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 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2012
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Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A companion to Sophocles / edited by Kirk Ormand.

p. cm. – (Blackwell companions to the ancient world. Literature and culture)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-8726-8 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Sophocles—Criticism and interpretation.

I. Ormand, Kirk, 1962–

PA4417.C65 2012

882'.01—dc23

2011034659

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

This book is published in the following electronic formats: ePDFs 9781444356885;
Wiley Online Library 9781444356915; ePub 9781444356892; Mobi 9781444356908

Set in 10/12pt Galliard by SPi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

For Jed
πρὸ γόνων δὲ μνάστις, ὁ δ' οἶκτος ἔπαινος

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List of Abbreviations

Aeschin.	Aeschines
<i>Tim.</i>	<i>Contra Timarchum (Against Timarchus)</i>
A.	Aeschylus
<i>Ag.</i>	<i>Agamemnon</i>
<i>Ch.</i>	<i>Choephoroi (Libation Bearers)</i>
<i>Eu.</i>	<i>Eumenides</i>
<i>Pers.</i>	<i>Persae (Persians)</i>
<i>Supp.</i>	<i>Supplices</i>
<i>Th.</i>	<i>Septem contra Thebas (Seven against Thebes)</i>
<i>ad loc.</i>	<i>ad locum</i>
And.	Andocides
A.R.	Apollonius Rhodius
<i>Arg.</i>	<i>Argonautica</i>
Archil.	Archilochus
Aristid.	Aelius Aristides
<i>Or.</i>	<i>Orationes</i>
Ar.	Aristophanes
<i>Ach.</i>	<i>Acharnians</i>
<i>Lys.</i>	<i>Lysistrata</i>
<i>Nu.</i>	<i>Nubes (Clouds)</i>
<i>Ra.</i>	<i>Ranae (Frogs)</i>
<i>Th.</i>	<i>Thesmophoriazousae (Women of the Thesmophoria)</i>
Arist.	Aristotle
<i>GA</i>	<i>De generatione animalium (On the Generation of Animals)</i>
<i>HA</i>	<i>Historia animalium (History of Animals)</i>
<i>Po.</i>	<i>Poetica (Poetics)</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politica (Politics)</i>
<i>Rh.</i>	<i>Rhetorica (Rhetoric)</i>
[Arist.]	Aristotle
<i>Ath. Pol.</i>	<i>Athenaion politeia (Constitution of the Athenians)</i>
Ath.	Athenaeus of Naucratis

B.	Bacchylides
Beazley, <i>ARV</i>	Beazley, J. D. (1963), <i>Attic Red-Figure Vase Painters</i> , vols. 1–3, 2nd ed. Oxford
<i>c.</i>	<i>circa</i>
Call.	Callimachus
Cat.	Catullus
col.	column
cf.	confer (= compare)
CEG	Hansen, P. A. (1983), <i>Carmina epigraphica graeca saeculorum VIII–V a.Chr.n.</i> Berlin and New York
Cic.	Cicero
<i>Tusc.</i>	<i>Tusculanae disputationes</i>
cj.	conjecture
Demetr.	Demetrius Phalereus
<i>Eloq.</i>	<i>De eloquentia (On Style)</i>
Dem.	Demosthenes
D. Chr.	Dio Chrysostomus
<i>Or.</i>	<i>Orationes</i>
D.L.	Diogenes Laertius
D.H.	Dionysius Halicarnassensis
<i>Comp.</i>	<i>De compositione verborum</i>
<i>De imit.</i>	<i>De imitatione</i>
D–K	Diels, Hermann and Kranz, Walther (1952), <i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i> , 6th ed. Berlin
D.S.	Diodorus Siculus
Epict.	Epictetus
<i>Diss.</i>	<i>Dissertationes</i>
Epicur.	Epicurus
<i>Sent. Vat.</i>	<i>Gnomologium vaticanum</i>
E.	Euripides
<i>Andr.</i>	<i>Andromache</i>
<i>Ba.</i>	<i>Bacchae</i>
<i>Hec.</i>	<i>Hecuba</i>
<i>Hel.</i>	<i>Helen</i>
<i>Heracl.</i>	<i>Heraclidae (Children of Heracles)</i>
<i>HF</i>	<i>Hercules furens</i>
<i>Hipp.</i>	<i>Hippolytus</i>
<i>IT</i>	<i>Iphigenia Taurica (Iphigenia at Tauris)</i>
<i>Med.</i>	<i>Medea</i>
<i>Or.</i>	<i>Orestes</i>
<i>Ph.</i>	<i>Phoenissae (Phoenician Women)</i>
<i>Supp.</i>	<i>Supplices (Suppliant Women)</i>
<i>Tr.</i>	<i>Troades (Trojan Women)</i>
F, fr(r).	fragmentum, fragmenta
<i>FGrH</i>	Jacoby, F. (1923–), <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> . Leiden
Gell.	Aulus Gellius
<i>NA</i>	<i>Noctes atticae (Attic Nights)</i>
Heraclid. Pont.	Heraclides Ponticus

Heraclit.	Heraclitus
Hdt.	Herodotus
Hes.	Hesiod
<i>Op.</i>	<i>Opera et dies (Works and Days)</i>
<i>Th.</i>	<i>Theogonia (Theogony)</i>
Hp.	Hippocrates
<i>Prog.</i>	<i>Prognosticon</i>
Hom.	Homer
<i>Il.</i>	<i>Iliad</i>
<i>Od.</i>	<i>Odyssey</i>
IG	<i>Inscriptiones graecae</i> , vols. 1–15
Isoc.	Isocrates
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
KRS	Kirk, G. G., Raven, J. E., and Schofield, M. (1983), <i>The Presocratic Philosophers</i> , 2nd ed. Cambridge
KPS	Krumeich, R., Pechstein, N., and Seidensticker, B. (eds.) (1999), <i>Das Griechische Satyrspiel</i> . Darmstadt
LIMC	<i>Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae</i> , vols. I–IX, 1981–99. Zürich
l(l).	line(s)
Lyc.	Lycophron
ms(s)	manuscript(s)
Meiggs–Lewis	Meiggs, R. and Lewis, D. M. (1988), <i>A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century BC</i> , 2nd ed. Oxford and New York
Men.	Menander
<i>Pk.</i>	<i>Perikeiromene (Rape of the Locks)</i>
n(n).	note(s)
PHerc.	Papyrus Herculaneus
POxy.	Papyrus Oxyrhynchus
Paus.	Pausanias
Phot.	Photius
<i>Bibl.</i>	<i>Bibliotheca</i>
Pi.	Pindarus
<i>I.</i>	<i>Isthmian Odes</i>
<i>N.</i>	<i>Nemean Odes</i>
<i>O.</i>	<i>Olympian Odes</i>
<i>P.</i>	<i>Pythian Odes</i>
Philostr.	Philostratus
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Heroicus</i>
Pl.	Plato
<i>Ap.</i>	<i>Apologia Socratis (Apology/Defense of Socrates)</i>
<i>Phadr.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
Plin.	Pliny the Elder
<i>HN</i>	<i>Historia naturalis (Natural History)</i>
Plu.	Plutarch
<i>De glor. Ath.</i>	<i>De gloria Atheniensium</i>
<i>De prof. virt.</i>	<i>Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus</i>

<i>De gen. Socr.</i>	<i>De genio Socratis</i>
<i>Nic.</i>	<i>Nicias</i>
<i>Per.</i>	<i>Pericles</i>
PMG	Page, D. L. (1962), <i>Poetae melici graeci</i> . Oxford
PLF	Lobel, E. and Page, D. L. (1955), <i>Poetarum lesbiorum fragmenta</i> . Oxford
Quint.	Quintilian
<i>Inst.</i>	<i>Institutio oratoria</i>
schol. in	<i>scholion</i> /scholiast at
sc.	scilicet (= namely)
Sen.	Lucius Annaeus Seneca
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Oed.</i>	<i>Oedipus</i>
Sol.	Solon
S.	Sophocles
<i>Aj.</i>	<i>Ajax</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Antigone</i>
<i>El.</i>	<i>Electra</i>
OC	<i>Oedipus Coloneus</i> (<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>)
OT	<i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>
<i>Ph.</i>	<i>Philoctetes</i>
<i>Tr.</i>	<i>Trachiniae</i> (<i>Women of Trachis</i>)
SEG	<i>Supplementum epigraphicum graecum</i>
Stob.	Stobaeus
<i>Flor.</i>	<i>Florilegium</i>
Str.	Strabo
<i>s.v.</i>	<i>sub verbum</i>
Tac.	Tacitus
<i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annales</i>
T, test.	testimonium, testimonia
Them.	Themistius
<i>Or.</i>	<i>Orationes</i>
Thgn.	Theognis
Th.	Thucydides
TrGF	<i>Tragicorum graecorum fragmenta</i>
Verg.	Virgil
<i>Aen.</i>	<i>Aeneid</i>
<i>Ecl.</i>	<i>Eclogae</i> (<i>Eclogues/Bucolics</i>)
Vitr.	Vitruvius
<i>De arch.</i>	<i>De architectura</i>
X.	Xenophon
<i>Hell.</i>	<i>Hellenica</i>
<i>Mem.</i>	<i>Memorabilia</i>

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Acknowledgments

As editor of this volume, I owe sincere thanks to many people, first and foremost to the 38 authors who have contributed essays. Each of them has endured my queries and editorial suggestions with good cheer and a willingness to make changes far beyond anything I expected. Haze Humbert and Galen Smith at Blackwell have been patient through several extensions of deadline and provided much helpful support and guidance through a long process. Alex Purves was a great help in identifying possible contributors and in encouraging me throughout the project. Denise McCoskey, in addition to contributing an essay, was a constant source of optimistic support.

Several students worked with me on the volume as proofreaders and assistant editors. My thanks to Tim Platt, Desiree Sweet, and especially Laura Wilke. Laura's keen eye and sure sense of style have been invaluable, and she deserves credit for an astounding amount of work.

Manuela Tecusan, the copy-editor for Wiley-Blackwell, improved the volume immeasurably, and did so with tireless optimism and good spirits. I owe her many thanks.

As always, my spouse, Gayle Boyer, and my children, Kevin and Ella, have kept me sane, have reminded me that there is a life outside my office, and have borne with this project for years with much good humor.

I am dedicating this volume to my friend and colleague Jed Deppman, whose essay on Anouilh is one of the gems of this volume. Jed has shown me, and all those who know him, how to deal with adversity with dignity, humor, and the fierce exercise of intellect; he has done so not in the mode of Creon, whose "greatness of action lies in him alone" (to paraphrase B. M. W. Knox), but in the full and often painfully public context of his family, friends, and community. He is the best man I know.

Introduction

Kirk Ormand

The grace and power with which his intellect moved amid and transcended the rabid theorizing of the avant-garde is one of the miracles of artistic history and almost justifies the classic impression of Sophocles as one who stood quite apart from his time. But he did not stand apart. A full-sized study could be made of passages wherein he touches on ideas current among his contemporaries...

C. H. Whitman, *Sophocles: A Study in Heroic Humanism*

1 Sophocles

In an important and persuasive study of Sophoclean heroism from nearly 50 years ago, B. M. W. Knox argued that the fifth-century Athenian playwright Sophocles invented the form of tragedy as the West knows it (Knox 1964: 1–27). To be sure, there were other tragic poets before Sophocles, and from his immediate predecessor Aeschylus we have seven extant plays and some significant fragments. But it is with Sophocles that the plot of the tragic play first centers around the “tragic hero.” As Knox puts it:

The modern concept of tragic drama takes for granted the existence of a single central character, whose action and suffering are the focal point of the play – what we call “the tragic hero” [...] This dramatic method, the presentation of the tragic dilemma in the figure of a single dominating character, seems in fact to be an invention of Sophocles. (Knox 1964: 1)

This form has become all too familiar to us, so much so that the more cosmological, less character-driven tragedies of Aeschylus strike modern audiences – and students – as inscrutable, chaotic. By contrast, with Sophocles, the meaning of the play can always be found, or so it seems, in the central hero’s failure to yield to unstoppable forces and in the inevitable consequences that are written on his or her person.

Such a reading of Sophocles is persuasive, and it works well for most of the extant plays (though Knox does not see a central hero in the *Trachiniae*). At the same time it is predicated on a notion of the hero as isolated in time and space, almost a cosmic force unto himself. It is not difficult to read *Antigone's* Creon in the schema that Knox outlines:

The Sophoclean hero acts in a terrifying vacuum, a present which has no future to comfort and no past to guide, an isolation in time and space which imposes on the hero the full responsibility for his own action and its consequences. It is precisely this fact which makes possible the greatness of the Sophoclean heroes; the source of the action lies in them alone, nowhere else; the greatness of the action is theirs alone. (Knox 1964: 7)

The curious aspect of this reading, however, is that the same kind of thinking has often been applied to Sophocles himself: he is seen as producing poetry of artistic greatness almost in a vacuum, entirely divorced from the political and intellectual currents of his time. Indeed, in a similarly fundamental work, Cedric Whitman launched a reading of Sophocles as a profound humanist with a criticism of previous scholarship, characterizing “the classic view” as producing a Sophocles entirely separate from time and place:

But Sophocles defied all pigeonholes and programs. His simplicity was veiled in a kind of mystery, an indefinable but familiar aloofness and perfection which recalled nothing so much as the Greek spirit itself [...] Sophocles illustrated the Greek spirit, while the Greek spirit explained Sophocles. (Whitman 1951: 4)

Few works have seen Sophocles as an author commenting on the political crises of the Peloponnesian War (as was – and is – done with Euripides), or concerned with the functioning of aristocratic leaders in the emerging democratic *polis* (as is common in readings of Aeschylus). Even when the plays of Euripides and Aeschylus were read in terms of emerging feminist and political approaches (e.g. Zeitlin 1984; Rabinowitz 1993), Sophocles largely floated above the fray as a poet of uncompromising aesthetic worth, untouched by the events of the world around him. (An important exception is Knox’s earlier work; see below.)

To some extent, that understanding of Sophocles was enabled by exciting new literary theories that were just arriving in the field of classics in the 1950s and 1960s. Robert Goheen’s groundbreaking reading of the *Antigone* from 1951 is one of the first explicit works of New Criticism in classics, predicated as it is on the notion that the meaning of a play can be extricated by a reading of the text itself, in isolation, and by careful consideration of the interplay of recurring themes and images. And, of course, the 1960s also brought Claude Lévi-Strauss’ iconic reading of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* to the attention of classicists – and with it the principles of structural anthropology, which were powerfully used and modified by, among others, Charles Segal (e.g. Segal 1981). Such readings, again, derive significance from the interplay of broad themes, now figured as categories of meaning. Although structural anthropology had its roots in the study of living cultures, its methods were quickly appropriated for literary ends by scholars who argued that Sophocles’ plays provide a conceptual map of the Greek imaginary universe. In exploring the tragic hero’s place in that universe, large categories of human experience are elucidated: raw/cooked; animal/human/immortal; nature/civilization. Powerful though these analyses are, they remain largely in the world of abstract ideas and of the mythical past rather than coming to bear on the contemporary political scene.

Equally influential, in their own way, were psychoanalytic readings of Sophocles, which, beginning with Freud, were fundamentally opposed to the notion that Sophocles' plays should be tied to a particular time and place. Instead, the greatness of Sophocles was to be found in the way in which his plays – especially, as always, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* – revealed the universal and transhistorical secrets of the human psyche (see Armstrong's chapter in this volume). Here, too, the central tragic hero is both necessary and enabled: Freud's reading of Oedipus works only as long as we can see ourselves in the representation of this central figure; and, once this connection has been made, our psychic drives lend legitimacy to the personal and psychological dilemma that the famous king of Thebes must face.

All of these forces combined in the reading of Sophocles to keep him, as it were, isolated from his society, not unlike the heroes of his plays. Even the important work of Whitman mentioned above situates Sophocles primarily by seeing him as the proponent of a humanistic philosophy that, ultimately, seems to derive more from his genius than from fifth-century Athens (Whitman 1951: 229). And yet, one of the curious things about Sophocles is that we know more about his life than we know about either Euripides or Aeschylus, and it appears that he was in fact quite closely engaged in the politics of fifth-century Athens (see Scodel's chapter in this volume). There is sound evidence that Sophocles was involved in local hero cults during his lifetime and that he received the sacred snake of Aesclepius when it arrived in Athens from Epidaurus (Knox 1964: 54–5; Mitchell-Boyask 2008; see Currie in this volume). We know, moreover, that during the disastrous political turmoil of 413 BC Sophocles was appointed to a special council of ten *probouloi*, whose actions seem to have paved the way for a brief and terrible period of oligarchy in Athens (Jameson 1971). Sophocles, then, was hardly a poet living in modern isolation, paying no attention to the culture and politics in which he lived; there is no *prima facie* reason why we should assume that his plays were any more isolated than he was.

2 Politics

Over the past thirty years or so, Sophocles has increasingly been read in ways that tie him directly to political and social context. Indeed, one of the earliest proponents of such readings in the modern period was Knox, whose *Oedipus at Thebes* (1957) saw in the relentless energy of Oedipus an analogue to the Athenian empire itself. The work of scholars such as Simon Goldhill and Peter Wilson, among others, has argued for understanding the tragic festival itself in the context of the Athenian empire that produced it (Goldhill 1990; Wilson 2000). And careful, nuanced readings of Sophocles' language have demonstrated the ways in which his plays are situated in, and respond to, changes in the philosophical, scientific, and medical thinking of the fifth century (see e.g. Blundell 1989; Mitchell-Boyask 2008). In more recent years, scholars have produced feminist readings of Sophocles, demonstrating the ways in which his plays were engaged in contemporary concerns about the place of women in the fifth-century *polis* (among many others, see Wohl 1998; Foley 2001). Moreover, scholars of Athenian law have recently begun to argue that the legal issues presented in Sophocles' plays, far from existing in a distant mythological past, correspond with surprising fidelity to fifth-century law (Harris, Leao, and Rhodes

2010). All of these trends have resulted in a Sophocles who, though still deeply admired for his poetic and dramatic genius, is more carefully situated in a historical context than he was a generation ago.

3 Companions

As a result of my interest in a historically situated Sophocles, my guiding principle in putting together this volume has been to try to bring out the Sophocles of fifth-century Athens, to see both the poet and his works in their specific historical context. This is not to deny the importance of Sophocles the artist, but rather to suggest that some of the most engaging work of the last 20 years has tied Sophocles' language, poetry, and dramatic technique to the remarkable political and social culture of the fifth century in Athens. In a phrase, this book is not an introduction to "Sophocles the Poet" or, to borrow the title of Cedric Whitman's study, "A Study in Heroic Humanism," but a "Sophocles and...": Sophocles and politics, Sophocles and society, Sophocles and gender, Sophocles and medical science, Sophocles and various modes of critical reception. I hope that, in producing such a book, I will interest readers in the best of the new work on Sophocles of this moment.

A word is also called for about the nature of Companions. This book will have many audiences, each with different needs and desires. To be sure, one of the functions of a book like this is to provide useful summaries of recent and important work. But such summaries, in my view, often lack the verve of original new interpretations and tend to flatten local differences. In approaching the authors who have written for this volume, then, I asked each one to produce new work and to write a chapter that looked forward at least as much as (if not more than) backward. This volume, if it is successful, should open up new paths of Sophoclean scholarship and should play a part in defining the directions of research for the next 20 years. In my view, the authors here have done a splendid job of meeting this challenge (and not a small one at that).

4 This Volume

This volume is divided into seven parts. Even in a volume of this size, it quickly became clear to me that each area represented here could be a volume all by itself. Each of these areas of inquiry, therefore, contains three to nine chapters that should in fact be taken only as representative of exciting work in each subfield. These chapters stake out new ground, but they do not fully map the territory; instead, I hope that, through the chapters themselves and bibliographic sections at the end of each chapter, this book will be a spur to further investigation of Sophocles – the man who did, in all sorts of ways, invent tragedy as we know it.

The first category of chapters, "Text and Author," provides an overview of both technical and historical issues: how the text of Sophocles arrived to us in its current remarkable form, what we know of the life of the man who first produced these plays, and how we chart his place in relation to the other two canonical Athenian playwrights, Aeschylus and Euripides.

This section is followed by the longest one of the book: a series of chapters on each of the extant plays. The pieces contained here, more than those in other sections, serve a

double purpose: they offer thorough overviews of the major issues presented by each play, and they strike out in new directions, providing fresh readings. By necessity, these chapters also touch on the guiding themes of other sections in the book: Kitzen's reading of the *Trachiniae*, for example, has much to say about representations of gender, and Liapis' analysis of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* presents a new understanding of the dramatic techniques used in that play. This section also includes new chapters on the *Ichneutae*, a Sophoclean satyr play from which we have significant fragments, and on the other extant fragments. These often neglected texts reveal surprising aspects of Sophocles as a poet and dramatist.

The following section, Part III, contains four chapters that deal with Sophoclean technique: his use of stage conventions, his use of particular modes of speech, and his treatment of the tragic chorus. To be sure, many other chapters could be written about various aspects of Sophocles as a dramatic artist; the selection here, however, highlights some of the most distinctive features of his dramas.

Part IV consists of a series of chapters that explicitly investigate Sophocles' interaction with contemporary political, religious, and intellectual thought. These chapters all deal with multiple plays, reaching out across Sophocles' career and his involvement in Athenian life of the fifth century. Needless to say, the authors in this section do not all agree with one another on every point; it is a necessary feature of any artistic artifact that it will produce different understandings of its relation to the time that produced it, and Sophocles viewed through the lens of law displays differently from Sophocles viewed through the lens of class conflict.

Though the chapters in the next section could have been folded into the previous one, it seemed wise, given the large body of outstanding work produced in the last decades, to have a separate section dedicated to issues of gender and sexuality. The chapters here go beyond other recent work on Sophocles and gender, in one case questioning the validity of gender as an interpretive category in Sophocles' plays, and in the others producing readings of specific aspects of gender (motherhood, marriage) and of its relation to other socially produced states (such as freedom).

The last two sections take us deliberately out of fifth-century Athens, to focus on the ways in which Sophocles has been read in subsequent centuries. Part VI presents a series of chapters that deal with important interpretations of Sophocles' plays. Here too, however, my interest has been a historicizing one. Rather than commissioning a Freudian reading of Sophocles, for example, I asked for a chapter that would discuss Freud's reading of Sophocles in *its* historical context. That there are only six titles in this section highlights the extent to which this volume can only provide a sampling of the available possibilities: the various historical moments that have produced their own Sophocles are virtually limitless, and I have done no more than collect several pieces that touch on some of the most important ones.

Similarly, the final section of this volume, Part VII, deals with an area of research that has, in the last decade, seen an absolute explosion of exciting work: reception. Though Sophocles' plays belong, in a sense, to the fifth-century Athenian context in which they were originally produced, they are also constantly being re-interpreted, re-imagined, and re-produced. These "receptions" of Sophocles are fascinating in the many ways that they shift and change the focus of canonical works (especially the *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*). The best work in reception, however, does more than simply point out that a new work of fiction has its roots in Sophocles; it shows how those shifts and changes in form and content belong to their own historical moments, reflecting the particular

political and philosophical concerns of their times and authors. In their own way, by making what seems at first familiar fit into a different mold, these works of reception allow us to see the jagged edges of Sophoclean drama, formerly worn smooth by too many repeated readings. Again, this area of scholarship is almost limitless; I have provided a sample of some of the areas in which reception work has been done in recent years.

5 Conclusions

A volume such as this one is necessarily multivocal. What surprised me in putting it together was the extent to which it seems that there is still so much more to be done. Any of the sections of this volume could occupy a separate volume of the same size and length as this one. I hope, however, that the readers of this collection will find it as fresh as I have in the process of assembling and editing it. If it offers a compass and a directional guide for future work on Sophocles – an author whose heroes emerge no less compelling for having been restored to a sense of time and place – then it will have done its work.

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PART I

Text and Author

The Textual Transmission of Sophocles' Dramas

P. J. Finglass

1 Introduction

Beginning a twenty-first century *Companion to Sophocles* with the transmission of his plays might seem a quaint concession to a bygone age of scholarship. What we have of Sophocles, we have: why should we concern ourselves with *how* we have it, rather than getting on with the pressing business of analysis and interpretation? Two reasons come to mind. First, the transmission of Sophocles' dramas demands the attention of historians in its own right. Which plays were the ancients reading and performing, and when? Why were so many lost – or, alternatively, how come any survived at all? The shifting fortunes of critical scholarship, so brilliant in some centuries, so attenuated in others, will interest the student of intellectual history. And, from a practical point of view, the history of the transmission of classical literature is so vast a field that it may help to consider it from the vantage point of the works of a single major author. Second, understanding the transmission of Sophocles' plays, so far from being a distraction, actually assists their literary interpretation. No one can begin serious study of these dramas without quickly realizing that our evidence for what Sophocles wrote is often tenuous or obscure. A sense of how Sophocles' words were transmitted through the centuries, and of the processes of corruption to which they were exposed, is an important intellectual tool for dealing with this problem, and thus for ensuring, so far as possible, that interpretations are based on what Sophocles wrote, rather than on errors introduced during the transmission.

Historical and literary reasons thus unite to render this a significant topic for a wide range of scholars and students. Two recent studies, Kovacs (2005) and Sommerstein (2010), consider the same subject for Greek tragedy and Aristophanes, respectively. The brief discussion below is designed to be, as far as possible, complementary to these articles, which I commend to readers of my own piece.

2 Sophocles to Lycurgus

We have conflicting evidence concerning the exact number of plays written by Sophocles: 123 according to Aristophanes of Byzantium (257–180 BCE), as recorded in the ancient *Life of Sophocles* (late second century BCE?), but 113 according to the Suda (σ 815 = iv 402.5–6 Adler). Careful sifting of the preserved titles of plays suggests that 123 is the correct figure (Sommerstein forthcoming). Today, only seven of these survive in full, accompanied by about 10,000 words from the lost plays (roughly the length of another tragedy the size of *Oedipus Tyrannus*). We therefore possess just under 7 percent of his total *oeuvre*. This melancholy statistic prompts various lines of inquiry. When was the other 93 percent of Sophocles' work lost? Why was it lost? How was the 7 percent preserved? How accurate were the copies which effected this preservation? How were errors introduced? How have scholars attempted to restore the words of Sophocles in the face of textual corruption? And when did that scholarly activity take place? In other words, what was preserved, when, and how well?

We begin with the original texts, written by Sophocles himself in preparation for the first performance of each play. Apart from his master copy, he will have provided texts for the actors and the members of the chorus; these probably contained only their respective lines (as in a papyrus of Euripides' *Alcestis*, which dates from *c.* 100 BCE to 50 CE and was apparently intended for the actor playing Admetus: see Marshall 2004), perhaps preceded by suitable prompts. Hence, when Sophocles produced a play for the first time at the Dionysia or Lenaea, only one complete manuscript may have been in existence. The survival of the play's text beyond that first performance depended on three factors:

1 Sophocles and his heirs (some of whom, such as his son Iophon and grandson Sophocles, were tragedians in their own right) will, we may assume, have wanted to retain copies of the scripts for their own purposes (see Revermann 2006: 84). The texts would have been an invaluable resource for writing future tragedies, as well as a source of family pride. Having more than one copy, and in different locations, would guard against loss by theft or fire.

2 In Attica there was probably “a vibrant reperformance culture by the last quarter of the fifth century at the very latest” (Revermann 2006: 68). An inscription from around the end of that century probably attests to Sophocles' competing at a deme festival in Eleusis (DID B 3 Snell). Although this particular text might refer to Sophocles' homonymous grandson, it would be excessively skeptical to deny that Sophocles' plays were re-performed at other Attic festivals and maybe (like those of Aeschylus and Euripides) elsewhere in the Greek world. From 386 BCE, the re-performance of old tragedies became a formal fixture of the Dionysia itself. Such a practice demands the availability of written texts.

3 The fifth century also saw the growth of a reading public in Attica and beyond. Our earliest reference to the reading of a tragedy appears in lines 52–4 of Aristophanes' *Frogs* (405 BCE), where the god Dionysus describes how he read Euripides' *Andromeda* (412 BCE) to himself while on a warship. Not everyone could have afforded the cost of reading copies (written on rolls of dried papyrus stalks from Egypt) or the time to read them; but some would have been in circulation.

The earliest alterations to Sophocles' original text may have been made by Sophocles himself; during rehearsals, or after a performance, he could have changed passages that he found unsatisfactory. But this brief period of authorial change (if it ever took place) soon yielded to the age of non-authorial change: of textual corruption, both deliberate and unconscious, by copiers of the plays. There are many processes by which this corruption takes place. Individual letter-shapes can be confused; so can groups of letters or words of similar shape. Letters representing similar sounds are interchanged, as the copyist voices the sound of a text internally while he transcribes it. The scribe's eye can jump over words or lines and miss them out, or put them in the wrong order. He may also spot an error and correct it; sometimes he may be right, but more often he changes Sophocles' word into his own, or compounds an originally small, mechanical error through some disastrous intervention. Deliberate change can proceed from less salubrious motives, such as a desire to improve on the work of the original author.

All the unconscious forms of corruption will have been in play from the moment when anyone (including Sophocles himself) made a copy of one of the dramas. Deliberate change of the text was presumably rarer; unfortunately, one type of such tampering seems to have been prevalent in the earliest stages of transmission. The emergence of the "star actor" in the fourth century led to the expansion of certain speeches through the insertion of spurious lines, designed to allow the performer more scope to display his talents. The greater popularity of Euripides in the fourth century made his plays particularly vulnerable to such attack; but Sophocles was not immune.

This activity did not go unchallenged. The Athenian statesman Lycurgus (active c. 338–325/4 BCE) commissioned an official copy of the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and actors were henceforth required to keep to this text (Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus* 15 and pseudo-Plutarch, *Lives of the Ten Orators* 841F = Soph., testimonium 156 Radt). This was, for him, part of a wider program, which involved the rebuilding of the Theater of Dionysus in stone and the erection therein of statues of the three tragedians. This Lycurgan text was the first attempt to deal with the problem of textual corruption. But it almost certainly did not involve a critical recension of the text. Lycurgus probably wanted to fix the text as it then was, preventing future corruption, but without attempting to correct mistakes already entrenched. Nor is there reason to suppose that he attempted to obtain a good text from which to make his official copy, which may well have contained many errors and spurious lines. His rebuilding of the theater in stone suggests that, for him, permanence trumped historical accuracy. As a result, modern scholars are confronted by "that fatal gap between the time of Sophocles himself and the first official transcript" (Dawe 2006: 19).

Sophocles became the subject of scholarly activity in this period, with monographs on him or his works by Heraclides Ponticus (testimonia 151–2 Radt), Philochorus (test. 149 Radt), and Duris of Samos (test. 150 Radt). But, again, it is most unlikely that any of these involved textual criticism. That awaited later scholars, to whom we now turn.

3 Alexandria to Late Antiquity

Ptolemy I of Egypt (ruler from 323 to 283 BCE, king from 305 BCE) established a "museum" (Μουσείον, "temple of the Muses") at his new capital, Alexandria, which provided food, lodgings, and salaries for a permanent community of scholars. He also

founded a library in the same city. Among the scholars was Alexander of Aetolia, who, at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (sole ruler 283–246 BCE), undertook a διόρθωσις (“straightening,” correction, recension) of tragic and satyric texts (test. 7 Magnelli = Soph., test. 158 Radt). That is, he attempted to identify and correct corruptions in the copy or copies available to him. He is the first person known to have done this. None of his criticism has survived. If that Ptolemy instigated the first recorded critical engagement with the text, the next king, Ptolemy III Euergetes (246–221 BCE), greatly improved the manuscript sources available to scholars – at least if an anecdote from four centuries later can be believed (test. 157 Radt = Galen, *Commentary on the Epidemics of Hippocrates* 2.4). He asked to borrow the Athenians’ tragic texts; our source does not specify that these were the Lycurgan recension (referring simply to τὰ βιβλία – “the books,” or perhaps “the famous books”), but it is a plausible assumption that they were. The Athenians agreed, on condition that the king deposited 15 silver talents as security; but, once possessed of the documents, Ptolemy held on to them, happy to forfeit his bond, and sent back lavishly produced copies in their stead. If these were the Lycurgan texts, they were not necessarily an especially pure text of their time, but presumably they had at least remained untouched by further corruption for a full century (if the original papyrus survived that long without having to be re-copied). Now scholars could compare them against other sources in Alexandria to assist their textual criticism.

But which scholars? The vagaries of transmission compel us to jump ahead for a moment in what up to now has been a chronological account. Literary scholarship in this period was published in the form of separate volumes; but, in time, comments on individual passages were transferred to the margins of editions, usually in abbreviated form, and only sometimes preserving the author’s name. We possess some such marginalia in our papyri (that is, ancient copies dug up from the sands of Egypt from the end of the nineteenth century). These marginalia are the direct ancestors of the *scholia* (notes) written in the margins of our medieval manuscripts, where also some emendations and interpretations are attributed to named scholars of antiquity. The great majority, however, are unattributed, and many of these will go back to ancient scholars.

As a result, evidence for the work of individual scholars on Sophocles’ text is thin. Moderns regularly credit Aristophanes of Byzantium (257–180 BCE) with editing the whole of Greek tragedy, although there is no direct evidence for this. The medieval *scholia* preserve his name once (on *Aj.* 746 = fr. 359 Slater, not from a commentary on Sophocles), and he is the author of one of the *hypotheses* (prose summaries) of *Antigone*. Papyri (of *Tr.* 744 and fr. 730e.16–17 Radt, respectively) attribute comments to AP and API, which could denote Aristophanes, Aristarchus of Samothrace (c. 216–144 BCE), or Aristonicus (an Alexandrian scholar of Augustan date); the last of these is probably the author of two variant readings attributed to APNI (fr. 314.72, 314.146). The same papyrus attributes over a dozen interventions to ΘΕ or ΘΕΩ (presumably Aristonicus’ near-contemporary, Theon of Alexandria); while NI (fr. 220a.84.2, 314.108, 314.156) could be Nicander of Colophon (second century BCE) or Nicanor of Alexandria (second century CE).

As for Aristarchus’ writings on Sophocles, the medieval *scholia* preserve his interpretation of a word in line 6 of *Electra*, while manuscripts of other authors record in passing explanations from three other plays: *Chryses* (fr. 728), *Niobe* (fr. 449), and *Troilus* (fr. 624). The later Alexandrian scholar Didymus (first century BCE) is mentioned nine times in the *scholia*. More of a compiler than an original scholar, Didymus probably preserves

a good deal of earlier scholarship. Finally, two fragments of scholarly work on Sophocles by Pius survive; he is perhaps to be dated to the third or fourth century CE.

Whoever did compose an edition of Sophocles in Alexandria (and there may well have been more than one edition), the operation is unlikely to have involved a full recension of manuscripts. Careful attention to style and language will have been at the heart of the enterprise; other copies of the text will have been consulted from time to time, but not in a systematic manner (see West 2001: 33–45 on the text of Homer, for which the evidence is richer). The prestige of Alexandrian scholarship will no doubt have led to the edition(s) of Sophocles produced there being extensively copied and traded; we cannot say, however, whether all our surviving copies ultimately go back to Alexandria.

An epigram by Dioscorides (late third century BCE) cites *Antigone* and *Electra* as among Sophocles' best works (*AP* 7.37 = 1597–1606 Gow–Page); both were to survive down to our own day. But there is no evidence that any of the dramas had been lost by this point. As we have seen, ancient scholars worked on a variety of plays not limited to the seven preserved today; and writers of Latin literature also allude to a range of dramas. But that was soon to change. The distribution of the papyri gives us a glimpse of what plays were read when, at least in Egypt, from where (thanks to the climate) almost all surviving papyri come. We have six papyri from up until about 100 CE, three as early as the third century BCE; of these, only one is from the seven plays that survive complete (hereafter referred to as “the Seven”). Papyri are most numerous in the second and third centuries CE, a period from which eighteen survive: the Seven are represented by nine of these. After 300 BCE there are fewer papyri: seven in all, the last of which comes from the sixth or seventh century, and all of which are from the Seven. The triadic plays (*Ajax*, *Electra*, and *Oedipus Tyrannus*), which in the Byzantine period are attested in many more manuscripts than the other four, have slightly more papyri, too, than the tetradic ones (10 to 7), and this difference is still more pronounced after 300 BCE (5 to 2); on the other hand, *Trachiniae* has more papyri overall than *Electra* (3 to 2).

In other words, there is nothing to suggest that, before 100 BCE, any group of plays was being read, performed, and copied (henceforth just “read,” to avoid repetition) more than any other. In the second and third centuries the dominance of the Seven is already emerging: half the papyri come from that small fraction of the 123 plays (50 percent from 5.7 percent). Other plays are being read at this period: nine different dramas are attested. Six are from the second century (out of ten papyri, or 60 percent), but only three from the third (out of eight, or 37.5 percent). This drop suggests a narrowing of focus onto the Seven even within the period when they are not the exclusive representatives of Sophocles' work. (Five of the third-century papyri – three from the Seven – may be from the second century; if they all were, that would make the narrowing still more dramatic.) The complete absence of plays outside the Seven from the fourth century onwards is striking. Euripidean papyri from the same period do contain plays now lost (*Oedipus*, *Melanippe Desmotis*, *Phaethon*, *Sciron*), but Euripides was much more widely read throughout this time. It can hardly be a coincidence that seven papyri come from 5.7 percent of Sophocles' plays (or in fact 4 percent, since only five of the Seven have papyri dating from after 300 CE). The other 116 plays stopped being read during this period, probably sooner rather than later; some were probably lost as early as the second or third centuries. This was the time when the papyrus roll was making way for the codex, or modern book format; many texts that were not much read will have failed to make the transition from one form of reading technology to the other, and as a consequence will

have been lost, as the roll became obsolete. The sudden drop in the number of papyri from 300 CE suggests that even the Seven were being read less than before.

The secondary tradition, by contrast, is a less secure guide to contemporary reading habits. According to Pearson (1917i), p. xxxiii, “direct quotation of tragedies other than [the Seven] died out at the end of the second century.” Quotations from plays now lost are found later than that date, but they do not necessarily indicate that people were reading those plays then: “lexicographers [and other authors who quote fragments] fed on lexis without the benefit of occasional refreshment from the texts of the authors cited” (Dover 1993: 103). A collection and analysis of ancient quotations from Sophocles, as well as references and allusions to his plays, remains a scholarly desideratum.

Why the Seven became the dominant, and in time the sole, representatives of Sophocles’ work is unknown. A similar process took place with Aeschylus (seven plays), Euripides (ten, reflecting his greater popularity), and Aristophanes (eleven). Wilamowitz speculated that a single person made a selection for teaching purposes (Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1907: 196–204). Two groups of plays, he suggested, were intended to be read together. Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, Sophocles’ and Euripides’ *Electra* plays, and Euripides’ *Orestes* formed one such group; Aeschylus’ *Septem contra Thebas*, Sophocles’ *Oedipus*, and Euripides’ *Phoenissae* formed another. This implies that one person chose the plays for all three tragedians. We cannot confirm or reject this hypothesis; nor has a better one supplanted it. Wilamowitz’s conjecture (pp. 202–3) that the selection was made in the time of Plutarch and achieved general acceptance a century later has been borne out well by papyri (unavailable when he first put forward his idea in 1889); as we have seen, the Seven are prominent in the second century, dominant in the third, and sole survivors in the fourth. Papyri also suggest that the triad was more widely read than the other four plays of the Seven, perhaps because they were the first three of the selection. But the triad was nowhere near as dominant as in the next stage of the transmission.

4 The Medieval Transmission

The latest surviving ancient manuscript of Sophocles (containing part of *Electra*) dates from the seventh century. There is then a gap of three centuries before the earliest and most important medieval manuscript: Laurentianus 32.9 (L), a volume dating perhaps from the middle of the tenth century, which also contains the works of Aeschylus and Apollonius of Rhodes. Like all surviving medieval manuscripts of Sophocles, it is written in minuscule script rather than uncials (i.e. capitals). As well as the text, it contains our best selection of the ancient *scholia*, including many textual variants. A contemporary and closely related manuscript (Leiden BPG 60A, or Λ) was subsequently reused for another text (a palimpsest) and can be read only in part today. Akin to them, but incorporating material from a different branch of the tradition, is Laurentianus 31.10 (K), dated to the last part of the twelfth century. These three manuscripts, containing all seven plays, are the only medieval witnesses from before the sack of Constantinople in 1204. But from this period we also have the Suda, a tenth-century lexicon, and the Homeric commentaries of Eustathius, the twelfth-century archbishop of Thessalonica; both contain many Sophoclean quotations and occasionally preserve truth not found in the direct tradition. No doubt the sack and the dark period that followed saw the destruction of other manuscripts.

The restoration of the Byzantine Empire by Manuel VIII Palaeologus in 1261 resulted in the creation of many new copies of Sophocles' text. There are several from the end of the thirteenth century and many more (some two hundred in all) from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Most of these will have been written in Constantinople or some other great urban center, but at least some (such as G, from 1282) were copied in Greek-speaking regions of southern Italy. The great majority contain at most three plays, and a significant minority only two (*Ajax* and *Electra*): this presumably reflects the contents of the contemporary school curriculum. Some of these manuscripts provide the earliest attestations of readings that most scholars today agree are correct; we cannot dispense with them in favor of copies from before the sack.

In addition to the *scholia* inherited from antiquity, manuscripts now attract a considerable amount of purely Byzantine annotation, including some by prominent scholars such as Manuel Moschopoulos (born *c.* 1265) and Thomas Magister (active *c.* 1300–50), writing in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. By far the most important of these was Demetrius Triclinius (active *c.* 1320), “an intellectual force as worthy of our admiration as, let us say, Casaubon or Elmsley” (Dawe 1973–8: i. 80), who edited the seven plays and endowed them with *scholia*. His understanding of meter, and in particular of strophic responsion (the repetition, in a lyric passage, of the same combination of long and short syllables), allowed him to restore the original words of Sophocles in dozens of places. Modern scholarship on the text of this author begins with Triclinius.

The plays continued to be copied even as the Byzantine Empire fell into terminal decline. Its final years saw the transport of many manuscripts from Constantinople to Italy, before the city itself was sacked again in 1453. Fifteenth-century Italian humanists usually had little proficiency in Greek; Hellenic émigrés to Italy, however, such as Aristobulus Apostolides (1465–1535) and Zacharias Callierges (*c.* 1470–1520), did contribute to the restoration of the text via annotations in their manuscripts.

5 The Earliest Printed Editions

The plays of Sophocles were not among the earliest classical works committed to the printing press. His works first appeared in this medium in 1502, thanks to the famous Venetian publisher Aldus Manutius; perhaps inauspiciously, the book contains a misprint on the title page. The publication of the Aldine edition is a landmark in the textual history of Sophocles for two reasons. First, it ensured the continued survival of the plays that had been preserved up to that point. In 1501 there were perhaps a few dozen copies in existence of, say, *Antigone*, all on manuscripts up to half a millennium old: a precarious state. In 1502 the play could be found in hundreds of copies and would soon be available in thousands, as further print runs and fresh editions saw the light. Second, the Aldine made the text of Sophocles accessible to a greater number of scholars than before. Anyone with sufficient means and time could acquire a copy and subject it to scrutiny and emendation; no longer was it necessary to consult, or laboriously transcribe, a manuscript locked away in some private collection simply in order to read and study the plays.

Landmark though it is, the Aldine is not a particularly impressive piece of scholarship, in that it does not contain any significant attempt to correct the (by then) highly corrupt text presented by the manuscripts. (Modern scholars generally reject the one significant

alteration that it does contain: the attribution of *Ant.* 572 to Antigone, not Ismene.) The same can be said of subsequent editions published during the first half of the sixteenth century, which were generally founded on the Aldine. Nor indeed was the Aldine based on a particularly good source. Yet the manuscript today acknowledged as the oldest and best (namely L) was known to scholars in this period; the *scholia* in its margins, which contain many important readings for the text of the plays, were published by Janus Lascaris in Rome in 1518. (L was already in use as a source for the printed text of Aeschylus.) It would be exactly three hundred years before a scholar discovered the significance of this precious book for the text of Sophocles. If this had happened earlier, progress in emending the text would have been considerably more rapid, as it would have had a much sounder base from which to proceed.

In the event not L, but T was to be the foundation of subsequent scholarship. That manuscript, heavily emended by the work of Triclinius and containing his *scholia*, was used by Turnebus for his edition of 1552. This formed the basis for the editions of Stephanus (1568) and Willem Canter (1579, the first printed edition to set out the lyrics in responding units), and indeed for all editions until near the end of the eighteenth century. As noted above, Triclinius makes many excellent emendations thanks to his appreciation of metrical responson. Many more of his conjectures are implausible; yet his recension, conjectures and all, now became the default text, to be accepted unless it could be shown to be wrong.

Relatively little conjectural work was published in editions or monographs during this period; instead, scholars wrote down their ideas in the margins of their books. The three most important contributors whose work is known today were Auratus (1508–88), J. J. Scaliger (1540–1609), and Livineius (*c.* 1546–99). The failure of these and later scholars to publish so much of their best work can seem bizarre to modern academics, who are often under considerable pressure to commit their ideas to print whether or not they are ready to be immortalized. One must accept that different attitudes and customs prevailed.

This period also saw the beginnings of work on Sophocles' fragments. Lost plays had been quoted by other ancient authors whose works had survived, and scholars now began to gather these quotations together. Dirk Canter (1545–1616), younger brother of Willem, assembled the first collection, together with those of the other Greek dramatists – a task requiring immense labor and dedication. His work was never published, but it was widely consulted by contemporaries such as Scaliger (who added fragments to it). Its Sophoclean part, now lost, may have been (as its Euripidean section, which survives, certainly was) accessible to Hugo Grotius, under whose name the first substantial fragment collections from tragedy appeared in 1623 and 1626. Casaubon had previously published the first list of titles of Sophoclean plays (1600: 303.7).

6 Bentley to Elmsley

After the death of Scaliger in 1609, nobody is known to have undertaken significant critical work on the text of Sophocles until Richard Bentley (1662–1742), whose many good conjectures in the margins of his editions were not published until 1816. More significant are the contributions of the Dutch scholars L. C. Valckenaer (1715–85) and J. Pierson, his pupil (1731–59); again, most of their work remained hidden in notebooks

and marginalia, not to be unearthed until a quarter of a millennium after the latter's death. Still more recently, the massive contribution by Jeremiah Markland (1693–1776) has come to light in the margins of one of his books.

Not all the best work of this period went unpublished. So far as editions are concerned, a few good conjectures are found in that of Thomas Johnson (1705, 1708, 1745, 1746), and many more in that of Samuel Musgrave (1732–80), which appeared in 1800. Two books of emendations by J. J. Reiske (1753) and Benjamin Heath (1762) were of great significance, presenting solutions to problems that virtually all later scholars have accepted as sound restorations of Sophocles' words. Heath's work also encompassed the fragments, presenting the first critical work on them for almost 150 years. But the single most important contribution was the edition published in handsome quarto volumes in Strasbourg in 1786 by R. F. P. Brunck (1729–1803). This work not only contained several good emendations; it put the text onto an altogether new footing thanks to the editor's refusal to use the Triclinian recension as his base. Returning to the text of the Aldine, Brunck employed several manuscripts, including one known today as A, which most scholars have continued to regard as an exceptionally important source. (The Dutch scholar Tiberius Hemsterhuis (1685–1766) had previously noted the importance of A, and passed on his collation of part of the manuscript to Valckenaer, who was meditating an edition.) Brunck continued to print Triclinus' emendations where he thought that they were right. But he no longer had to start from the position of assuming that Triclinius was right unless he could be definitely shown not to be, which in effect was the consequence of giving primacy to his version. Brunck's edition was also the first to include the fragments as well as the seven plays; in editing them he was able to profit from unpublished work sent to him by Valckenaer.

Brunck's text quickly became itself the basis for future work, such as the edition of six plays published by C. G. A. Erfurd (1802–11). This work incorporated some of the earliest suggestions by Gottfried Hermann (1772–1848), whose unrivaled understanding of meter allowed him scope for many advances. The great English scholar Richard Porson (1759–1808) did not edit any play of Sophocles, but pupils and colleagues published his marginalia after his death. Peter Elmsley (1774–1825) produced an early edition of all of Sophocles (1805/6), but his key contribution was the rediscovery of the manuscript L in the Laurentian Library in Florence during the winter of 1818–19. The oldest and best manuscript was at last available to the scholarly world.

7 Dindorf to Jebb

The first edition to make use of L was Elmsley's *Oedipus Coloneus* in 1823. After his untimely death two years later, L provided the foundation for T. Gaisford's edition of 1826 and for W. Dindorf's of 1830; the latter went through many editions and saw widespread use. No one since has disputed the centrality of L for any attempt to work out what Sophocles wrote. The key question quickly became what manuscripts, if any, scholars should use in addition to L, and what weight should be given them. C. G. Cobet (1813–89) argued that all other manuscripts were simply copied from L, and that any different readings that they contained were all the result of scribal error or conjecture (1847: 103). This preposterous theory should never have been taken seriously: there are too many

places where obviously superior readings are preserved in manuscripts later than L, which could not result from copying errors and which could only be conjectures if we credit Byzantine scribes with emendatory acumen beyond that of a Bentley or Porson.

Yet taken seriously it was, and by influential editors such as Dindorf and Nauck, because it appealed to the spirit of the times in two distinct ways. First, scholars were making initial attempts to construct stemmata (manuscript filiation trees) as a means of eliminating individual manuscripts from consideration in the constitution of a text (see Timpanaro 2005). Putting L at the head of such a stemma had a specious simplicity, as well as the incidental benefit of absolving scholars of the need to consult any other manuscripts. Second, by downgrading all witnesses except one to the status of *apographa* (worthless copies), scholars implicitly asserted the value of conjectural criticism, which became widespread in the middle years of the nineteenth century. Although radical emenders such as F. H. M. Blaydes (1818–1908), J. A. Nauck (1822–92), and H. van Herwerden (1831–1910) did make many changes that have won general acceptance, their successes were greatly outweighed by their failures. Emending Sophocles was turning into a kind of game; the more conjectures one made, the more likely it was that some would win favor (or so it seemed), and so vast numbers of proposals were made, often unaccompanied by explanation or justification. This scattergun approach was in danger of bringing the subject into disrepute.

The editions of Lewis Campbell (1871–81) and R. C. (later Sir Richard) Jebb (1883–96) marked a reaction against this prevailing tendency. They do contain a few new conjectures, but their chief merit was to explain the transmitted text wherever possible rather than having over-hasty recourse to emendation. In doing so they made great advances in the understanding of Sophocles' language. Both scholars were following in the footsteps of F. W. Schneidewin, whose edition (1849–55) was the first to accompany purely philological matters with interpretative inquiry. As often happens, the scholarly pendulum now swung too far in the opposite direction, and Campbell and Jebb frequently defended the text of the manuscripts when it is apparent that corruption had in fact taken place. Nevertheless, their timely contribution emphasized the truth that the establishment of Sophocles' text requires vindication of correct manuscript readings against misguided assault, just as much as emendation of error.

Campbell's collation of several new manuscripts for his edition also went against the spirit of contemporary criticism. He justified this course as follows (1874: 133): "I do not promise that the fullest examination of the later MSS. will yield much result. But in the case of a writer like Sophocles, it is worth while to use to the utmost even the least hopeful means [...] Collations of a few MSS. of the 13th and 14th centuries with some well-known edition might be published separately." His wish was not destined to be fulfilled for 99 years.

Dindorf's edition of the fragments was widely used, but for scholarly purposes it was superseded by that of Nauck (1856¹, 1889²). This was also the time when scholars attempted to reconstruct the plots of lost tragedies and the contexts of the fragments: the pioneer in this area was F. G. Welcker (1784–1868).

8 The Twentieth Century

The discovery and publication of papyri from the end of the nineteenth century yielded many new fragments of the lost plays, some very substantial; for example, half of the satyr play *Ichneutae* was published in 1912. Pearson took account of many of these in his

commentary on the fragments in 1917; more were available for Radt's magisterial edition (1977¹, 1999²). The latter, although barely a decade old, is already out of date, thanks to a recent discovery (Mülke 2007). Extensive work has also gone into reconstructing the plots of these dramas, which has given a fuller view of Sophocles' *oeuvre*. Papyri of the Seven have in a few places provided new readings (e.g. *Aj.* 699, *OT* 430) or welcome support for older readings that previously had only a tenuous foothold in the tradition (e.g. *El.* 995; cf. Grenfell 1919).

As regards the Seven, the key advance in this century was Roger Dawe's publication of collations of 17 manuscripts (Dawe 1973–8), most previously unexamined. They contained several good new readings, and provided some manuscript support for many previous emendations. Dawe's own edition (1975–9, 1984–5, 1996) made first use of this new material, although without any attempt to show why all these manuscripts needed to be cited as witnesses. Dawe also introduced a large number of conjectures into the text, including his own; many of his changes in this regard have not won widespread support. The most recent complete edition, Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990b), is generally more judicious on this front, but not always; for example, it displays a fondness for conjectures made by Lloyd-Jones in the 1950s that had not previously been welcomed into the text of an edition. Comparison of the editions by Dawe and by Lloyd-Jones and Wilson, both of them by reputed scholars with considerable expertise in this field and working with almost exactly the same material, is telling: they differ in more than a thousand places. Five hundred years since the first printed editions, and seven hundred years since the first modern scholarship, there is no sign of a consensus. Nevertheless, when we compare modern texts with those of ages past, it is clear that we are the beneficiaries of vast improvements thanks to the labors of many scholars over the years.

9 The Future

I end with three suggestions for future work on the transmission of Sophocles' dramas:

- 1 We need a critical edition which: (a) makes full and careful use of the improved state of understanding of tragic language and meter that is the result of twentieth-century scholarship, which itself built on the insights of previous scholars; (b) considers afresh which manuscripts need to be cited alongside L; (c) shows no bias toward the conjectures of its editor; (d) is accompanied by a commentary that explains every textual decision, without taking any choice for granted; and (e) takes care to attribute conjectures correctly to their first proposers.
- 2 Our texts of the Sophoclean *scholia* are woefully inadequate for most of the plays and are in need of further study. At the moment, the most recent edition for four of the plays is over a century old, and relies almost wholly on a single manuscript.
- 3 The history of the transmission itself requires critical scrutiny, both for its own sake and as a means of better understanding the evidence for Sophocles' writings. An investigation of Alexandrian scholarship on Sophocles and his fellow tragedians is a desideratum; so is an assessment of the contribution of Byzantine scholars. (Both depend in part on progress in editing the *scholia*.) Furthermore, the recent emergence of unpublished and suppressed material on Sophocles by scholars in the Renaissance and in later times whets the appetite in anticipation of future discoveries.

Renaissance scholarship on Aeschylus has attracted much attention in recent years; perhaps scholars need to examine the history of Sophoclean criticism with a similar passion. The account offered by the present chapter merely sketches a rich field now ripe for cultivation.

Guide to Further Reading

For the history of scholarship, see Reynold and Wilson (1991), and for the history of Sophoclean scholarship in particular, see Jebb (1897): vii–xliv, and also Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990): 1–6. On editing texts, see West (1973). On types of corruption, see Diggle (1981): Index, *s.v.* “manuscripts, errors of,” and Diggle (1994).

On early transmission, see Pearson (1917), i: xxxii–xlvi and Allan (2008): 82–4. On the authenticity of early texts, see Revermann (2006): 66–95. On re-performances of tragedy, see Easterling (2006): 4–5 (with n. 11). On actors’ interpolations, see Revermann (2006): 76–83 and Allan (2008): 83 n. 372.

On Alexander of Aetolia, see Pfeiffer (1968): 106–7. On Ptolemy II’s acquisition, Prauscello (2006): 68–78. On Aristophanes of Byzantium, see Barrett (1964): 47–8 and Pfeiffer (1968): 192–6. On Aristarchus, see Pfeiffer (1968): 222–3 and Schironi (2004): fr. 70 (especially p. 530 n. 4). On Didymus, see Pfeiffer (1968): 277. On Pius, see Finglass (2011a) (on *Aj.* 143–5).

Concerning knowledge of Sophocles’ plays among ancient authors, see Pearson (1917), i: xlvi–xci. On Latin literature and Sophocles, see Holford-Strevens (1999).

For papyri of the seven plays, see Daris (2003): 97–9. For scholars’ names on papyri, McNamee (2007): 362–71.

Among editions of the ancient *scholia*, see De Marco (1952) for *scholia* on *OC*; Christodoulou (1977) for *scholia* on *Ajax*; Janz (2005) for *scholia* on *Philoctetes*; and Papageorgius (1888) for other *scholia*. See also Dickey (2007): 34–5. On the invention of *scholia*, see McNamee (2007): 79–92.

Since this chapter was written in 2009, a most important development has taken place: the publication in 2010 of excellent editions of the ancient *scholia* to Sophocles’ *Electra* and *Trachiniae* by G. A. Xenis (2010a, 2010b). See my review in the *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, available at <http://bmc.brynmawr.edu/2011/2011-07-22.html>.

For medieval *scholia*, see Longo (1971) on *scholia* to *OT* and Janz (2005) on *scholia* to *Philoctetes*. For other medieval *scholia*, see Dindorf (1852) – but Dindorf does not include Triclinius’s metrical *scholia*. Tessier (2005) contains these for the triad and *Ant.* (which he confusingly calls the ‘tetrad’ in the title of his book, a non-standard usage); for *Tr.*, *Phil.*, and *OC*, see Turnebus (1552), reprinted e.g. in Stephanus (1568) and in Erfurd (1802–11). For Triclinius, see Tessier (1999). For Zacharias Callierges, see Chatzopoulou (2009): 85 n. 1.

For medieval manuscripts, see Turyn (1944 and 1952). For a facsimile of manuscript L, see Thompson and Jebb (1885).

For sixteenth-century editions, see Borza (2007).

For unpublished emendations by Scaliger, see Finglass (2009): 188–91; by Livineus, see Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990b): 269–75; by Auratus, see Masson (1887); by Bentley, see Bentley (1816); by Valckenaer and Pierson, see Finglass (2009): 194–202, 204–7; by Markland, see Finglass (2011b); by Porson, see Kidd (1815); by Elmsley, see Finglass (2007).

For the fragments, see Gruys (1981): 277–309 on Dirk Canter's library. On other collectors, see Kassel (2005) and Harvey (2005). On Welcker, see Radt (1986) = (2002): 320–44. The main edition is Radt (1999). For a translation, see Lloyd-Jones (1996). For a commentary, see Pearson (1917), Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick, and Talboy (2006), and Sommerstein and Talboy (2011).

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Professor Alan Sommerstein for helpful comments.

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Sophocles' Biography

Ruth Scodel

We know more about the life of Sophocles than we know about the lives of many other Greek poets. Still, we do not know very much. There is a biography of Sophocles in some manuscripts of his plays and another in the Byzantine encyclopedia *Suda*. In addition, anecdotes about him appear in various ancient authors. However, the biographical traditions about Greek poets, as recorded both in the surviving short formal biographies and in the anecdotes told by extant authors, tend to be almost useless as historical sources, although they are very valuable testimonies for how ancient readers thought about the authors. They are heavily based on inferences from the poetry itself and on jokes from comedy, neither of them used with critical sophistication, and many of the incidents they narrate are obviously folktales.

For the tragic poets, at least the rankings of the original performances at the Athenian City Dionysia and Lenaea were publicly recorded, so that, when an ancient source quotes a date, it is likely to be reliable. Unfortunately, we have very few such dates for Sophocles. His first production (and first victory) was in 468 BCE; *Philoctetes* was produced in 409 BCE; and *Oedipus at Colonus* was produced posthumously. Because Sophocles also held important public offices, we know something about his non-dramatic career. Because his acquaintance (perhaps friend), Ion of Chios (a tragedian and lyric poet), relayed some anecdotes about him in his book *Visits (Epidemiai)*, and Athenaeus' *The Learned Banqueters (Deipnosophistai)* includes an extended extract, we have some gossip that is at least contemporary and intended, unlike comedy, to be credible. Aristotle, too, relays some anecdotes about Sophocles, and these, while not contemporary, are at least close to his own time and reflect gossip rather than comedy or folktale.

We do not, however, have the kind of individual biographical information that is of real use for literary studies: we have no access to Sophocles' inner life. From comedy, the fragments of Ion, and indeed from Sophocles' political career, we see an immensely charming, successful, pious, and popular man. He lived about ninety years: in the first part of his career as a tragedian his most important competitor was Aeschylus, and for the later 50 years his chief rival was Euripides. Aristophanes' comedy *Frogs (Ranae)*, whose

effects on literary history are hard to overestimate, depicts a Dionysus who goes to the Underworld to bring back Euripides because Sophocles would not agree to come – “he was easy-going here and is easy-going there” (*Ra.* 82) – and who then judges a contest between Aeschylus and Euripides for the chair of honor designated in the Underworld for the greatest tragedian. Sophocles, according to Aristophanes, was too gracious to challenge Aeschylus (ll. 788–90).

Being defined as the most genial of men and rarely being subjected to parody is not always the best treatment for a tragic poet. The comic poet Phrynichus said in his *Muses* (fr. 1 Meineke = fr. 31 Hock):

Blessed Sophocles, who died after a long life,
a fortunate and adroit man
who composed many fine tragedies
and had a good death, enduring nothing bad.

Sophocles may very well have suffered a variety of ordinary misfortunes: we do not know whether his mother died young, whether he lost siblings, or children, or a wife. He had a long and very successful career and had sons who survived him, which was enough to label him as fortunate and to allow his life to be sentimentalized. That he died shortly before Athens lost the Peloponnesian War would have been another reason to see him as blessed.

Suda names five sons of his: Iophon, Leosthenes, Ariston, Stephanus, and Menekleides; but the biography mentions only two, both attested elsewhere. Iophon won at the Dionysia in 435 BCE and came second in 428 BCE (Euripides won the first prize with the production that included *Hippolytus*, and Ion of Chios was third). Ariston, said to be illegitimate, had a son also named Sophocles, who produced *Oedipus at Colonus* after his grandfather’s death and won his first victory with his own plays in 396 BCE.

Sophocles’ biographical tradition has defined him as an unquestioned classic, obscuring the difficulty and strangeness of his work. Only “Longinus” (*On the Sublime* 33.5) among ancient critics points out that Sophocles’ style is daring, so that he achieves true sublimity when he succeeds, but sometimes he fails completely – unlike the reliable but less thrilling Ion of Chios.

The biography preserved in the manuscript tradition begins thus:

Sophocles, son of Sophilos, who was neither, as Aristoxenos asserts, a carpenter or a smith, nor, as Istrus claims, a knife-maker by craft, but maybe he owned slaves who worked as smiths or carpenters. For it is not likely that someone of such origin would have been judged deserving to serve as general with Pericles and Thucydides, the men of highest standing in the city. Neither would he have been allowed to go without attack from the comic poets, who did not leave even Pericles alone. (*Vita* 1–6)

Aristoxenos was a fourth-century Peripatetic philosopher and theorist of music. It is absolutely clear that he had no real information at all about Sophocles’ father apart from his name – and even the spelling of this name varies in the sources. Evidently, these guesses were not based on jokes from comedy, since the arguments depend on the absence of such jokes. So they are almost certainly inferences from the poetry: Aristoxenos thought that Sophocles’ use of metaphors from building and metal-working indicated direct knowledge of these skills. The inference from the absence of jokes in comedy is

not unreasonable (and ancient biographers had a much larger body of comedies): since Sophocles obviously had an excellent education in poetry and music, since he served in public offices that were restricted to the wealthy, and since comedy never made fun of his origins, we can assume that his father was prosperous.

Istros, a Hellenistic biographer, said that, as a boy, Sophocles won crowns in both athletic and musical competitions. The biography says that he led a victory paean after the battle of Salamis, playing the lyre naked and anointed with oil (*Vita* 15–19). It is at least possible that boys' victories and the performance of the paean would have been recorded in inscriptions, but it is also possible that these stories, too, simply give concrete form to the tradition's sense of Sophocles as a versatile, successful, and patriotic man (and the details of the performance have a whiff of pederastic fantasy).

The sources vary about the date of his birth. Since the date of his death was well known (406/5 BCE), sources that give the length of his life imply a year of birth – and the possibilities go from 500/499 BCE to the seventy-third Olympiad, 488/485 BCE. Scholars typically assume the most commonly reported dates, 497/496 or 495/94 BCE. But, evidently, there was no record. There is a line and a half of elegaic verse quoted by Plutarch (*An seni res publica gerenda sit* 785b) as an *epigrammation*, a tiny epigram: “Sophocles made a song for Herodotus when he [Sophocles] was fifty-five.” This Herodotus is probably the historian, whose work Sophocles used, although the reference to Sophocles' age has caused debate over whether the poem was addressed to a boy (Jacoby 1913: 233–4). The introductory poem to the song suggests that it was sent rather than performed; but, since Herodotus was in Athens sometime during the mid-440s and joined the colony at Thurii (probably at its foundation in 443 BCE), it is no help in dating.

Plutarch's *Life of Cimon* (8.7) follows the account of Cimon's popularity after he brought the bones of the hero Theseus from Scyros with an anecdote:

Sophocles, who was still young, had just entered his first production; there was intense rivalry among the spectators and they were grouped into two sides. So the archon Apsephion did not conduct the lottery to select the judges; but when Cimon and the other generals came into the theater, after they had performed the usual rites to the god, he would not allow them to leave but gave them the oath and forced them to sit and judge – there were ten, one from each tribe. The competition also through the standing of the judges went beyond rivalry. When Sophocles won, Aeschylus is said to have become very distressed and to have taken it badly; he did not stay in Athens for long, but in anger went off to Sicily, where he died, and was buried near Gela.

The dates of victories were known, so this story is likely to be based on that much fact (although some anecdotes about poets evidently ignored these available chronological facts). However, Aeschylus was victorious in 467 BCE with his Theban trilogy, and with the *Oresteia* in 458 BCE. He left Athens some time later, probably intending only a visit to Sicily.

It is an odd story. The decision to have the generals serve as judges is made before the judges' names are selected from the pre-approved list, when the generals enter the theater – which means that the spectators are acutely excited before seeing anything. Although there was a sort of preview of the play before the festival, at the *proagon*, it is hard to imagine that the response to the *proagon* would be sufficient to prompt the archon to disrupt the usual procedure. It is tempting to dismiss the story as a fiction created to explain Aeschylus' departure from Athens. However, the tale could well go back

to Ion of Chios, who may even have been present. Perhaps members of the chorus gossiped and repeated what they learned in rehearsals, or the actors and poets may have recited selections; there could have been “buzz.” It is also possible that the archon’s decision to transfer judgment to the generals – who, like the regular judges, represented the ten Athenian “tribes” – was not really so spontaneous; he could have done it precisely in order to generate excitement. At any rate, the archon’s name (which was used to date the Athenian year) makes it reasonably certain that in 468 BCE Sophocles won and that he defeated Aeschylus, although this would mean that Aeschylus produced at the Dionysia two years in a row, which was unusual. Pliny the Elder says that Sophocles praised the grain of Italy in his *Triptolemus* 145 years before the death of Alexander the Great (*HN* 18.12), and most scholars therefore agree that this production included the *Triptolemus*. Triptolemus is a hero of Eleusis, which was Aeschylus’ home *deme*; it looks as if this production may have been an aggressive challenge (which might explain the level of feeling in the audience). Whether it was really Sophocles’ first production is another question. Eusebius gives 471 BCE as the date of Sophocles’ first competition, and the “first competition” detail could have been added to make the anecdote more exciting. From POxy. 2256 fr. 3 we know that Aeschylus, with the trilogy that included the *Suppliants*, won in a competition with Sophocles; but it is unclear whether this was later than 468 BCE.

The story, if true, is remarkable. It is sometimes taken as a deliberate political gesture. On this understanding, Aeschylus was associated with Themistocles, who was ostracized sometime between 472 and 470 BCE and then condemned for treason. Cimon, the main opponent of Themistocles, ensured that the prize went to his own favorite, Sophocles. However, the Athenians took elaborate measures to ensure fair judging in the dramatic contests; and, although the judging could well be political rather than aesthetic, it is hard to believe that they would have allowed such blatant bias. The story, if true, suggests rather that Sophocles and Cimon were not associated before this competition.

The biography says that Sophocles studied music with Lampros and learned tragedy from Aeschylus. “Lampros” is probably a mistake for “Lamprocles” (Lampros was probably younger than Sophocles). It is natural to assume that Sophocles would have learned from Aeschylus. Yet Aeschylus’ son Euphorion and a nephew, Philocles, were both successful tragedians (a production of Philocles was victorious over the production of Sophocles that included the *Oedipus Tyrannus*), and it would have been very generous of the master to teach Sophocles, too. In any case, ancient biographies tend to create tidy teacher–student relationships between famous people. There is no doubt that Sophocles learned a great deal from Aeschylus, but it is impossible to know what their personal relationship was. One anecdote found in Athenaeus and elsewhere (10.428f) has Aeschylus composing drunk and Sophocles rebuking him by saying: “Aeschylus, even though you do what you should, you do it without knowing what you’re doing.” The drunken Aeschylus comes from a cliché of ancient literary history that separates inspired and drunk poets from the craftsman-like and water-drinking, though it is not impossible that Sophocles actually made the remark.

Still, theater is an art usually learned through apprenticeship, and the classical tragedian had much to learn. For a production at the City Dionysia, the only firmly attested venue in the first period of Sophocles’ career, the poet needed to have three tragedies and a satyr play – a considerable body of polished work. The poet had to compose the music, design the choreography, and direct the production. So he needed to have the ability not only to put together a plot and invent interesting characters, but to make it work within the rules, managing the entrances and exits of the three actors (perhaps only

two when Sophocles started) so that they could change masks and costumes and appear in their various roles. He had to compose songs that were striking, memorable, and different from each other, but within the capacities of the chorus to perform while dancing; and he also needed to be aware of what the actors could handle. A magistrate, the archon, was responsible for selecting the competitors at the festival, and an aspiring tragedian would have had to convince him that his work was worthy of a trial, probably in preference to that of more familiar contenders.

In the early period, the tradition says that the tragedians were also actors, and this is very likely. There are, at least, obvious pathways by which aspiring poets could have learned the craft: the chorus had 12 (later 15) members, and there was a continual need for non-speaking extras in addition to the actors. Also, tragedians probably employed assistants to help drill choruses. We can safely assume that Sophocles acquired the necessary skills through this kind of practice.

According to the biography, Sophocles abandoned acting because his voice was inadequate, and so he made poet and actor distinct for the first time. Weakness of voice is almost certainly an invention designed to explain why Sophocles did not act, or why he stopped acting; Sophocles and other tragedians surely gave up acting in their own plays because specialists could do a better job than they would and could achieve effects that they would not. There was a prize for the best actor, probably beginning in 449 BCE, and the existence of this distinct prize implies that by that time the actor was not normally the poet. We need in general to be wary of the biographies' frequent comments to the effect that a poet invented this feature or that; Sophocles is made responsible for scene-painting, for the third actor, and for the increase in the number of chorus members from 12 to 15. Most such innovations, however, would have had to be negotiated with the magistrate in charge of the festival, or even with the assembly, since they had to be available to all contestants if the contest were to be fair, and since they would cost money. The extra actor would be a cost for the city, while a larger chorus would mean more expense for the *choregus*, the wealthy citizen who paid for training the chorus. The biographical tradition ascribes these features to Sophocles, either because they first appeared in his plays (from among those they knew), or simply because they seem to belong to the period when he was prominent. To be sure, he may have been the most important promoter of these changes, but he could hardly have introduced them on his own. The biography also says that Satyrus attributed him the curved staff, and Istrus the white shoes worn by actors and chorus; Hellenistic scholars looked for an inventor for everything and for things for every major dramatist to invent.

The tradition attributes two striking performances to Sophocles before he left acting: one, when he played the *kithara* (the professional's lyre) as Thamyris – the singer who boasted that he could defeat the Muses in a contest (*Vita* 24–5) – and another, when he played ball as Nausicaa (Ath. 1, 20f). *Kithara*-playing was not standard in tragedy, where song was accompanied by the *aulos*, a reeded wind instrument, and the *kithara*-player must have been highly skilled; he probably also sang in dactylic hexameter, the meter of epic poetry. The ball game must have been a choreographed dance, and the play's other title, *Washer-Women*, means that Nausicaa's attendants formed the chorus. The actor must have entered the orchestra – the dancing floor – in order to participate. Both these plays were innovative in technique, whether Sophocles played the title roles or not. Since the anecdote requires that these plays belong to a relatively early period, before he gave up acting, if they respect chronology, the implication is that he was capable of lively variation within tragic convention from early on in his career.

The biography, on the authority of Aristophanes of Byzantium, says that there were 130 plays under Sophocles' name, of which 17 were spurious, while *Suda* says that there were 123, "but many more according to some." The biography claims that he won 20 times (*Suda* 24), while an inscription (*IG II 2325*) allots him 18 victories at the Dionysia. He may also have won victories at the lesser festival, the Lenaea, where tragic competitions took place starting in 432 BCE. Since he died in 406/5 BCE, this means that he won at the Dionysia every three or four years and that he was victorious more than half the time, competing on average every second or third year (we do not know whether he was more or less productive at different stages of his career).

The famous inscription known as the Athenian Tribute Lists gives]ΟΦΟΚΛΕΣ ΚΟΛΟ[as Hellenotamias in 443/2 BCE. Almost all scholars supplement this so that it gives "Sophocles of Colonus" and agree that this Sophocles must be the tragedian (Jouanna 2007: 677–80). The ten Hellenotamiai were Athenian chief financial officers. In the years following the Persian Wars, the Delian League, an alliance of cities against the Persians, had become increasingly dominated by Athens. More and more cities contributed tribute money instead of supplying ships for military operations, either because it was easier that way or because they were forced after they had unsuccessfully tried to secede from the alliance, and Athens' military superiority to the other cities became ever greater. In 454 BCE, at Pericles' instigation, the alliance's treasury was moved from the island of Delos to Athens. The board of ten Hellenotamiai, "treasurers of the Greeks," were in charge of receiving the tribute from the allies, of paying the "first fruits" to Athena (one-sixtieth of the total), and of disbursing the funds when they were authorized by the assembly. The office was probably restricted to the richest group of citizens, because these were more likely to have experience in handling large amounts of money and they were believed to be less susceptible to trying to embezzle it. They were probably elected by the assembly, one from each of the ten Athenian tribes. (Each "tribe" included 30 *demes* or villages/neighborhoods from different areas of Attica. The army was organized by tribes. Each tribe had its own hero, the powerful spirit of an ancestral Athenian, and the monument of the tribal heroes was an important landmark in the Athenian civic center, used for posting important announcements.)

The year 442 BCE is the first year in which a Hellenotamias is named on the tribute list; and, since only one is named, he was probably the chair. This does not seem to have been a routine year, for there was a new assessment of tribute in 443 BCE, even though the amounts changed very little and that was not a year of the Great Panathenaea, which is when the assessments were usually done. Not only is this the first year in which the Hellenotamias was named on the inscribed list at all, but an extra secretary is also listed, Anticles, who also served in the following year (Lewis, Boardman, Davies, and Ostwald 1992: 141). There may have been a significant reorganization. All this suggests that the Athenians elected Sophocles for a reason, perhaps because they trusted his honesty and thought that the allies would also trust him.

Sophocles was then elected general for 441/0 BCE. There were again ten generals, one from each tribe. The generalship was the most important and powerful public office; because many offices were filled by lottery, their holders were not leaders. Men with political ambitions held offices that were elected, and Pericles, for example, was elected general many times.

The first *hypothesis* of *Antigone* says that Sophocles was chosen as general because *Antigone* was so successful. Creon's opening speech became a famous piece of patriotic sentiment, even though Creon's actual policy decisions in the play are calamitous.

Scholars typically discount the connection, though they often assume that the chronology is right and that *Antigone* was therefore produced shortly before the election. Some have, however, argued that Sophocles would have been too busy as Hellenotamias and then general, and so they date the play after the Samian War (Lewis 1988). Surely he was chosen, at least in part, because he had seemed to be a competent administrator as Hellenotamias. He was also very popular – a witty and charming man, and a famous tragedian, hence an ideal person to work closely with the leaders of the “allies,” the cities of the Athenian empire. He was in his fifties, old enough for reliability, not too old for campaigning.

Linked with the stories about Sophocles as a general are stories about his erotic life. One anecdote that appears in several variants (Plutarch, *Life of Pericles* 8.8; Stobaeus 3.17.18; Cicero, *De officiis* 1.44) has Sophocles, while in the company of Pericles, pointing out a beautiful boy. Pericles responds that a general should have not only clean hands, but a clean gaze (Pericles could be a prig). Ion of Chios, quoted by Athenaeus (13.603e), describes a party he attended with Sophocles, on Chios, when Sophocles was on his way to Lesbos, as general. Sophocles had already urged the attractive slave boy to serve him slowly, embarrassing him. The boy was trying to remove a tiny chip from Sophocles' cup with his little finger. Sophocles urged him to blow it out instead, and when the boy brought his head close to Sophocles', Sophocles kissed him. He then remarked to the applauding company:

I am practicing being a general, gentlemen, since Pericles says I can compose poetry, but don't know generalship. But hasn't my stratagem come out right?

There are other erotic stories, too. Sophocles goes outside the walls with a boy; they put the boy's cloak underneath, and Sophocles' above. After they have sex, the boy steals Sophocles' cloak – and when the incident becomes a topic of gossip, Euripides says that he had the boy once but didn't have to pay (Ath. 13, 640d–f, citing the third-century BCE historian Hieronymus of Rhodes). The late fourth-century iambic poet Macho describes how a beloved of Sophocles was with a courtesan named Niko; when he wished for her beautiful behind, she laughed and said that he would just give it to Sophocles (Macho 429–32 Gow). He is said in old age to have been in love with a courtesan from Sicyon named Theoris, who is identified as the mother of his son Ariston.

It really does not matter whether these tales are individually true. They are at least contemporary or near-contemporary fictions, and they strongly suggest that Sophocles was famous for being susceptible to desire for members of both sexes. Athenaeus (13.557e) says that, when someone called Euripides a misogynist, Sophocles commented: “only in his tragedies – in bed he is a woman-lover,” distinguishing Euripides from himself. (But we cannot trust stories whose point is to differentiate Sophocles from Euripides.) In Plato's *Republic* (329B), Cephalus illustrates the advantages of old age:

I was once present when the poet Sophocles was asked by somebody, “Sophocles, what is your condition when it comes to sex? Are you still able to have relations with a woman?” And he said, “Avoid ill-omened talk, man! I have escaped that with the greatest relief, as if I were a slave who had run away from a wild and crazy master.”

Sophocles probably said this – but how seriously?

To judge from Ion's account, Sophocles seems to have been skilled at using his own erotic tendencies in self-deprecating representations that increased his popularity. Ion

calls him “playful over wine, and adroit.” (“Over wine” means “at symposia,” the dinner and drinking-parties that were the most important form of elite Greek private social gathering.) Ion narrates another incident from the same party in Chios, involving the same boy. Sophocles praised the boy, quoting the tragedian Phrynichus: “The light of desire shines on red cheeks.” A “teacher of letters” objected that Phrynichus was wrong to say that a beautiful person’s cheeks were red, since the boy would not be beautiful if a painter smeared his cheeks with red paint. Sophocles responded by citing a line of Simonides in which a maiden sends forth her voice from her “red” mouth – a line generally admired. He then cited two more instances: poets call Apollo’s hair “golden” but the painters make it black; Homer uses the epithet “rosy-fingered,” but someone who colored her fingers rosy would look like a professional dyer, not like a beautiful woman. The guests laughed. Sophocles, going from Simonides to Pindar to Homer, made a virtuosic display of his ability to find examples of differing treatments of color in poetic and pictorial conventions. For all the charm that Ion stresses, we can clearly see the competitive edge (Ath. 13, 603e).

Sophocles, though, did not just put down decisively a pedant and a show-off, but defended poetry’s right to be understood in its own terms. Finding flaws in famous passages of poetry was a favorite trick of the sophists for demonstrating the superiority of their own brand of education. Since poetry was at the center of traditional Greek aristocratic education, subjecting it to fussy criticism was a form of deliberate and serious intellectual aggression. This exchange at a party was a minor skirmish in an ongoing culture war.

The anecdote offers a glimpse into Sophocles’ literary and intellectual life, which the biography mostly neglects – except for the comment that he “formed a *thiasos* [a religious/social club] of the educated.” It is not, perhaps, surprising that a tragedian should be able to quote a variety of poets to make a point. But there is considerable evidence for other intellectual engagement. Most notably, he was a friend of Herodotus. The lyric poem to which I have already referred was probably a drinking-song or a joke. Sophocles twice borrows directly from Herodotus: in the infamous passage at *Antigone* 905–20, where he uses the story of Intaphernes’ wife from Herodotus (Hdt. 3.119), and at *Oedipus at Colonus* 337–41, where the elderly Oedipus compares his sons and daughters to the upside-down social practices of Egypt described by the historian (Hdt. 2.35). The play, too, borrows from Herodotus less obviously; Creon’s reference to “gold from India” at 1038–39 depends on 3.94.3. *Antigone* also refers to the importance of Dionysiac worship in Italy (ll. 1118–21); Sophocles had up-to-date geographical knowledge and interest.

The metrical author Hephaestion quotes a line from an elegaic poem in which Sophocles gives the Attic form “Archeleos” (with long final syllable) for the name “Archelaus” because the common Greek form of the name will not fit the meter. (A similar joke on the difficulties of fitting names into standard meters appears in Critias’ elegy on Alcibiades, fr. 4 West.) This is probably the natural philosopher Archelaus, who was a teacher of Euripides in Euripides’ biographical tradition, and also a teacher of Socrates in Hellenistic accounts. He, too, appeared in the works of Ion of Chios. While contemporary science does not surface in the extant plays of Sophocles as it does in Euripides, there is abundant evidence of his interests in contemporary thought: the “Ode on Man” in *Antigone* reflects Protagorean thought. While it limits the celebration of human progress by insisting that human cleverness is only a good when it is constrained by traditional values, it certainly endorses the theory that human beings have progressed through

time (332–75). Creon's self-defense in *Oedipus Tyrannus* is an argument from probability in the rhetorical mode of the period (583–602). Philoctetes' life on his lonely island is modeled on sophistic speculations about early humanity. To be sure, Sophocles often shows a critical or conservative turn when he adapts contemporary thought: Creon in *Antigone* thinks that exposing Polynices' corpse to predatory birds would not be a problem even if they reached the throne of Zeus, because mortals cannot pollute the gods (1040–4); it is a fine sentiment, but it appears to be wrong.

Sophocles is also reported to have composed a prose work on the chorus. Greeks of the fifth century rarely wrote books, unless they had controversial doctrines or polemical points to make. If Sophocles wrote such a book, it indicates that he thought other people were wrong. He was, in other words, very much an intellectual of his time.

Just as we can sense real irritation in his reply to the teacher at the party on Chios, there is a trace of real resentment in the comment about Pericles' criticism of his abilities as a general. Sophocles was not quite so limitlessly genial as Aristophanes would suggest. Was he in fact an incompetent general? Ion said that, when drinking, he made many witty remarks like those he quoted, "but in political matters he was not astute or active, but like anyone of the 'good' Athenians." (Ath. 13, 603e). It is not quite clear to what extent *chrestos*, which I have translated "good" in scare quotes, means "upper-class" or is mildly ironic (its literal meaning is "useful"). Ion was the citizen of a subject city in the Athenian empire, and, although his poetic career flourished within the imperial system, we cannot assume that he was entirely happy with it. There is, indeed, no sign that Sophocles was "political." Although he held high public offices, he is never mentioned as a speaker in the assembly or linked with any particular policy. His name does not appear in Thucydides. He was capable of serving his city, and he did so when he was chosen, but there is no evidence that he had any desire to be a civic leader. His plays endorse moral behaviors in political life: good leaders listen to advice from others, seek the well-being of the community rather than self-aggrandizement, avoid deception and bullying, and revere the gods. It is hard to extract any specific policies from them, or even a preference for a form of government.

As for Sophocles' competence: the Athenians came to suppress the revolt of Samos with 60 ships. Sixteen of these were sent either to watch for the Persian fleet or to collect reinforcements from Chios and Lesbos. That was presumably the occasion on which Sophocles attended the symposium on Chios that Ion narrates. Meanwhile, Pericles was successful in defeating the Samians at sea, and he was beginning a siege. However, when the Athenians heard that the Persian fleet was on its way, Pericles took 60 ships and sailed out to intercept the Persians; in his absence the Samians successfully broke the naval blockade, but, when the Persian force turned back and Pericles returned, he re-established the blockade of Samos and forced a surrender after nine months. If the episode on Chios took place before the Athenian defeat, Pericles' comment must have been unspecific. Sophocles had never been in charge of a fleet or an army and was, doubtlessly, not especially well prepared to conduct a battle. However, the Athenians had ten generals for a reason. They needed reinforcements, and probably Sophocles obtained them; he was a diplomat and an administrator, not a strategist.

Sophocles apparently served as general more than once, which would strongly suggest that his compatriots did not think he was incompetent. However, the testimony is perplexing, even by the standards of ancient biography. First, the biography, arguing for his high social origins, mentions that he served as general with "Pericles and Thucydides." Thucydides, the son of Melesias, was ostracized from 443 to 433 BCE. We have the full

list of generals for the year when Sophocles served in the Samian War, and there is no Thucydides among them. Either this is an utter fabrication, or Sophocles served as a general in an earlier year – unless the name has been confused or the notice refers to another Thucydides, presumably the historian. Then the biography says: “The Athenian chose him as general at the age of 65 in the war against the Anaeans, seven years before the Peloponnesian War.” However, the biography places Sophocles’ birth in 495/4 BCE, which would make him 65 in 430/29 BCE, after the start of the Peloponnesian War. We have no other information about a war between Athens and the Anaeans in 438 BCE, although the city received refugees from Samos and fought against Athens later. Something here is seriously muddled. Then there is an anecdote in Plutarch’s *Life of Nicias* (15.2), in which Nicias, at a meeting of the generals, invites Sophocles to offer his opinion first, as the oldest. Sophocles answers: “I am the oldest [*palaiotatos*], but you are the most ‘senior’ [*presbutatos*].” Nicias was a general for the first time in 427 BCE, and the remark would make sense only after he had distinguished himself; by that date Sophocles would certainly have been old. His deference to Nicias could indicate either courtesy or evasiveness; if his abilities lay in executing others’ ideas, he would have had good reason to avoid speaking first.

In Aristophanes’ *Peace* (*Pax*) of 421 BCE, there is an obscure joke (ll. 698–9):

From Sophocles he’s become Simonides. Being old and rotten
For the sake of profit he would sail on wicker-work.

This is a parody of a line of Sophocles’ own. The parody replaces “with the gods’ help” by “for the sake of profit.” The anecdotal tradition about Simonides stresses his greed and the high fees he charged for his poems. So the point of the dig is generally quite clear – Sophocles is doing something risky to make money. What he did, however, we do not know. The scholiast thinks he was making money out of a generalship, but it mentions Samos, where his generalship was 20 years in the past by that time; the comment is a guess, and the joke is about risk, not about wrongdoing. Sophocles was speculating. More reliably, Sophocles is described here as being just as unseaworthy as his ship. (Another *scholion* complains that he could hardly be old, since he was to live another 17 years.) In another context, Aristotle (*Rh.* 1416^a13), discussing responses to slanders, quotes Sophocles as saying that he was trembling, not by way of faking the symptoms of extreme age in order to elicit sympathy, as the slanderer claimed, but because he could not help it; it was not by his own choice that he was 80. The situation seems to be a court. Like the lines from Aristophanes’ *Peace*, it suggests that Sophocles, though still vigorous enough to conduct business and to produce plays, was visibly old and frail.

Aristotle (*Rh.* 1374^b34) has another obscure story that places Sophocles in a court, as a speaker on behalf of Euctemon. The victim of the crime had killed himself, and Sophocles argued that the criminal’s punishment should not be smaller than the punishment the victim had inflicted on himself. This would hardly be the same occasion as in the preceding story, since there would be no point in Sophocles’ making the jury feel sorry for him when he was speaking in someone else’s case. Euctemon is a common name, and the background is utterly obscure.

We know of one more public office that Sophocles held, namely as member of the special committee of advisors (*probouloi*), all “older men” (over 40) appointed to propose constitutional reforms after the disaster of the Sicilian expedition in the fall of

413 BCE (see Osborne's chapter in this volume). The situation was desperate, and the Athenians had been convinced, especially by Peisander, that, if they changed their constitution and recalled Alcibiades from exile, they would be able to get support from Persia against the Peloponnesian League; meanwhile the oligarchs violently suppressed their opponents. Thucydides (8.67.1–2) narrates what ultimately happened:

First they assembled the people, and moved to elect ten fully independent commissioners [*xungraphais*], and these commissioners should reach a judgment about how the city would best be run and on a set day report it to the people. Then, when the day arrived, they enclosed the assembly in Colonus (this is a shrine of Poseidon, about ten stades outside the city). The commissioners simply proposed nothing except that it be allowed for any Athenian to offer whatever view he wanted without penalty.

The Athenians had a law against unconstitutional proposals, and by suspending this law, the commissioners opened the way for the oligarchs to create their governing body of the Four Hundred. The *Constitution of the Athenians*, written by a member of Aristotle's school, says that there were 30 commissioners – the ten *probouloi* and 20 others – and this is probably right.

Aristotle reports an anecdote in a discussion of how to defeat an opponent in asking and answering questions (*Rb.* 1429^a25–31):

Thus when Sophocles was asked by Peisander whether he had, like the other commissioners, voted to establish the Four Hundred, he said “Yes.” – “Wasn't it your opinion that it was bad?” – “Yes.” – “So you did this, though it was bad?” “Yes,” said Sophocles, “for there was nothing better.”

Although Aristotle does not specify that this Sophocles was the poet and there were other important figures in Athens with this name, it is very unlikely that he would refer to any other Sophocles by name alone. Peisander was the leader of the oligarchs, and it is hard to imagine the occasion of this dialogue, since Peisander fled to the Spartans after the Four Hundred were replaced by the Five Thousand, as Thucydides reports (*Th.* 8.98.1). Jameson (1971) proposed that the anecdote reflects a prosecution of Peisander. Still, the conversation need not ever have taken place for its background to be genuine. It implies that Sophocles was one of the commissioners and that he supported the motion to suspend the law against unconstitutional proposals, knowing that it would lead to oligarchy – but that at least some people thought that he had done so not because he was hostile to the democracy in principle, but because he saw no real alternative. (The episode would seem to prove Ion right when he said that Sophocles was not really a politician.)

The biography of Euripides claims that, when he heard of the death of Euripides in 407/6 BCE, Sophocles wore mourning garb and presented his actors without their customary garlands. This would have to have been at the *proagon*, and it is probably true. *The proagon* would have been a public event, and both men were very famous. Sophocles is also supposed to have said, when he heard of Euripides' death: “The whetstone of my poems has perished.” Aristotle (*Po.* 1460^b32) quotes a saying of Sophocles that Euripides made his characters the way people are, but he himself “as they should be” – this probably means not as real people ought to be (nobody would want a world peopled by Sophoclean characters), but as tragic characters ought to be.

In *Oedipus at Colonus* the chorus of old men sings about the miseries of old age. They complain that, once youth is past, a man is subject to a variety of burdensome troubles:

“murders, feuds, strife, battles, and resentment” (ll. 1234–5). It is not the most obvious catalog of human problems, and it surely reflects Sophocles’ experience in the last decade of his life. In the biographical tradition, the influence of the *Oedipus at Colonus* has been very great. It goes in two different ways. The play could be described as the story of an old man who meets with a miraculous death and becomes a powerful hero. It could be also be described as the story of an old man who, on the way to that miraculous death, is harassed by his enemies and curses his quarreling sons. There is a widely repeated story that Sophocles’ sons, or Iophon alone (resenting his favoritism towards his grandson, Sophocles the second), brought him to court as senile; Sophocles refuted the charge by reciting from the *Oedipus at Colonus*. The tale is profoundly unlikely: it is an inference from the gloomy treatment of old age in the play. Since Sophocles was supposed to have been such a happy man, that his last play is about an elderly man whose life has been wretched – and who curses his sons – required explanation.

The biographical tradition stresses Sophocles’ piety and closeness to the gods. In one common story, when a golden crown had been stolen from the Acropolis, Heracles appeared to Sophocles in a dream and told him where it was hidden or who had stolen it. Subsequently, Sophocles used the reward money to create a shrine of Heracles the Revealer. The biography makes him the priest of an otherwise unknown hero named “Halon,” a companion of Asclepius when he was educated by the Centaur Chiron. There was, in particular, a story – not in the biography, but in Plutarch’s *Life of Numa* (4.8) and elsewhere – that he had “received” Asclepius in his house and after his death was worshipped as a hero, Dexion. Scholars have wondered whether he kept the statue at home, or even took care of the sacred snake. But the whole thing is probably fiction. Its basis is the paean Sophocles composed for Asclepius, the *Oedipus at Colonus*, and the cult of a hero associated with Asclepius named “Dexion.” A poet’s last work should predict his death, so Sophocles, like Oedipus, should be a hero, especially because he was beloved and pious. The paean suggested that he should be connected with Asclepius, and the existence of a hero named “Dexion” (“receiver”) explained why he was so honored (Connolly 1998). There is no reason to doubt Sophocles’ piety, but little reason to believe any of the tales that exemplify it.

As for the accounts of Sophocles’ death, in one version an actor sent him some grapes for the Jugs (an early spring festival of Dionysus), and he choked to death on an unripe grape. In another, he was reading the *Antigone* aloud, and when he came to a powerful passage near the end, in which there was no pause, he gave up his life with his voice. In another, after he read the play and was declared victor, he died of joy. The last story is incomprehensible, since there were no competitions in reading tragedies; and so is the first – unripe grapes in February? All three accounts convey the same message: that Sophocles died in the service of Dionysus. *Antigone* is chosen not only because it was among his most popular plays, but because it can be seen as a sequel to *Oedipus at Colonus*, and so it belongs at the end of his life, even though it was written in the 440s. A further anecdote says that a dream warned the Spartan general who was besieging Athens at the time of Sophocles’ generalship to make sure that the beloved of Dionysus was buried.

The various remarks attributed to Sophocles are genuinely valuable, since even when they are not genuine they are based on knowledge of all his works. Plutarch (*Progress in Virtue* 7.79) says that Sophocles divided his style into three periods: first, he imitated the “weight” of Aeschylus, then, he developed a style that was “bitter and affected,” before working on a style that was “most expressive of character and best.” He could have said

this in the book on the chorus, if it existed, or it could have been quoted by Ion; it has, at any rate, a reasonable chance of being close to something he said. It is an interesting comment, especially since Sophocles is often called “sweet” in antiquity, even though there is much in his style that is indeed harsh.

On the whole, however, the biography gives less than it promises. Sophocles held important public offices; nonetheless, he does not seem to have been a political man. In the end, we know that he was willing to serve the city; that he was a wit; that he had powerful sexual drives towards both boys and women alike; and that, in a long life, he composed many plays.

Guide to Further Reading

The dating of Sophocles' works depends largely on the analysis of Reinhardt (1979). There is a very full discussion of the biography (in French) in Jouanna (2007: 13–125); he is not very skeptical about the evidence. Lefkowitz (1981) discusses the biography at 75–87, with a translation 160–3; she rejects the entire biographical tradition. For Sophocles' cult, see Connolly (1998). On the difficulties of Sophocles' famous comment about his own style, the most influential contribution is Bowra (1940); see Pelling (2007) for a caution about how the context in Plutarch may have influenced the quotation.

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Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides

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I Introduction

It seems to have been a characteristic of ancient biography to link famous people – both among themselves and to some significant historical event. Thus, the anonymous ancient *Life of Sophocles* states: “after the naval battle at Salamis, when the Athenians were standing round the victory monument, Sophocles with his lyre, naked and anointed with oil, led the chorus which sang the paean at the victory sacrifice” (Lefkowitz 1981: 160). According to the chronology outlined in this account, Sophocles was a youth aged about 15, and he was seven years younger than Aeschylus and 24 years older than Euripides. The equivalent *Life of Euripides*, however, first claims that Euripides was born in the year when the battle of Salamis was fought – and on the island of Salamis itself, to boot – and later it adds that “they say” that his birth date was on the actual day of the battle. To complete the picture, the *Life of Aeschylus* records from hearsay that the grand old man of the Athenian theater actually fought at Salamis (as well as at Marathon and Plataea).

Much of the information contained in these and other ancient *Lives* must be treated with the deepest caution – and indeed skepticism – as far as historical accuracy is concerned (Lefkowitz 1981: *passim*). However, the connection made between Salamis and the three pre-eminent Athenian tragedians clearly shows the desire of ancient biographers to anchor their subjects in a neat historical context. The fact that the three tragedians were each tied to Salamis, and thus to one another, is hardly surprising. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides dominated the Athenian tragic stage and together they covered almost the entire fifth century BCE.

In this scenario Sophocles sits sweetly in the middle, overlapping with his two great rivals in the tragic competition, since he competed against Aeschylus in the early part of his career and against Euripides in the second half of the fifth century. The “middle position” is more than just an accident of birth dates, because in a very real sense, as a writer of tragedies, Sophocles mediates between the other two in terms of approach and style.

2 Aristophanes' *Frogs*

This is well illustrated by Aristophanes' comedy *Frogs* (*Ranae*). In this most hilarious *tour de force*, Heracles asks the god Dionysus why, if he has to bring back anyone from the Shades, that person shouldn't be Sophocles – who, he opines, is superior to Euripides in any case.

Heracles' value judgment about the relative merits of the two tragedians is interesting in itself. Dionysus' response is even more interesting. It goes like this (Ar. *Ran.* 78–82):

No, first I want to get Iophon [a son of Sophocles] alone by himself and evaluate what he produces without Sophocles. Besides, Euripides is a slippery character and would probably even help me pull off an escape, whereas Sophocles was peaceable here and will be peaceable there. (Henderson 2002: 29)

This sets up significant comparisons. In the first place, the comic poet is drawing attention to the idea, real or imaginary, that tragedians worked with collaborators. In the case of Iophon, the jury was supposedly still out as to whether he could cope, now that his father was dead, the implication being that Sophocles had been the one helping him with his tragic productions rather than the other way round. In contrast, the *Life of Euripides* paints its subject as being rather dependent on the assistance of others. The relevant section runs as follows:

Socrates [the philosopher] and Mnesilochus appear to have collaborated with him in some of his writings; as Teleclides says: “that fellow Mnesilochus is cooking up a new play for Euripides, and Socrates is supplying him with firewood.” Some authorities say that Iophon or Timocrates of Argos wrote his lyrics. (Lefkowitz 1981: 164)

Teleclides was, like Aristophanes, a comic poet, and his below-the-belt swipe at the tragedian is most likely to be pure invention for comic point-scoring. Euripides was the butt of many comic jokes, and the charge that he needed help in writing his plays is simply part of the generally bad press he received in comedy. What is important, though, is the distinction – manufactured in comedy, as far as we can judge – between him and Sophocles, who emerges relatively unscathed!

Returning to the passage from the *Frogs*, Dionysus' comment that Euripides is “a slippery character” is simply part and parcel of the general comic denigration of him. The translation “slippery” fits this particular context rather well, but the original Greek word *panourgos* bears connotations ranging from downright “wicked” or “villainous” to the somewhat less pejorative range of “cunning” or “smart.” In any case, the implication that Euripides is always up to some mischief is again projected onto him by certain characters in his plays. The idea that he could help to “pull off an escape” (where his slipperiness would come in handy) refers to the fact that a number of his plays feature exciting escapes. Sophocles, on the other hand, is not noted so much for this plot device.

The epithet applied to Sophocles in the *Frogs* passage, here translated as “peaceable,” is *eukolos*. This rather implies that the person so designated is “easily satisfied,” “good-natured,” or “at ease,” and it ties in with the way in which Sophocles is characterized in the *Life*, which records that “his character was so charming that he was loved everywhere and by everyone.” This is in sharp contrast to what the *Life of Euripides* says about its subject: the picture painted there is one of a turbulent life on the part of a man who shunned the public gaze and ultimately went into voluntary exile in Macedonia, where

one day he was torn to pieces by hunting dogs. The various traditions about the circumstances of Sophocles' death, on the other hand, are considerably less unpleasant.

In the *Frogs*, when Dionysus finally makes it to the Underworld, the original idea that his mission impossible was to resurrect Euripides is rather lost sight of, since the second part of the comedy, set now in the dark realm of Pluto, involves a competition between Aeschylus and Euripides in order to decide who is the rightful holder of the throne of tragedy. Aeschylus has been unchallenged until the arrival of Euripides who, encouraged by the crowd of good-for-nothings – the majority of the Underworld's population – has staked a claim. By contrast, Sophocles, who died after Euripides, had joined in an embrace with Aeschylus and relinquished any claim to his throne, though he is waiting in the wings to challenge Euripides, should the younger poet dethrone the master.

The actual competition that ensues between Aeschylus and Euripides makes it crystal clear why Sophocles has been sidelined by Aristophanes. What is required for his dramatic purposes is the strongest possible contrast between the old and the new, the old-fashioned and the new-fangled, the conservative and the radical, a contrast that he can exploit with all the exaggeration of cartoon-type stylization. There is no place for Sophocles in this titanic conflict of extremes. Sophocles occupies the middle ground.

The final act in the process comes when Dionysus, much to Euripides' chagrin, judges Aeschylus to be the victor and the god of the Underworld farewells him as he departs to save Athens. Aeschylus says to Pluto (Ar. *Ra.* 1515–23 = Henderson 2002: 233):

And you hand over my chair to Sophocles to look after and preserve, for I rank him second to me in the art. And remember to see to it that that criminal [*panourgos*], that liar, that buffoon, never sits down on my chair, not even accidentally.

3 Lives and Careers

The fictional *Frogs* contest presents us with a situation that never occurred in real life in the tragic competition at Athens, since Aeschylus died before Euripides came on the scene. As already noted, however, Sophocles competed with each of them in turn at different stages of his career. Some comparisons here are instructive. The *Life* says that Sophocles wrote 130 dramas “of which seventeen are spurious.” The *Life* also claims that he won 20 victories and was otherwise always placed second and never third, this avoidance of third place apparently being confirmed by the didascallic record, at least insofar as the surviving material allows this conclusion to be drawn.

In the case of Aeschylus, the *Life* has him composing “70 dramas and in addition about five satyr plays” and notes that a number of victories were achieved in his name after his death. For Euripides, the *Life* speaks of 92 dramas, and also up to eight satyr plays. The number of his victories, however, is given as only five, and this relatively poor success rate is not contradicted by any other evidence. Although the figures for the number of plays are by no means totally reliable, they are probably a reasonable guide. Thus, Sophocles would appear to have been the most prolific of the three tragedians and also the most successful, at least in terms of number of victories. On the other hand, it appears that Aeschylus, to judge from the *Life*, was accorded a signal honor: the Athenians voted after his death to award a golden crown to anyone who produced one of his plays in the competition. Moreover, the regular performance of plays by Euripides at Athens in the fourth century BCE (Xanthakis-Karamanos 1980: 28–34) was not matched by anything similar for Sophocles.

Quite apart from the *Lives*, there is a range of other ancient testimonia linking Sophocles with either Aeschylus or Euripides, or with both. Again, while these references are for the most part of dubious historicity, they do offer an insight into the way in which antiquity itself sought to make connections among the leading tragic poets.

With regard to Sophocles and Aeschylus, the most interesting and possibly most significant of these testimonia is a story told by Plutarch (Plu. *Cim.* 8.7–9), which records an unusual break in protocol in the year in which Sophocles first competed in the tragic competition. According to this account, because the audience fragmented into partisan groups supporting different tragedians, the archon Apsephion took the bold step of foregoing the normal appointment of judges by lot, and instead “compelled” Cimon and his fellow generals to act in this capacity. The story goes on to say that Sophocles was declared the winner and that, as a result, Aeschylus got in a huff and soon afterwards left Athens for Sicily, where he spent the final period of his life.

If this story is taken at face value, it has particular dating implications for the careers of both Sophocles and Aeschylus. Apsephion was archon for the tragic competition of 468 BCE, and this is the date given in the so-called Parian Marble for Sophocles’ first *victory*. It has therefore generally been assumed by scholars that Sophocles was successful in his very first appearance at the competition. Moreover, a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus (POxy. 2256 fr. 3) published in the early 1950s (Lobel 1952: 30) records Sophocles as being placed second in a year in which Aeschylus won the prize with a trilogy including the extant *Suppliant Women*. Assuming that Sophocles’ first appearance in the competition coincided with his first victory, scholars were obliged to redate *Suppliant Women* to some later time in the 460s BCE; it had formerly been considered an early play, pre-dating *Persians* of 472 BCE.

It has now been argued, however (Scullion 2002: 87–90), that Plutarch’s account must be based on faulty sources and must have become muddled, and that in any case its originator must have just been thinking in terms of Sophocles’ first *victory* rather than of his first *production*. This is because of the reference to spectator rivalry and partisanship, which could be interpreted as implying that Sophocles had already been competing in previous competitions and over a period sufficiently long for him to have built up his own supporters’ “club,” in much the same way as certain opera singers today develop *clagues* in competition with the *clagues* of rival singers.

Whether or not this interpretation is correct, the effect on Aeschylus of his defeat at the hands of a young whippersnapper cannot have been what the Plutarch story says it was. The *Life of Aeschylus* appears to blur two separate visits to Sicily on the part of the older tragedian: the first occurred reasonably soon after Hieron’s founding of the city of Aetna around 475 BCE and was designed to produce the celebratory *Women of Aetna*, and the second happened after his victory with the *Oresteia* trilogy in 458 BCE. Neither visit could have been a knee-jerk reaction to Sophocles’ victory in 468 BCE, whether this was on debut or not.

At least some kernel of historical fact may lie somewhere in the Plutarch story even if it is just testimony to the keen rivalry between the two tragedians and their supporters, and we are dealing with matters of importance for the history of the Greek theater. The same cannot be said for another story, versions of which are found in several ancient sources. It is, however, worth repeating, because it illustrates the level of interest that ancient “gossip columnists” took in the supposed dealings of one literary figure with another.

The most complete account of this story is found in Athenaeus (10.428f). The gist of it is that Aeschylus was the first to bring on the stage characters under the influence of

alcohol and that this simply reflected the tragedian's own propensity for inebriation, supposedly manifested even while he composed his tragedies. So far, so good. But this is where Sophocles enters the story. He criticized his fellow tragedian and said: "My dear Aeschylus, even though you're doing the right thing [or: what you need to do] you're doing it without realizing it." Athenaeus is quoting from a certain Chamaeleon, who apparently wrote a work about Aeschylus. The story must be read, of course, with the understanding that the patron god of tragedy was Dionysus, one of whose attributes was the fermented juice of the grape. In one sense, Sophocles was just as much "under the influence" as Aeschylus was.

There are considerably more testimonia linking Sophocles with Euripides. Two well-known examples concern sex, that favorite biographical category of ancient gossip-mongers. Unsurprisingly, Athenaeus is the source for both. The first (Ath. 13, 557e) informs us that a certain Hieronymus (from Rhodes), in his *Historical Commentaries*, told the following story: "When someone said to Sophocles that Euripides was a *hater* of women, Sophocles answered, 'In his tragedies, yes, but in bed the opposite.'" Whether this has any historical basis or not, it is at the same time a pithy ancient example of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* awareness, and also an acknowledgment of the likelihood that two tragic poets would take an interest in each other's personal life as well as in their art.

The second of these sex stories (Ath. 13, 604d-f) is considerably more complicated, building on the statement (Ath. 13, 603e) that Sophocles was a lover of boys, while Euripides was a lover of women. Following this comes the report of another incident told by Hieronymus concerning Sophocles' sexual act with a young boy, at the conclusion of which the boy made off with Sophocles' cape. This incident in itself does not concern us so much as the exchange between Sophocles and Euripides, which was initiated by the latter when he learned of the incident and mocked his fellow playwright on the grounds that he, too, had consorted with the same boy, but had not paid any similar kind of humiliating price.

Sophocles is said to have responded by writing Euripides an epigram that refers to the fable of Helios (the sun god) and Boreas (the north wind) and their dispute as to which one was the most powerful, and that also alludes to Euripides' supposed adulterous proclivities. The epigram goes like this:

It was Helios, not a boy, Euripides, who through the heat
stripped me. But with you, when you were engaging in love
with another's wife [?], Boreas had intercourse.
So you're not clever, because in sowing another's territory,
you're bringing Eros into court as a common thief.

Again, historical fact doesn't count here. What does count is this preoccupation with juxtaposing and contrasting the two famous tragic poets.

We have already seen how Aristophanes, in the *Frogs*, makes Aeschylus rate Sophocles significantly above Euripides. Ancient judgment, however, did not always fall in line with this ranking, as can be seen from an oracle supposedly given to Chaerephon, a disciple of the philosopher Socrates. The oracle is basically a eulogy of the philosopher and is quoted, among other sources, by a number of scholiasts. It goes as follows:

Sophocles is wise, but Euripides wiser,
and of all men is Socrates the wisest.

There are two more stories involving Sophocles and Euripides that seem worth relating, the first flippant, the second possibly of some significance for the history of the Athenian tragic theater. The setting of the flippant one (Stob. *Flor.* 2. 30.10) is the kitchen (which makes a change from the “bedroom”!). The gist of it is that someone found Euripides cooking for himself and said that Sophocles had a slave to do his cooking, in response to which Euripides said that Sophocles ate what appealed to his slave, whereas he ate what appealed to him. The wealthy Sophocles is being contrasted with the poor, loner, “do-it-yourself” Euripides; but it is the latter who is credited with the last laugh.

The more serious story is found in the *Life of Euripides* and concerns Sophocles’ reaction to the news of his younger rival’s death. According to this account, Sophocles did something special at the *proagon*, the ceremony that preceded the tragic dramatic competition – an institution notorious for the interpretive problems associated with the surviving ancient sources (van Erp Taalman Kip 1990: 38–41, 123–9), but which basically seems to have been “a means of advertising the civic identities of the performers and poets of a genre which, by its nature, tends to conceal these in performance” (Wilson 2000: 96). What Sophocles is said to have done on this occasion was to present himself before the public in a dark cloak in the company of his chorus and actors, without the crowns or garlands they apparently wore in normal circumstances. We have here the equivalent of black armbands worn by sportspeople to acknowledge a recent death. The account of the *Life* concludes by saying that the audience was moved to tears.

4 Stylistic Comparisons

In addition to telling stories about the personal lives and professional careers of the three tragic poets, ancient commentators were also fond of making comparisons in connection with their literary styles. And here we are on somewhat firmer ground, because we can weigh their judgments against the texts of the plays themselves, or at least against that relatively small proportion of the texts that have survived into modern times.

It seems to have been the consensus in antiquity that Sophocles was the most “polished” of the three tragic poets with regard to his poetic style and indeed his dramatic management generally. Even the author of the *Life of Aeschylus* (grudgingly) concedes this, but mounts a spirited defence of his own subject. He makes the point that, in terms of his dramatic art, if Aeschylus were compared with his successors, he would look simple and unsophisticated, but if he were compared with his forerunners, his creativity and inventiveness would shine through. And he continues:

Anyone who thinks that the most perfect writer of tragedy is Sophocles is correct, but he should remember that it was much harder to bring tragedy to such a height after Thespis, Phrynichus and Choerilus, than it was by speaking after Aeschylus to come to Sophocles’ perfection. (Lefkowitz 1981: 159)

A number of ancient writers essay comparisons involving all three tragic poets. For example, Plutarch (*De glor. Ath.* 5, 348d) speaks of the “wisdom” or “cleverness” (*sophia*) of Euripides, the “eloquence” (*logiotes*) of Sophocles, and the “mouth” (*stoma*) of Aeschylus; this might designate simply “style,” or perhaps “poetic magnificence,” or perhaps even “volume,” which would make Aeschylus the ancient equivalent of Wagner, at least in popular stereotypes of the German operatic composer.

This third interpretation of *stoma* as a characteristic of Aeschylus perhaps finds support in the lexicographer Photius' attempt (*Bibl.* 101b4) to offer succinct comparative descriptions of the three poets. For him, Sophocles is "sweet" (*glukus*) and Euripides "terribly clever" (*pansophos*), but at the front of the list stands Aeschylus, who is characterized as "*megalophonotatos*"; this, from a favorable point of view, would mean something like "super grandiloquent," but it could also imply the concomitant trumpets that, as the author of the *Life* claims, was one of the techniques the poet used to impress his audience.

More detailed comparisons can be found in the work of the Roman Quintilian (*Inst.* 10.1.66–8k) and in Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*De imit.* 2 fr. 6.2.10). To take Quintilian first, he describes Aeschylean tragedy as *sublimis* ("lofty"), *gravis* ("dignified"), and *grandilocus* ("grandiloquent"), though "often to a fault," in many respects being *rudis* ("rough") and *incompositus* ("unpolished"). When he moves on to Sophocles and Euripides, he finds that these two brought more distinction to the tragic genre, while noting that their styles are different and that there is considerable debate as to which is the superior poet. As he is especially interested in oratory and rhetoric, Quintilian gives Euripides a particular pat on the back for the efficacy of his style of language in court – a style, he adds, that some criticize because they regard the Sophoclean *gravitas* ("dignity"), *coturnus* ("elevated style"), and *sonus* ("resonance") as being *sublimior* ("loftier").

Dionysius of Halicarnassus uses a broader brushstroke. Aeschylus, in his judgment, was supremely "lofty" (*hupselos*) and a consistent user of "elevated style" (*megaloprepeia*), knew what was appropriate in characterization and in the treatment of emotion, was outstanding for his use of figurative language, and used greater variety than Euripides and Sophocles in the way in which he introduced *dramatis personae*. Sophocles, he continues, was superior in characterization and in the treatment of emotion. Euripides, on the other hand, liked "realism" or the "close connection to contemporary life" and, as a result, often eschewed what was "fitting" and "decent." He did not make a success of the generic or noble in the characterization of his *dramatis personae* or in the treatment of their emotions, as Sophocles did. If it was a case of the cowardly or the base, you could rely on Euripides to portray it accurately! Thus, Sophocles is again seen here as occupying what might be called a "middle ground," not "over the top" like Aeschylus, but a cut above Euripides. Dionysius also found Sophocles to be economical in his use of words, whereas Euripides tended to go in for rhetorical extremes.

We have already seen how, in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, it was to Aeschylus and Euripides that the comic poet turned when he wanted to make bold stylistic comparisons. Something similar can be found in a passage from pseudo-Longinus' treatise *On the Sublime* (15). The subject under discussion here is the literary technique that the author calls *phantasiai* ("visualizations"), though he adds that others give it the name of *eidolopoiiai* ("image formations"). It is this that supposedly engenders stylistic weight and grandeur and stems from the ability of an author to present what he describes with great vividness to an audience when he is emotionally inspired. To illustrate this as applied to poetry in particular, pseudo-Longinus turns first to Euripides, quoting short passages from two plays (*Or.* 255–7 and *IT* 291) in which one of the characters (Orestes) is speaking when afflicted by the onset of madness.

Pseudo-Longinus concludes that Euripides is best at visualizing, and thus at creating, tragic madness and love. He denies him any height of natural genius but says that he can often raise his talent to a tragic level when he sets his sights high, most appropriately quoting from the messenger's speech in the fragmentary play *Phaethon*. He then quotes

from Aeschylus, implying that the lofty style is more or less second nature to him, even if the result is sometimes a bit chaotic; whereas it is Euripides' competitive spirit that induces him to try his hand in the same dangerous altitudes. Shortly after this, and almost with the appearance of an afterthought, Sophocles is brought into the picture. He, it seems, can also be a dab hand at *phantasiai*, examples given (but not quoted) being the last moments of Oedipus in the *Oedipus at Colonus* and the ghost of Achilles in the lost play *Polyxena*. But pseudo-Longinus almost immediately pushes Sophocles aside by adding that the latter scene has probably been most successfully depicted by the lyric poet Simonides.

With regard to the depiction of emotion in general, a direct comparison between Sophocles and Euripides is quoted by Athenaeus (Ath. 14, 652c–d), who says that Lynceus, in his letter to the comic poet Poseidippus, assesses them as follows: “With regard to the tragic emotions, I think that Euripides is in no way superior to Sophocles.” This might possibly be seen to conflict with a very famous statement made by Aristotle in the *Poetics*. In general, Aristotle appears to be much more favorably inclined toward Sophocles than toward Euripides, since in his view tragedy more or less reached its full potential with Sophocles. He says little about Aeschylus, presumably taking his work to represent a less advanced state in the development of the tragic art.

In this particular passage (Arist. *Po.* 1453^a), however, Aristotle “concedes” that Euripides is “the most tragic of the poets,” even if “he does not manage everything else well.” But in considering this statement it is important to bear the context in mind, a point that scholars quoting the “most tragic of the poets” clause often overlook. Aristotle has been engaged in a lengthy discussion of plot, which he regards as the “soul” of tragedy. The climax of this discussion concerns the most effective type of tragic plot, which, he concludes, shows a progression from prosperity to adversity and not the other way round.

This is the background to his statement that people are misguided in criticizing Euripides for employing this pattern in his plays, most of which (or perhaps just “many of which”) end in adversity. This, he repeats, is the right pattern, and to prove his point he notes that it is plays with just such a plot pattern that are “most tragic” on the performance stage and in the dramatic competition, provided that they are successfully put together in general. And *then* he says that Euripides is at least “the most tragic of the poets,” even if, as we have already noted him as saying, “he does not manage everything else well.” Thus, Euripides' claim to be “the most tragic” rests only on a technicality of plot structure as seen throughout his dramatic output. This leaves many areas under the tragic rubric wide open for Sophoclean superiority. Quite apart from anything else, Aristotle's idea of the model tragic plot seems to be based on *Oedipus the King*. In addition, he quotes with apparent approval Sophocles' statement, whose source is unknown, that he created characters as they ought to be, while Euripides created them as they actually are (Arist. *Po.* 1460^b). This fits in with Aristotle's own view that the characters in tragedy should ideally be better than the norm.

In this discussion of the style and approach of Sophocles vis-à-vis those of Aeschylus and Euripides, we should leave the last word to Sophocles himself, or at least to Sophocles as reported by Plutarch (*De prof. virt.* 7.79b). Plutarch is seeking a parallel for the progression of philosophy students as they move from ostentatious, pompous, and artificial discourse to one that touches on character and emotion, and he finds it in what Sophocles supposedly said about the development of his own style.

Euripides doesn't come into the picture here; but Aeschylus does, and in a rather unflattering manner at that. Sophocles is said to have spoken of first “playfully imitating”

Aeschylus' "weighty style," or "bombast," and then of the "harshness" and "artificiality" of his artistic construction. In a third and final stage of his poetic development, however, Sophocles changed the form of his language to one that has mostly to do with character and excellence. How this can be related to the language of the surviving plays, however, is somewhat debatable.

5 Dramatic Developments

We have seen how, in general, Aristotle rated Sophoclean above Euripidean tragedy and rather ignored Aeschylus, probably as representative of a preliminary stage in the development of the tragic genre. Aristotle also makes a few comments of a more technical nature regarding the evolution of tragedy as a theatrical form, comments that generally include mention of Sophocles' role in this process in relation to that of other poets. For example he states (*Po.* 1449^a) that it was Aeschylus who increased the number of actors (that is, speaking actors) in a tragedy from one to two, reduced the choral element, and established the primacy of the spoken word, while Sophocles introduced a third actor (the third actor is also associated with Sophocles in the *Life of Sophocles*). This contradicts information given in the *Life of Aeschylus*, where Aeschylus himself is credited with this innovation, although it is also stated there that a certain Dicaearchus of Messene said that Sophocles was responsible for the third actor.

As well as linking Sophocles with the third actor, Aristotle states in the same passage that he also introduced *skenographia*, which is usually translated as "scene-painting," although there are differences of opinion as to what this actually meant (cf. Simon 1982: 22–5; Green 1990: 283–4; Rehm 2002: 18, 306 n. 104). It is therefore extremely difficult to be able to assess the precise contribution of Sophocles to this sort of theatrical development in relation to Aeschylus and Euripides.

Further information about Sophocles' role in the development of Greek theatrical practice is provided in the *Life of Sophocles*, although, as we have seen, it should be treated with caution. The relevant passage runs as follows:

He learned about tragedy from Aeschylus. He also was responsible for innovations in the dramatic competitions. He was the first to break the tradition of the poet's acting because his own voice was weak. For in the old days the poet himself served as one of the actors. He changed the number of chorus members from twelve to fifteen and invented the third actor. (Lefkowitz 1981: 161)

Quite apart from the "invention" of the third actor, which we have already considered, a number of statements in this passage merit attention. First, we find it spelled out that Sophocles served his tragic apprenticeship, as it were, under Aeschylus. But we then move quickly from the concept of Sophocles the "pupil" to that of Sophocles the innovator, in one case the innovator by necessity. We are given to understand that tragic poets originally doubled as actors in their own plays, and that this tradition had been carried on by Aeschylus. Sophocles, it is said, was the one to make the roles of playwright and actor distinct, but he did so only on account of his own weak vocal equipment. If this information is accurate, it would clearly mark an important development, which would be "rewriting" the rules of the game as inherited and carried on by Aeschylus.

The other important development mentioned is the raising of the number of chorus members in a tragedy from 12 to 15, for reasons at which we can only guess. Evidence from the text of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* does suggest that the older playwright used a chorus of 12. If Sophocles did start the practice of working with a larger chorus, then again this shows him breaking with tradition – and in this case perhaps enhancing the impact of the chorus in the theatrical setting.

With regard to the chorus, Aristotle finds Sophoclean practice in general preferable to that of Euripides (*Po.* 1456^a). His basic point is that the chorus should be handled as one of the actors and should be fully integrated into the action – something that, he says, is done by Sophocles, but not by Euripides. He goes on to say that the choral odes employed by other poets (who presumably included Euripides) could more or less fit into any tragedy rather than being specific to an individual play for which they were expressly written. Unity of action is one of Aristotle's important criteria for the assessment of tragic effectiveness, and so it is Sophocles, in his view, rather than Euripides who makes the chorus into one element contributing to this goal.

As far as other dramatic developments are concerned, one important change that Sophocles seems to have made from Aeschylean practice is his abandonment of the trilogy format. Aeschylus was famous for his presentation of the grand sweep of tragedy across the generations of an ill-fated family. The *Oresteia*, which tells the story of Agamemnon's return from Troy and murder in the first play, that of the revenge of his son Orestes in the second, and that of Orestes' trial and acquittal of the charge of matricide in the third, is the only surviving example. However, single plays survive from other trilogies, for example, the *Seven against Thebes*, the final tragedy of a set that was preceded by a *Laius* and by an *Oedipus*. In choosing to forgo the chance of exploring an ongoing story in such depth, Sophocles clearly scored by being able to concentrate the tragic tension in individual plays. This is the pattern that became dominant in the fifth century, although there are later examples of at least a quasi-trilogic form, such as Euripides' three plays in the competition of 415 BCE – *Palamedes*, *Alexander*, and the surviving *Trojan Women* (Scodel 1980).

Connected to some extent with the focus on single tragedies comes Sophocles' invention, or at least significant development, of that lonely, stubborn, and deeply suffering figure popularly known as "the Sophoclean hero," who has been the subject of much modern scholarly interest (Knox 1964) and of whom the most famous example is Oedipus in *Oedipus the King*. Of course, Aeschylus created suffering and tragic figures before Sophocles, but it took the younger poet to run with the concept and to develop it – well beyond the parameters established by his predecessor. The result was something of a shift in the way dramatic figures came to be "characterized," and following Sophocles Euripides took his dramatic figures in still new directions.

The whole question of "characterization" in Greek tragedy has, of course, been the subject of much scholarly debate. One approach has been to argue that the formal language and changing modes of presentation in the genre cause the stage figures to be felt by the audience "as fragmented and discontinuous" (Gould 1978: 50). This concept of "fragmentation," however, has then been applied more to Euripides than to Sophocles. Thus, the figure of the Sophoclean Electra, for example, is said to be "a continuous and concretely realized conception," whereas the Euripidean Medea is "a fragmented, disjointed figure, abstractly seized" (Gould 1978: 52). This distinction between the approaches of the two tragedians has met with approval, but it is an approval tempered by the awareness of the anomaly between what, on the one hand,

is presented as a feature of Greek tragedy in general and, on the other, is credited rather to Euripides (Easterling 1990: 92–3).

In general, Euripides is often said to have injected a stronger dose of “realism” into his characters than either Sophocles or Aeschylus; but this concept, as applied to figures that are in fact theatrical constructs, has rightly been subject to serious criticism in recent years. Quite apart from other considerations, the tendency of Euripidean characters of differing types to engage in rhetorical moralizing, a feature not nearly so prominent among characters in Sophocles, can hardly be called “realistic.” In the end, it is safest to say that there are similarities in the way in which all three tragedians handled characterization, but that each also contributed his own distinctive touch, even displaying variety within his own corpus (Seidensticker 2008: 344; specifically in the case of Euripides, see Griffin 1990).

6 The Plays

The dating of most of Sophocles’ extant plays is extremely problematic. It has usually, though by no means universally, been thought that *Ajax* is the earliest. If this is correct, an important consideration is raised in connection with Sophocles’ relationship with Aeschylus, since one might assume that traces of Aeschylean influence would be detected here if anywhere. Even a comparatively early dating of *Ajax*, however, might still mean that the play was originally performed more than 10 years after Aeschylus’ last production at Athens, and therefore a considerable time after Sophocles’ first victory in 468 BCE – whether or not this was also his first appearance in the tragic competition.

We have seen how, according to Plutarch (*De prof. virt.* 7.79b), Sophocles distinguished three stages in the development of his poetic style. It seems to be a reasonable assumption that *Ajax* does not belong to the third style; but to which of the previous two, both of which refer to Aeschylus, should we relate it? Can we see Sophocles “playfully imitating” the “weighty style” of his predecessor, or should we rather be thinking in terms of the “harshness” and “artificiality” of Aeschylus’ artistic construction? Certainty is impossible; but, if we are thinking in terms of the 440s as the production date of *Ajax* (which is the usual guess), then it seems most likely that the play is an example of the second style. Certainly, the language is far more “artificial” than that encountered in *Philoctetes*, for example – which can definitely be dated to the last years of Sophocles’ career.

There are two further factors that may create a link of some kind between *Ajax* and Aeschylean tragedy. Aeschylus is famously reported as having claimed that his plays were just “slices from the great banquets of Homer” (Ath. 8, 347e). There is also ample evidence from the ancient testimonia, including a rather obscure passage from the *Life of Sophocles*, to the effect that Sophocles also followed closely in Homer’s footsteps. *Ajax* is a play with extremely strong Homeric coloring, though this may be due, at least partly, simply to the play’s subject matter. At any rate, we may be seeing something of a Homer/Aeschylus/Sophocles nexus in operation.

A second factor in *Ajax* that may enable us to link it closely with Aeschylus involves the theological dimension. *Ajax* is the only extant Sophoclean play to feature a deity on stage as part of the action, with the exception of the *deus ex machina* appearance of the divinized Heracles at the conclusion of *Philoctetes*. Moreover, there are strong hints of

the direct correlation between hybriatic behavior and divine punishment, a theological feature most generally associated with Aeschylus. Modern critics have generally found in Aeschylus the gods working much more directly in the lives of mortals, whether as friendly or unfriendly powers, whereas they are more remote from the existence of Sophoclean figures. One scholar expresses the difference like this:

It is true that the will of the gods also prevails in the tragedies of Sophocles; but it is no longer an ever-present force which hovers over a character and makes itself felt in his deeds and his life. On the contrary, it confronts him one day as something alien, incomprehensible, a breath from a non-human world. (Reinhardt 1979: 3)

If any Sophoclean play does not conform quite so well to this formulation and tends to veer toward the Aeschylean model, then that play is *Ajax*.

With regard to *Antigone*, a connection with Aeschylus comes mainly from the subject matter, since the events of the play follow on from those depicted in the Aeschylean *Seven against Thebes*. The battle itself is evoked through lyrics in the *parodos*, whereas in Aeschylus' play the build-up to it is described in great detail – and then its outcome. Interestingly, it is generally agreed by scholars that the final section of *Seven against Thebes*, involving Antigone's announcement that she will bury the body of Polyneices in defiance of the decree reported by the herald, is a later addition to the play prompted by the success of Sophocles' play some years later. It should also be noted that Euripides treated the story of the Argive attack on Thebes in the extant play *Phoenician Women*, and that he also wrote an *Antigone* – which doesn't survive but which we know to have departed radically from the Sophoclean version. A further feature of Sophocles' *Antigone* that may provide a link with Aeschylus is the first choral ode of the play, the so-called "Ode on Man," which presents a view of human progress and achievement that finds some parallel in the *Prometheus Bound*, though Aeschylean authorship of this play has been strongly denied in modern times (Griffith 1977; West 1990).

Antigone, like *Ajax*, seems to have been a relatively early play, and the same probably applies to *Women of Trachis*. Here a connection of sorts with Aeschylus can be found in the basic situation where a hero returns home bringing a concubine, only to be killed at the hands of his wife. Of course, the circumstances are rather different, but the essential pattern remains the same. There is more to say about *Oedipus the King*. In particular, it looks as though it was from Aeschylus that Sophocles adopted certain features of the story that have become inseparably associated with the younger dramatist. For example, Homer, the earliest surviving source of the story, says nothing about Oedipus' self-blinding, but Aeschylus apparently introduced this incident in the lost play *Oedipus*, which was part of the trilogy already mentioned. However, Sophocles departed significantly in some respects from the Aeschylean approach as well, as we can tell from references made in *Seven against Thebes* to earlier plays in the trilogy (March 1987: 139–48). Thus, Aeschylus made Apollo warn Laius three times that he could save his city only by dying childless, only for Laius to disobey and to father Oedipus. There is no mention of this in the Sophoclean play.

With regard to possible cross-fertilization between Sophocles and Euripides, the lost Sophoclean play *Phaedra* should be mentioned here. The *hypothesis* to Euripides' surviving tragedy *Hippolytus*, which is dated to 428 BCE and deals with the same myth, indicates that Euripides in fact wrote two plays of this title. Further information in the *hypothesis* has led scholars to suggest a scenario according to which

Euripides' first attempt was a failure, probably on account of the way in which the author handled the character of Phaedra. He then "corrected" his error with the second play (which at least contributed to his victory in the competition), quite possibly prompted by the more appropriate and successful approach made in the meantime by Sophocles with his *Phaedra* (Barrett 1964: 10–15). The scenario is speculative and doubt has been cast on it (Gibert 1997). If it is correct, however, it would certainly demonstrate the sort of lively interaction between competing tragic poets over a number of years that we might expect.

By the time we reach *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonus* we are certainly in the third stage of Sophocles' style and, as far as dealing with intrigue plots goes, we are almost on Euripidean ground, especially in the first two cases. The third of these plays does not provide so much scope for the purposes of this study, and so we will concentrate on the other two. The *Electra* is a special case because, for once, we are able to make direct comparisons with specific surviving plays of the two other playwrights. Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* is the second play of the *Oresteia* trilogy. While *Electra* herself appears, the main focus is on Orestes. Both Sophocles and Euripides, however, wrote stand-alone plays in which the spotlight is thrown on *Electra*, and their plays take their titles from the heroine's name. We have a difficult problem of dating, and so we don't know whether Sophocles was "responding" in some way to Euripides' radically different treatment of the story or whether it was the other way round. It is clear that Euripides is bouncing off Aeschylus in the recognition sequence, but this in no way guarantees Euripidean priority. Perhaps it is safer to assume that the Sophoclean play is earlier (Cropp 1988: xlviii–1). The three recognition scenes themselves make for interesting comparisons (Solmsen 1967). A big debate surrounds the "tone" of the Sophoclean play, that is to say, whether it is essentially "dark" or "optimistic." One of the factors in the debate has been the extent of Aeschylean influence on the moral significance of matricide. It has been argued that the pursuit of Orestes by the Furies, though not explicit, is inevitably implied through Aeschylean echoes and through the general Aeschylean background (Winnington-Ingram 1980: 217–47). The issue, though, is still open.

It is impossible to approach the Sophoclean *Philoctetes* and its connection with lost plays on the same subject by the other two tragedians without recourse to Dio Chrysostom, who wrote a short comparison between them (*Or.* 52). On the basis of this and other evidence, a significant reconstruction of the Euripidean play has been essayed (Müller 1997 and 2000). Dio makes a number of observations about the style of the three tragedians, again placing Sophocles in the middle, between the "stubbornness" or "ruggedness" (*to anthades*) of Aeschylus and the "precision" (*to akribes*), "sharpness" (*to drimu*) and "political" orientation (*to politikon*) of Euripides. Sophocles is characterized in almost reverential terms, as producing poetry that is "august" and "magnificent," "most tragic" and "most melodious," which results in "maximum pleasure" along with "grandeur" and "solemnity." As far as dramatic construction is concerned, what is most revealing is the fact that, whereas both Aeschylus and Euripides used a chorus of Lemnians, Sophocles at least implies that Lemnos, the setting of the hero's "exile," is otherwise uninhabited; and he makes his own chorus out of the sailors from Neoptolemus' ship. He thus adds total physical isolation to the spiritual isolation of his suffering hero, as well as setting up a conflict of loyalty for the son of Achilles between Philoctetes and Odysseus. It is in a comparison like this that distinctive features of Sophocles' genius can be brought out.

7 Conclusion

In general, Sophocles comes out very well when set against his two great rivals, though tastes differ and fashions change. It is hard, however, to see Sophocles ever being held in anything other than the greatest respect, even if individuals or indeed whole generations veer in their preference either to Aeschylus or to Euripides.

Guide to Further Reading

There is no single work whose basic focus is a comparison involving the three tragedians. However, in addition to histories of Greek literature, most major studies of Sophocles include a greater or lesser degree of comparative material. Examples illustrative of rather different approaches include Whitman (1951), Reinhardt (1979), Winnington-Ingram (1980), and Segal (1981). Succinct studies of the tragic writing of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides by Säid, Scodel, and Gregory, respectively, can be found in Gregory (2005a: 215–32, 233–50, and 251–70). An English translation and discussion of the *Lives* of the three tragedians is available in Lefkowitz (1981). The ancient testimonia, along with a scholarly presentation of the texts of the fragmentary plays, can be found in Radt (1999). The equivalent work for Aeschylus is Radt (1985) and, for Euripides, Kannicht (2004). For the non-specialist, a text with English translation of Sophoclean fragments is provided by Lloyd-Jones (1996) and (with commentary added) by Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick, and Talbot (2006). For the equivalent material in the case of Euripides, see Collard, Cropp, and Lee (1995) and Collard, Cropp, and Gibert (2004) and, for Aeschylus, Sommerstein (2008). Theological comparisons can be found in Lloyd-Jones (1971). There is a useful introduction to the question of “character” in Aeschylus and Sophocles by Easterling (1973 and 1977). A discussion of the same issue applied across tragedy can be found in Gould (1978). From many works dealing with the production of tragedies in the ancient Greek theater and the use of theatrical space in selected plays of the three tragedians, Rehm (2002) may be singled out. For a recent commentary on Aristotle’s *Poetics*, see Halliwell (1986), and for a commentary on Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, see Dover (1993). Issues in fourth-century tragedy are dealt with by Xanthakis-Karamanos (1980).

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PART II

The Plays and the Fragments

Antigone

André Lardinois

1 Introduction

“They say that Sophocles was awarded a generalship in the war against Samos, because of the fame he acquired in staging the *Antigone*.” This is what we are told in one of the ancient introductions to the play (the *hypothesis* of Aristophanes of Byzantium, 17–18). Perhaps it was true: we know from other, more reliable sources that Sophocles served as general in this war, that the play won first prize, and that the Athenians could select their generals on far shakier grounds. But even if the story is apocryphal, it still tells us something about the popularity of *Antigone* in ancient times. It also helps us to date the play in the late 40s of the fifth century BCE. (For a slightly later dating, see Lewis 1988.)

The play was still well known a century later. The Athenian orator Demosthenes cites part of it in one of his forensic speeches (19.247), dated to 343 BCE, clearly assuming that the jury, which consisted of 1,501 ordinary citizens, was familiar with its content. *Antigone* also made it into the canon of the seven plays of Sophocles that were part of the school curriculum in late antiquity and, although we do not know the exact criteria for selection in that canon, its celebrity must have been a factor. The play has remained immensely popular right down to the present day (Steiner 1984; Mee and Foley 2011).

The origins of the plot are harder to reconstruct. The story of Oedipus and his two sons, who fought over the throne of Thebes after their father relinquished power, was well known in Sophocles’ time. It was part of several famous epics and made up the plot of one of Aeschylus’ trilogies, of which the last play, *Seven against Thebes*, survives. In this play, too, Eteocles defends the city, while Polyneices attacks it with an army he raised in Argos. The tragedy, as we have it, ends with the burial of Eteocles by one half of the chorus and with Antigone, in defiance of a public decree of the city, leading away the other half to bury the body of Polyneices. This ending is generally believed to be inauthentic and to have been added only after Sophocles’ treatment of the story (Zimmermann

1993: 99–111). There isn't therefore any reliable source that tells us about Antigone's attempted burial of Polyneices prior to Sophocles' play, and it could be that that episode was his own invention. On the other hand, the names of Antigone and Ismene are known from earlier sources, and there existed later versions of the story that could go back to traditions pre-dating Sophocles' play (Petersmann 1978). We will probably never know. Fortunately, this is not so important for our appreciation of the play because, even if Sophocles borrowed the burial motif from earlier sources, he must have varied it considerably in order to turn it into a play. In the present chapter I will first discuss the original performance of *Antigone*. Next, I will consider modern interpretations of the major and minor characters. Finally, I will discuss the choral odes.

2 Performance

It is good, when you read a play, to try to visualize it the way it was first performed in the theater of Dionysos around 440 BCE. In the case of *Antigone* such a visualization truly pays off, because the stage actions illuminate many of the issues presented in the drama. When the play opens, the original audience, looking down from their seats on the slope of the Acropolis to the round orchestra below, would have seen behind the orchestra a small wooden building, dressed up as a palace. (According to Aristotle, Sophocles had first introduced the practice of decorating the stage building: *Po.* 1449^a18.) This building represents the royal palace of Thebes, which used to be the residence of Oedipus and his sons but is now occupied by Creon. It probably had one door in the middle, and on each side of it there was a stage entrance (*eisodos*) leading to the imagined city or countryside beyond.

The play begins; out of the palace two male actors appear, both wearing the costumes and masks of young girls. Antigone's address to her sister as "common, same-sisterly head of Ismene" in the first line may be an allusion to the fact that she and her sister were wearing the same mask (Molinari 1973), as well as an expression of the initial unity between the two sisters. In the course of the prologue, however, the two sisters literally drift apart: the scene ends with Antigone leaving by one of the stage entrances to bury Polyneices, while Ismene returns into the palace. After this scene a chorus of 15 male singers enters, probably through the other stage entrance rather than the one Antigone took. The contrast with the previous scene could hardly be greater, since these singers are masked and dressed up as old men. They sing a victory song and narrate how the two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, killed each other before the city gates. At the end of their song they welcome Creon as their new king (l. 156).

Creon probably emerges from the palace, as a symbol of his royal authority. He was played by the third actor, Antigone and Ismene by the first and second. The Athenian theater allowed for a maximum of three actors who delivered all spoken parts, and it has been argued that Sophocles "scored" his roles to make them fit the three-actor convention (Ringer 1998). In the case of *Antigone* the division of parts, while not entirely certain, appears to be significant as well. The actor playing Creon played only this role: he appears on stage in every scene except the prologue. The actor playing Antigone also played the messenger or Eurydice in the final scene. He may also have played Haemon or Teiresias, but that would require very quick costume changes at the end of the third or fourth *epeisodion*. It is therefore more likely that the actor playing Ismene, who also played the Guard, impersonated Haemon and Teiresias as well. In this way all the characters who

try to reason with the two protagonists at various points would speak with the same voice. (For a different, but equally significant, division of roles, see Griffith 1999: 23.)

At the beginning of the first *epeisodion* Creon delivers his great speech, in which he explains his decision with regard to the two brothers. He tries to involve the chorus in helping to uphold it, when a young soldier, a Guard of the unburied corpse of Polyneices, emerges through the same entrance Antigone took when she left the stage. Let's call it the left-side entrance: it is from this side that danger and resistance will come to Creon throughout the play. The Guard tells Creon about the dust he found covering the body of Polyneices, and Creon orders him under the gravest threats to expose the body again and to find the culprit who tried to bury it. The Guard leaves through the same entrance he came from (back to Antigone). Creon returns into the palace and the chorus sings the famous Ode to Man.

After this choral song the Guard emerges again from the left-side entrance, this time with Antigone. Creon re-emerges from the palace with two or more (silent) attendants, whom he addresses in line 578. For the first time we find all three actors on stage, as well as several silent characters and the full chorus in the orchestra. This will turn out to be a crucial scene. First, Creon interrogates the Guard, after which the Guard is allowed to leave (in time to change into the costume of Ismene again). Next, Antigone delivers her famous speech about the "unwritten ordinances" of the gods (ll. 450–70), and she and Creon engage in a closely fought debate, alternating lines in the dramatic form known as *stichomuthia*. This encounter will remain the only direct confrontation between the two protagonists, except for a very brief exchange in the fourth episode (ll. 931–6). Subsequently, Ismene, played by the same actor who impersonated the Guard, comes out of the palace, weeping loudly (ll. 526–30). She argues first with Antigone, then with Creon, but to no avail. At the end of the scene Creon orders his attendants to arrest the two sisters and to lock them up in the palace – his domain. We see them leave the stage together through the same door they had emerged from at the beginning of the play. All seems to be lost for the two sisters.

The chorus responds by singing of the disasters that have come over the house of Oedipus again and again. The second half of their song, however, is devoted to the power of Zeus, who punishes the transgressions and false hopes not only of the Labdacids, but of all men. Creon remains on stage during this song, thus inviting us to apply its message not only to Antigone and Ismene, but to him as well. Furthermore, after the chorus has spoken about the "last root" in the house of Oedipus being mowed down (ll. 599–600), it greets Haemon as the "latest" or "last" (*véatov*) son of Creon (l. 627). The curse on the house of Oedipus thus seems to be passing to its collateral branch right before our eyes.

The arrival of Haemon initially brings new hope for Antigone's cause. Haemon argues that more than one person can be right and that the people of Thebes admire what Antigone has done for her brother. Creon is not prepared to listen: he mistrusts his son and believes that he is infatuated with Antigone. Haemon angrily leaves the stage through the left-side entrance, the same entrance Antigone took in the prologue. This entrance leads to the corpse of Polyneices and, later, to the burial chamber of Antigone. After Haemon leaves, Creon informs the chorus that he will spare Ismene but bury Antigone alive.

The chorus adopts Creon's perspective on the conflict with his son by singing a choral song about the power of love, which has caused this quarrel between two men of the same blood (ll. 793–4). This choral song also sets the tone for the next scene, in which Antigone is led to her underground burial chamber as "bride of Hades" (ll. 810–12). Quite possibly the actor who played her was now dressed as a bride, since it was common

for Greek girls who died before marriage to be buried in bridal dress, as “brides of death” (Seaford 1994: 351). Such a costume would underscore the bitter regret Antigone voices in this scene – of having to die “without wedding bed, without wedding song, nor having partaken in marriage or the rearing of children” (ll. 917–18).

After this scene the action again appears to come to a standstill; Antigone is led to her death and Creon seems to have triumphed. The chorus sings of famous mythological figures who suffered – sometimes deservedly, sometimes undeservedly – through the gods. It clearly thinks of Antigone while singing this song, apostrophizing her both at the beginning and the end of the ode (ll. 949, 987); but Creon remains present on stage again, thus inviting the audience to draw parallels between his situation and that of the mythological characters.

When all seems to be lost, help comes in the form of an old man, lead by a (silent) young boy. It is the seer Teiresias, well known from Greek mythology – and this includes Odysseus’ visit to the underworld in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*. Ancient Greek audiences knew that his predictions never failed; unfortunately, his antagonists in the mythological stories did not. Teiresias does not persuade Creon, but he does manage to scare him, and after he leaves Creon asks the chorus what to do. They persuade him to bury Polyneices and to free Antigone from her tomb. Creon hurries off with his attendants through the left-side entrance and the chorus sings a song of hope in which they invoke the god Dionysus. Their description of the god as leading a chorus of fire-breathing stars (ll. 1146–7) was undoubtedly supported by movements of the chorus itself in the orchestra (Henrichs 1994/5: 78).

The final scene is, again, very rich in visual imagery, all three actors appearing on stage. First, a messenger appears, either played by the Antigone-actor or by the actor who had just impersonated Teiresias, who is thus delivering the fulfillment of his own prophecy. He starts telling the chorus what happened to Creon in the plain, when Eurydice, his wife, emerges from the palace. Then he tells her the tale of how they buried the corpse of Polyneices and tried to rescue Antigone, but they found her dead, as she had hanged herself – and Haemon with her. Haemon first tried to kill his father and then committed suicide. Without speaking a word, Eurydice goes back into the palace. The messenger follows her, worried about what she will do. At this point the Creon-actor emerges from the left-side entrance carrying in his arms the body of Haemon (in the form of a doll). He sings a lament in which he blames himself for all that has happened. The messenger re-emerges from the palace in order to inform the king that a second disaster awaits him: Eurydice has killed herself as well. Her body, also in the form of a doll, either is rolled out through a device called the *ekkekulema* (a rolling board) or, more likely, is being carried on stage (Griffith 1999: 349). Creon sings a second lament while he is being flanked by the bodies of his wife and son, and finally asks his attendants to lead him away. He either returns into the palace or leaves through one of the side entrances (the infamous “left one”?). The chorus sings a brief, final song and then leaves the stage too, probably through the other entrance, the same one it used for entering.

3 Interpretations

So what does this all mean? When reading studies about the meaning of the play, one almost forgets what a gripping story it is; it continues to fascinate audiences because of its dramatic twists and its rich set of characters. Its richness of meaning might also lie in

the fact that it is not always clear what each scene represents, or who is speaking the truth. Modern scholars differ in their opinions about this, as probably did the original audience, and this may well be what Sophocles intended.

The interpretation of *Antigone* has been dominated by two mutually exclusive traditions, both of which go back at least to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Their main point of contention is the question of who is right and who is wrong in the conflict between Antigone and Creon. The tradition that has attracted most followers in the past has been labeled “the orthodox view” (Hester 1971: 12). Proponents of this view maintain that, on the whole, Antigone is right and Creon is wrong. The other interpretive tradition is called “the Hegelian view,” after the famous German philosopher, who argued that Antigone and Creon are both equally right and wrong. In the following sections both traditions will be discussed, together with their main critics.

4 The Orthodox View

The orthodox view has been traced all the way back to the writings of the German classicist August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767–1845). A typical modern representative of this tradition is Gerhard Müller, who proclaims that “Antigone is fully right, Creon is fully wrong” (*Antigone hat ganz und gar recht, Creon ganz und gar unrecht*, Müller 1967: 11). Of course, he and other orthodox interpreters acknowledge that Antigone acts in defiance of a decree issued by the king of Thebes, but they argue that this decree is only human, if not downright illegitimate, whereas Antigone can appeal to divine law.

Relying on the idea that Antigone stands for divine justice and Creon for merely human justice, the famous Sophoclean commentator, Sir Richard Jebb, compared Antigone to a Christian martyr, ready to defy death for a higher cause (Jebb 1900: xxv). This particular comparison may no longer appeal to our modern, secularized minds, or it may strike us as too anachronistic, but many modern interpretations are cut from the same cloth: those, for example, that argue that Antigone stands for the rights of the individual, for a private conscience, or, as in some modern stage productions, for women’s rights. What these interpretations have in common is the idea that Antigone is made to represent something that transcends, in value and appeal, the political or human justifications of Creon.

Not everyone has accepted the orthodox view, however. Some serious objections have been leveled against it, especially when, in the course of the twentieth century, scholars started to pay more attention to the historical background of the play. Jebb could still maintain that

the audience for which Sophocles composed the *Antigone* would regard Creon’s edict as something very different from a measure of exceptional, but still legitimate severity. They would regard it as a shocking breach of that common piety which even the most exasperated belligerents regularly respected. (Jebb 1900: xxiii)

Jebb adduces as evidence, among other examples, the surrender of Hector’s corpse in the *Iliad* and the burial of the Persian dead after the battle of Marathon. In 1937, just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Henk Höppener challenged Jebb’s views. He pointed out that Polyneices was presented in the play as a traitor and that, in contrast to external enemies like Hector or the Persians, traitors were not given burial in

Attic soil (Höppener 1937). Hence, there was some legal basis for Creon's edict. Unfortunately, Höppener published his ideas in Dutch; but they were later picked up by the German scholar H. J. Mette, and they spread (Mette 1956; cf. Rosivach 1983; Griffith 1999: 29–32).

Some orthodox critics have tried to salvage Jebb's interpretation by arguing that Creon may have been right not to bury Polyneices in Theban soil, but that he should have allowed the body to be buried outside the confines of the city. The problem with this line of reasoning is that where the corpse is buried is not an issue in the play, nor is it at all clear that traitors were always allowed burial outside the city's confines: some corpses in Athens were thrown down a cliff into "the pit" (*barathron*), where they were left to rot (Parker 1983: 47). Of course, at the end of the play Teiresias does say that Creon was wrong and that the corpse of Polyneices should be buried, but other issues may play a role here, such as the fact that this is the corpse of no ordinary traitor but of a prince of Thebes, "the unhappy, fallen son of Oedipus" (l. 1018). The original audience would therefore probably have been uncertain and internally divided about the wisdom of Creon's decree, just as the chorus seems to react to it with some reservation (ll. 211–14).

Of major importance for a better understanding of the historical setting of the play has been the work of Bernard Knox, especially his book *The Heroic Temper* (1964). Knox argues that the "unwritten ordinances" (ἄγραπτα νόμιμα) to which Antigone appeals in line 454 are nothing but the duty to bury a dead kinsman. They are not some special ethics, or a set of all-embracing divine laws, and it is questionable if the original audience would have regarded them as more sacred than the laws of the state, which were after all sanctioned by the gods as well (see the chapter of Harris in this volume). Therefore, a fifth-century Athenian probably would have taken Creon's appeals to Zeus (ll. 184, 304) just as seriously as those of Antigone to Zeus and the nether gods in lines 450–1. According to Knox, the orthodox view rests upon the modern anachronistic conception of the state as an institution that is wholly secular and not to be trusted (Knox 1964: 84–6).

In recent studies the extreme form of the orthodox position is seldom encountered any more; but moderate versions of it still predominate. Typical examples are the interpretations of Knox (1964), Winnington-Ingram (1980), Nussbaum (1986), and Blundell (1989). After these interpreters provide various arguments as to why Antigone is no better than Creon, they nevertheless favor her position in the end. Knox, for example, argues that the religious beliefs that Creon propounds in his first speech "would have been enthusiastically shared by most of the Athenian audience which saw the play" (Knox 1964: 101). Yet at the end of his analysis he expects the same audience to have recognized these sentiments as being motivated by hate (1964: 116). And, whereas he first asserts that we must understand Antigone's emphasis on *philoï* (friends/relatives) in terms of the conflict between family and state (1964: 81), Knox finally interprets her famous reply to Creon ("I have no enemies by birth but I have friends/relatives [*philoï*] by birth," l. 523) as revealing Antigone's loving nature (1964: 116). Thus, even in Knox's balanced account of the play Antigone is ultimately better than Creon.

5 The Hegelian View

Hegelian interpreters would not agree with Knox's conclusion that Antigone is better than Creon, but they would agree with his initial interpretation of line 523 as referring to a conflict between family and state. This way of interpreting the *Antigone* is actually

older than the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), but it is through his writings that it has become most widely known. Two passages in particular were of great influence, one in Hegel's *Aesthetics* and the other in his *Philosophy of Religion*. In the *Aesthetics* Hegel presents the play as a clash between two equally important and equally divine sets of principles:

The public law of the State and the instinctive family-love and duty towards a brother are here set in conflict. Antigone, the woman, is pathetically possessed by the interests of family; Creon, the man, by the welfare of the community [...] In doing this she relied on the laws of the gods. The gods, however, whom she thus revered, are the *Dei inferi* of Hades (Soph. *Ant.* v. 451: ἡ ξύνοικος τῶν κάτω θεῶν Δίκη), the instinctive Powers of feeling, Love and kinship, not the daylight gods of free and self-conscious, social, and political life. (Translated by Osmaston in Paolucci 2001: 178)

Hegel thus recognizes in the confrontation between Creon and Antigone a conflict between state and family, man and woman, Olympian and nether gods. In the *Philosophy of Religion* he draws the moral implications of all this. Because Antigone and Creon defend fundamental principles, both are right, but because they are one-sided in their defense of these principles, they are wrong at the same time (Paolucci 2001: 325).

Hegel's insight into the play was actually more profound than these two passages show (Steiner 1984: 19–42); but since, understandably, only very few people managed to plow through the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, at the heart of which Hegel had written his most elaborate interpretation of *Antigone*, it was the views expressed above that formed the basis for the Hegelian interpretation of the play. The opposition between Antigone and Creon is neatly expressed in the different meanings the two characters attach to the same words: Antigone, for example, makes the Greek word *philos* (“dear one”) only refer to her relatives (e.g. ll. 10, 73, 81, 898–9), whereas Creon uses it predominantly for political friends (e.g. ll. 187, 190).

Hegel was, in a way, the first interpreter to analyze the play in terms of a gender conflict between a man and a woman. This angle has become very popular in the last decades (see most recently Söderbäck 2010). It is not easy to classify Antigone, however, as a typical (Greek) woman – nor, for that matter, Creon as a typical male. Particularly by comparison with Ismene, Antigone behaves as a “bad woman” (Sourvinou-Inwood 1989): a woman who disobeys the (male) authority of her guardian and king and takes action that hardly could have been expected from a young girl. On the other hand, she does champion a cause that the ancient Greeks closely associated with women: kinship and the family (Seidensticker 1995: 156–60). Similarly, Creon can be seen to champion an institution that, in its political extension, was most obviously associated with men: the *polis*. However, the way in which he champions this institution, his tyrannical behavior, can hardly have appealed to an original audience of democratic male citizens. The situation here, too, is more complex than a simple opposition between male and female would suggest.

Another important element in Hegel's interpretation is the final resolution of the conflict in a higher unity. The play works, according to Hegel, through the clash between a thesis (Antigone, representing the old family order) and its antithesis (Creon, representing the *polis*) and the development toward a synthesis of family and *polis* in a new state order, which integrates and respects the demands of the family. This aspect of Hegel's interpretation was picked up by Hermann Rohdich in his description of the play: “The *polis* emerges not only unscathed, but fully justified and strengthened in its existence

from the demise of the heroine and the destruction of her counterpart” (Rohdich 1980: 22; my translation). What is suppressed in such an interpretation, or at least not fully recognized, is the terrible price at which this unity is bought: the city has to sacrifice first a young girl and then its own king, with his whole family. Nor is there any guarantee at the end of the play that another conflict between family and state, or between Olympian and nether gods, might not erupt in Thebes in the future.

The Hegelian view thus has not been without its critics either. Right from the start, orthodox interpreters pointed to the fact that Creon may start off as a fairly reasonable king, but soon develops into a real tyrant. It is highly questionable whether such a tyrant can represent the true values of the state (Winnington-Ingram 1980: 120). The attitudes of Antigone with regard to her family can be questioned along similar lines. First, she distances herself in the prologue from her sister Ismene: twice she actually says that she hates her (ἐχθίωv, l. 86; ἐχθρᾶ, l. 94). Then, she alienates herself from her uncle Creon – who also happens to be her legal guardian, now that her father and two brothers are dead (ll. 486–9, 531–3, 658–60). Gilbert Murray remarked, with respect to her famous claim in line 523 to join not in hating but in loving: “She had shown herself such a good hater” (Murray 1941: 10). She does not seem to care about her fiancé Haemon either, if one accepts, with most modern editors, that line 572 is spoken by Ismene and not by her. She only seems to care for her dead relatives. As Charles Segal remarks: “Abandoning her loyalties and love for the living in favor of those below, Antigone upsets the balance between upper and lower worlds. Hence her relation to that very center of civilized values which she champions, the house, becomes ambiguous” (Segal 1981: 177).

This ambiguity extends even further and can be seen to apply not only to Antigone, but to Creon as well. Creon not only voices tyrannical sentiments, but he ends up polluting his own “center of civilized values” – the *polis*. Teiresias tells him that “from your mind a disease has come over the city” (l. 1015), the effects of which the seer describes in graphic detail (ll. 997ff.). Similarly, Antigone not only turns against her living kin, but she winds up harming her dead relatives as well – those she had wanted to serve most of all – because by choosing to die before her time (ll. 460–1) she helps to extinguish her own family. Twice she is referred to as the last of the Labdacids, once by the chorus (ll. 599–600) and once by herself (l. 941). (What this means for Ismene we will see later.) This fact may also help to explain why she so vehemently laments her unmarried state and her lack of children in her final scene (ll. 806ff.). It also appears that the categories of family and state are in practice less easy to separate than the two protagonists (or Hegel) would like. Creon overrides the concerns of the family by refusing to bury his cousin Polyneices; yet his own right to the throne is based on his “close kinship” (γένουc κατ’ ἀγγιστεῖα, l. 174) to the Labdacids. Similarly, Antigone tries to bury her brother twice in violation of a decree of the city; but it ultimately takes the village, in the person of its king, to get Polyneices properly buried at the end of the play. The ambiguous position of both Antigone and Creon with regard to their own cherished domains is hard to explain for either the orthodox or the Hegelian tradition and demonstrates the great moral complexity of this play.

6 Beyond the Orthodox and the Hegelian View

What the diseased mind of Creon and the hatred of Antigone toward her living kin show is the extreme to which both protagonists are willing to go. This extremism is different from the one-sidedness Hegel detected in the positions of Creon and Antigone, because

it makes them turn against their own one-sided positions as well. It is also different from the orthodox claim that Antigone is fully right – although it is not diametrically opposed to it. Orthodox interpreters correctly point out that Antigone upholds a divine principle; but they should be ready to admit that she has a sub-human, bestial side as well, expressed in a string of animal metaphors and in the words of the chorus when it refers to her as “the raw offspring of a raw father” (l. 471).

By focusing on the ambiguities implicit in Creon’s and Antigone’s positions before asking the inevitable question of who is right and who is wrong, it is possible to move beyond the orthodox and Hegelian points of view and to consider a more complex interpretation of the play. The text actually provides us with some remarkable signposts to guide us on this way. First, there is the ambiguous word *deinos* in the first line of the first *stasimon*. The German poet Friedrich Hölderlin rendered this word by *gewaltig* (“mighty”) in his translation of the play in 1801, but in 1804 he changed it to *ungebeuer* (“monstrous”). This word, which can have both meanings in Greek, is applied to both protagonists (ll. 96, 323, 408, 690) and describes the characters of Creon and Antigone very well. Then there are the self-descriptions of Antigone, first in the prologue, where she says that, by burying Polynices, she will “have performed a holy crime” (ὄσια πανουργήσασ’, l. 74), and later in her farewell address, when she says that “by practicing piety I earned impiety” (τὴν δυσσέβειαν εὐσεβοῦς’ ἐκτησάμην, l. 924). Both times she probably means to say that her actions should not be regarded as “crimes” or as “impiety,” but by referring to them in this way she herself draws attention to the problematic aspects of her behavior.

The limitations of Antigone and Creon’s positions become clear from the reversals that both of them undergo in the second half of the play. There is a certain poetic justice in the way both protagonists are brought low. Antigone had said that she would count it a gain if she were to die before her time (ll. 461–2). Yet when she is led to her tomb and given what she asked for, she laments that she has to die “before the term of my life is spent” (l. 896). She has never cared much for the city, denying it the right over the corpse of her brother (ll. 45–6), but in her last scene she calls on the chorus as citizens of Thebes (l. 806; cf. ll. 843, 937, 940). Now she is willing to admit that she acted “in defiance of the citizens” (βίαι πολιτῶν, l. 907; cf. Ismene’s words at l. 79), and for the first time she refers to Creon’s edict as a law (l. 847).

Antigone’s admission of her defiance of the citizenry is part of a disputed passage in the fourth *episodesion* (ll. 904–20), in which she also says that what she has done for her brother she would not have done for a husband or children. The German polymath Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) first declared in a letter to a friend, which was subsequently published, that he wished someone would prove this passage to be spurious; and nineteenth-century German scholarship tried to oblige him. To no avail: there is no convincing evidence that the passage is an interpolation (Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990b: 138). One can understand, however, why ardent admirers of Antigone are troubled by it, because it does seriously qualify her earlier statement that she acted on behalf of the “unwritten ordinances” of the gods (ll. 454–5). It is generally recognized that Antigone borrows this argument from the wife of Intaphernes, whose story is told in Herodotus’ *Histories* (3.119). Intaphernes’ wife is given the opportunity, by the Persian King Darius, to save one member of her family, whose members are all sentenced to death. She chooses her brother, because, as she tells the king, “God willing, I may get another husband, and other children when they are gone. But as my father and mother are both dead, I can never possibly have another brother” (translated by de Sélincourt

2003). Antigone's reasoning, compared to that of Intaphernes' wife, is even more odd, because her brother is dead and therefore already irreplaceable (Ormand 1999: 97). It shows her desperation at this point in the play: no longer sure of the divine justice of the gods (l. 921), she clings to this new "law" (νόμου, l. 908).

Finally, in the first half of the play, Antigone did not seem to care for marriage or motherhood, preferring instead to lie with her dead brother as *phile* ("dear one") with *philos* (l. 73). Ismene accuses her of having a warm heart for cold things (l. 88), meaning that all her care is devoted to her dead relatives. In her final scene Antigone still cares about her dead family members (ll. 897–903), but she also regrets that she will die unmarried and without children (ll. 917–18, cf. 813–16, 867, 876). Although her reversal is not as complete as Creon's, she does seem to retreat from several of her positions. No longer sure about the righteousness of her actions, she can only hope that they who punish her will suffer the same way she does (ll. 927–8).

Unknown to her, her wish will be granted. Creon's punishment mirrors that of Antigone in several respects, just as his earlier positions had done. He, who had said that showing regard for things in Hades is a worthless undertaking (l. 780), in the final scene must recognize that this god destroys him (ll. 1284–5); and, given the opportunity to live on, he, unlike Antigone, prefers to die (ll. 1328–32). He had paid little regard to his family in the first half of the play, favoring the demands of the city instead, but in the final scene he laments the loss of his wife and son and would readily give up his position in the *polis* (ll. 1324–5). Thus, in the end, both Creon and Antigone get in a way what they asked for, but now they do not want it anymore. This irony well illustrates how they themselves finally must recognize, too late, the negative consequences of their own behavior.

7 Minor Characters

Most scholarship has focused, understandably, on the opposition between Antigone and Creon, but it is good to realize that theirs is not the only conflict in the play: Antigone twice clashes with her sister, and Creon is confronted first by the Guard and later by his son Haemon and the seer Teiresias. Ismene and the Guard may be viewed as two prudent characters, especially when compared to Antigone and Creon. They know their own limitations and they seek to compromise (Ismene), and above all to survive (the Guard). Ismene in their second encounter tries to side with Antigone, but this is not possible: she has not touched the corpse, as Antigone puts it (l. 546), and is therefore ultimately released by Creon (l. 771). She and the Guard are not destroyed, like Antigone and Creon, but their survival comes at a price. The Guard is little more than a jester (cf. λάλημα, l. 320), and Ismene is accused by Antigone, not without grounds, as being able to show her love only in words (l. 543).

The prudence of Ismene and the Guard is therefore not a real alternative for the principled stance of Antigone or Creon, despite the appeal of the chorus for "safe-mindedness" at the end of the play (ll. 1347ff.). Ismene may be realizing this in her second encounter with Antigone: in line 554 she says that she "misses" her sister's fate, and four lines later that the "mistake" (ἔξαμαρτία, l. 558) of both of them is the same. The problem is that one cannot be prudent and act on one's principles at the same time.

Ismene and the Guard are the opposite of Antigone and Creon, yet for a full understanding of the human condition they are equally important. And if the behavior of two protagonists is morally ambiguous, so is, ultimately, that of Ismene and the Guard. As Gerald Else puts it with regard to Ismene's will to survive: "Ismene had chosen all along to live, while Antigone chose to die. But to live, in the paradoxical logic of the play, means to die, to be nothing, to be a living cipher. That is the death Ismene lives; not to exist, so far as the play is concerned, after line 771" (Else 1976: 35). Indeed, after the third episode neither Ismene nor the Guard is ever talked about again. Antigone even goes so far as to refer to herself as "the last remaining woman of the royal house" (l. 941). Because of her prudence, Ismene is disqualified as a Labdacid.

If Ismene and the Guard, on the one hand, and Antigone and Creon, on the other, represent extremes of human behavior, Haemon bridges the gap between them, in that he moves from a fairly prudent position at the beginning of the third *episodesion* to a passionate suicide in the tomb of Antigone. When Haemon first appears, the chorus (l. 627) and Creon (l. 632) are both afraid that he may come in a state of anger over the decision of his father; but initially he shows restraint. He knows his place: "father I am yours" (l. 635) are his very first words. He argues that more than one person can have a right opinion (ll. 705–7), thus assessing the situation in the play quite well. He is, of course, right, but this truth does not help a city leader who has to decide whether or not to execute a disobedient princess. Both decisions may be right, but only one can be taken, and why should Creon deviate from his earlier decision? Because a young boy, his son, tells him so? Creon rejects Haemon's advice by reason of his age, which makes him unsuitable to lecture older men, let alone his own father (ll. 726–7; see Griffith 1999: 231), and because he suspects his son to be so enamored with Antigone that he does not think clearly (ll. 748, 756). The chorus, too, believes Haemon to be in the ban of Eros – in the choral song that follows the exchange between father and son. It is, in a sense, proven right when Haemon commits suicide, in a deadly perversion of the wedding ritual (ll. 1240–1; see Segal 1981: 181, 189).

If Ismene and the Guard demonstrate the limitations of prudence, Haemon shows its vulnerability. His scene with Creon is flanked by two choral odes that speak about the power of the gods: the curse on the house of the Labdacids (second *stasimon*) and the power of Eros (third *stasimon*). Haemon is the victim of both. Already before he appears on stage there is a suggestion that the curse extends to the collateral branch of Creon and Haemon (see above). In Antigone's tomb Haemon first tries to kill his father (ll. 1233–4), like a second Oedipus, then he commits suicide "by his own hand" (αὐτόχειρ, l. 1175), like Eteocles and Polyneices (l. 172). He is also, according to the chorus, in the ban of Eros, who "wrenches the minds of just men aside from justice to their ruin" (ll. 791–2). How can one remain sane in such a world?

Perhaps by having the divine insight of Teiresias. He knows the actions of the gods before they happen. Yet even his wisdom comes at a price. In the human world he is lower and more ineffective than ordinary mortals: he is blind and has to be guided by a child. He knows the truth but is politically ineffective: just like Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, or like Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchantes*, Creon will not listen to him. The situation is well illustrated by the paradox, elaborately worked out in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, that the blind man sees the truth while the seeing king is blind to it. Besides, despite the fact that philosophers since Plato have promised us divine insight, so far few human beings have acquired it.

8 The Choral Odes

We cannot end our discussion of *Antigone* without commenting on the choral odes, which are among the most beautiful, but also among the most enigmatic of all tragic songs. Because they are so difficult to understand, it has been argued that they have no connection to the episodes whatsoever and are mere musical interludes (Waldock 1951: 112–19). This is a desperate interpretive move, and few have been willing to adopt it. It is true that the *stasima* are delivered at an unusual level of abstraction, but this helps us to see the characters in the episodes as paradigms of general human behavior. The choral songs also seem to build on each other and to develop a consistent worldview, especially the four central *stasima* (Oudemans and Lardinois 1987: 118–59).

The first *stasimon*, the famous Ode to Man, speaks about the achievements of “awesome man,” but also about some of his limitations: he cannot conquer death (ll. 361–2); he uses his cunning and skills sometimes for good, sometimes for bad (ll. 365–6); and he has to balance the laws of the land with justice sworn to the gods (ll. 368–9). Antigone and Creon, as I have argued above, are prime examples of awesome human beings, who act boldly but run up against one or more of these limits. The next choral ode further limits human autonomy by pointing out that some families, such as the Labdacids, are cursed and that Zeus punishes the transgressions and false hopes of mortals. The latter idea raises the question of what false hopes or human transgressions are: is it to set sail through wintry storms, or to wear out the immortal, unwearied Earth, as awesome man does in the first *stasimon*?

The curse on the house of Oedipus is a theme that is much neglected in interpretations of the play (an exception is Else 1976); yet it is, apart from this ode, repeatedly referred to in the play (ll. 2–3, 49–57, 471–2, 856–66). Most commentators do not know what to do with it, perhaps because they feel that, if Antigone or Haemon is driven by a curse, they cannot be held responsible for their actions. This is, however, to misunderstand Greek beliefs. Homeric scholars speak in such cases of double motivation (Lesky 1961): humans may act on their own accord and through the will of the gods at the same time. The same is true of being in the ban of Eros, the theme of the third choral ode. This, too, does not stop Haemon from being responsible for his suicide or for the attempted murder of his father, just as we do not say that people who are in love cannot make moral decisions. Love does, of course, cloud people’s judgment and thus limits the safe-mindedness we can hope for in our lives. In the fourth *stasimon* the vicissitudes of human life and their dependence on the gods are illustrated by three mythological tales, just as the whole tragedy is a mythological tale illustrating the human condition.

These four *stasima* are flanked by a *parodos* and a fifth *stasimon*, which relate more directly to the action. Interestingly, in both these cases the chorus is mistaken in its judgments. In the *parodos* the chorus celebrates the recent victory of Thebes and hopes that it will bring joy and forgetfulness to the city (ll. 149–51), but the audience knows from the prologue that new troubles are brewing. In the fifth *stasimon* the chorus prays that Dionysus may come to heal the city; but their hopes are dashed the moment the messenger appears to tell them that Antigone is dead and that Haemon has committed suicide. These flanking odes remind us that Sophocles has put his great thoughts on the human condition in the mouths of fallible, misguided old men. How can we be certain, then, about who is right and who is wrong?

Guide to Further Reading

The best Greek text and commentary, also for students, is Griffith (1999), although the commentary of Jebb (1900) remains useful in places as well. Lloyd-Jones also prints a good text in Lloyd-Jones (1994: vol. 2), which is based on Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990a), and he accompanies it with a fairly literal prose translation into English. Another accurate, but also poetic and playable translation is Rayor (2011). The most influential interpretations in English are Knox (1964), Winnington-Ingram (1980), Nussbaum (1986), Blundell (1989), and Foley (2001). Rohdich (1980) is, however, insightful as well. For a discussion of the gender issues in the play, one should consult Griffith (2001) and, more recently, Söderbäck (2010). Goheen (1951) and Segal (1981) provide excellent analyses of the imagery. Recent psychological readings of the play include Söderbäck (2010) and Wilmer and Žukauskaitė (2010), with earlier references. Readers who are interested in the ambiguities in the play and in how they relate to the pre-philosophical Greek worldview should consult Oudemans and Lardinois (1987). The reception of the play on the modern stage is well discussed by Steiner (1984) and in Mee and Foley (2011).

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Polyphonic *Ajax*

Peter Burian

Nothing seems more obvious than the observation that Sophocles' *Ajax* is insistently "about" its eponymous hero. Everything revolves around Ajax, love or hatred of Ajax, hopes and fears for Ajax, in life and in death, from beginning to end – and that is so even though Sophocles has chosen to let his hero commit suicide three-fifths of the way through the play. Consequently, the many other voices, even those heard only after Ajax's death, have been understood primarily as keys to understanding the man himself. The classic statement of this view is found (not surprisingly) in the influential Sophocles book of Karl Reinhardt. For him, the play shows no real plot development:

One set of circumstances simply succeeds another, and we watch a collection of contrasting figures who are united only by their relationship to the central figure of the hero. It is not that he has any effect on them or they on him: it is rather that they shed light on his character, in that their characters define his by contrast. (Reinhardt 1979: 39)

The contrasts are indeed striking and significant, but they do not constitute the sole, or even the main function of the others in a drama that has, as we shall see, more than one center of interest. This chapter turns attention to the others, to the polyphony of distinct and distinctive voices in the play that permit us – indeed require us – to consider a variety of perspectives beyond those of the hero. They raise questions about the competing claims of personal honor and group loyalty, and in particular about the value of loyalty to, and dependence upon, a great man; about the conflicts of heroic autonomy with the social fabric that at least ostensibly contains it; and about the role of violence, persuasion, and dissent in a world shaped by models of heroic agency and its concomitant hierarchies. And although it is difficult to make the case that the play comments directly on contemporary politics, we shall see that it also opens up perspectives on hegemony, status, and equity that resonate with the experience of democratic Athens, its emphasis on citizen equality, and its need for compromise and for harmony among social classes (see also Rose's chapter in this volume).

1 Epic Intertexts

The “back-story” of the Sophoclean Ajax belongs to a part of the Troy saga known to us from fragments and through a late summary of summaries, compiled by a Proclus who may or may not have been the Neoplatonic philosopher of the fifth century CE. It was, however, a famous tale, and was already referred to allusively in the *Odyssey*. After Achilles was killed, his armor was awarded (in various ways according to our various sources), not to Ajax – who, as the warrior next to Achilles in prowess and valor, claimed them as his due – but to Odysseus. In anger, Ajax tried to take revenge on Odysseus and the other leaders, whom he held responsible for dishonoring him. Sudden madness (whether caused, as in Sophocles, by Athena or in some other way) drove him to slaughter instead the animals taken as spoils by the Achaeans. It is just after this incident that *Ajax* begins. The daring and intricate three-way encounter that Sophocles devised as a prologue for his drama functions as a sort of play within the play, staged by Athena to put Ajax – still under the spell of the madness she cast over him, and covered in the blood of the animals he slaughtered in the belief that he was killing his erstwhile comrades, now his enemies – on display for the benefit of his greatest enemy, Odysseus. Bringing Odysseus and Ajax together on the tragic stage, Sophocles alludes to a long common history that these two heroes have in the epic tradition (see Schein in this volume), and he turns it in a new direction.

In Book 9 of the *Iliad*, both men plead with Achilles to give over his wrath. Odysseus, the brilliant orator, produces a cogent and exhaustive argument (ll. 225–306), which meets with Achilles’ scornful rejection; Ajax, the warrior whom Achilles respects most, makes a brief, reproachful appeal to his friend’s sense of solidarity with the other Danaans (ll. 624–42), which palpably shakes, but does not undo Achilles’ resolve. Ironically, in Sophocles’ play, Ajax has lost precisely such feelings of solidarity with the comrades who denied him the arms of the fallen Achilles – and thus due recognition as second only to the greatest of the Achaeans in strength, bravery, and resolve – and gave them instead to Odysseus. In *Iliad* 23, during the funeral games for Achilles, Odysseus defeats the larger and stronger Ajax in wrestling by using his characteristic trickery (*dolos*, l. 725) to throw him to the ground on his back. In the second fall, both men are thrown to the ground simultaneously, after which Achilles stops the match and declares that both have won and should divide the prizes equally (ll. 736–7). After the death of Achilles, however, there can be no equal division; the two heroes themselves are instead irreparably divided.

The division is memorably recorded in the *Odyssey* (ll. 543–67), where Odysseus, who has called up the shades of the dead from Hades, sees Ajax lurking further back than the rest. Odysseus recognizes immediately that Ajax is still filled with anger at his loss of the arms, and he comments that he wishes he had never won the prize. He addresses Ajax, telling him how much the Achaeans grieved at his death and asking him to put aside his wrath and to come closer and hear him out. Ajax answers without saying a word; instead he stalks away, his anger undiminished. It is thus no surprise that in Sophocles’ drama the two heroes do not really meet or exchange words, although their paths cross in the prologue. Recollecting the Odyssean scene helps us to recognize how deeply Sophocles has embedded his new version of the death of Ajax in the epic tradition: on the one hand, in the profound and coherent intransigence of Ajax, and, on the other, in Odysseus’ flexibility, human sympathy, and desire for reconciliation, which Sophocles will develop beyond any implication present in the *Odyssey*.

This element of intertextuality – a repeated summoning up of Homeric scenes, situations, and even lines, only to mark an essential difference from the epic tradition – in effect adds other voices, from “off stage” so to speak, to the dialogue. Taken all together, this intertextual network may be said to ground Ajax’s conduct in the old heroic ethos by which he lives and dies, while at the same time it works to underline the anomaly of Ajax’s actions and situation. Since this is one aspect of the polyphony of the *Ajax* that has been fully discussed in the scholarly literature, I shall limit myself in this chapter to a few remarks on the “presence” of Homer where it is interpretatively most significant.

2 The Wrath of Athena

The prologue repays close attention (see Seale 1982: 144–50; Pucci 1994: 17–31; Barker 2009: 284–90). Athena appears and watches quietly as Odysseus comes on stage, absorbed in following a trail like a hunter in pursuit of game. She addresses her protégé in familiar terms; he recognizes her voice gratefully, but cannot see her. He tells Athena the little that he has seen and knows so far: cattle and guards found slaughtered, and Ajax seen by a scout bounding across the plain with a sword dripping with fresh blood. He has volunteered to track Ajax to discover whether he is indeed the perpetrator of this bewildering deed (*pragos askopon*, l. 21, indicating something that cannot be understood, but literally denoting invisibility). Already this first exchange gives us two things to look out for: the prominence of the thematics of sight and a narrative procedure that does not, like a typical prologue speech, present a tidy summary of past events, but will give us partial perspectives on how to understand them – perspectives from Athena, Odysseus, the chorus, Tecmessa, and later from the prophet Calchas (via a messenger), Ajax’s brother Teucer, Agamemnon, and Menelaos.

Athena’s perspective is, of course, authoritative in a way that others’ are not, but her interpretation of the events does not go unchallenged, even in the prologue itself. She tells Odysseus (and us) clearly that Ajax was the culprit, that he acted out of anger at the award of Achilles’ arms to Odysseus, intending to kill the Argives, but was diverted from his purpose by Athena herself, who cast “false judgments” (*dusphorou gnomas*, ll. 51–2, literally “hard to bear” or “grievous” thoughts) upon his eyes. Athena narrates with apparent delight Ajax’s slaughter and torture of various animals, which he performed thinking that they were the Atreidae or other chiefs, and his tying up of the remaining beasts in order to bring them home for further torture. Then she announces that she is going to show Odysseus Ajax’s madness, so he can tell the Argives what he has seen, and she assures him that she will divert Ajax’s vision, thus making him unable to see Odysseus or cause him harm. Odysseus nevertheless pleads with her not to call Ajax outside. She accuses him of cowardice, reassures him that he will be safe, and Odysseus reluctantly assents: “I shall remain, but I wish I were somewhere else” (l. 88).

Ajax comes bounding out, greeting Athena with effusive thanks and the promise of a reward for her help. There can be no doubt that he, unlike Odysseus, can see her plainly. Thus, Ajax sees Athena but not Odysseus, Odysseus sees Ajax but not Athena, and only Athena sees both her interlocutors. It is as if the partiality of mortal vision is being given a visual metaphor on stage. There is, however, a particular irony in the goddess’ granting to Ajax, within the madness she has produced, the exceptional privilege of seeing her, which is denied even to her beloved Odysseus. Of course, Ajax’s very first sentence (“how well you have stood by my side,” l. 92) demonstrates that he does not see her as

she really is, for he takes her at her word as his ally (ll. 90, 117). Ajax's madness is manifest in the certainty and pride with which, prompted by the goddess, he announces the slaughter of Agamemnon and Menelaos and then describes the ongoing torture of Odysseus, "my most welcome [*hedistos*, literally sweetest] prisoner" (l. 105), whom he wishes to kill only after he has beaten him bloody. When Athena orders him not to torture the wretch, Ajax replies with a dismissive rejection of her demand: "In all other matters I bid you have your way [*chairein*], but this is the penalty he will pay, and no other" (ll. 112–13). "I bid you have your way" is a dismissive formula and, in speaking to a god, an insolent one. One might be tempted to suppose that Ajax's hubristic reply is another sign of madness, but Athena will make avoiding "any arrogant word against the gods" the moral of the scene that Odysseus has just witnessed. Furthermore, a prophecy of Calchas (to be reported later) will confirm that Ajax had already, with an arrogance not befitting his human status, rejected Athena's aid in battle and thereby won her unappeasable wrath (ll. 770–7). This is a piece of the puzzle that the spectator can only put together later to clarify the motive of Athena's hostility to Ajax, but whether it constitutes, as some have argued, the "moral of the play" as a whole is another story. From a human perspective at least, it does not begin to do justice to the significance of Ajax's life and death.

Meanwhile we are left with another – and more surprising – dissent from Athena's view of the matter. She has already asked Odysseus whether he does not think that "laughing at one's enemies is the sweetest laughter" (l. 79), to which Odysseus replied noncommittally that he would prefer Ajax to remain inside. Now she underlines the meaning she wants Odysseus to take from what he has witnessed: "Do you see how great is the power of the gods?" (l. 118). Odysseus replies with a very different vision, and with a different lesson (ll. 121–5):

I pity him in his misery all the same, though he is my enemy,
because he has been yoked to evil ruin, but not looking to his
condition more than to my own. For I see that we are nothing more
than phantoms, all of us who live, or an empty shadow.

Athena's worldview is entirely compatible with that of Ajax, in that she shares with him thirst for recognition, desire for control, and the ethics of doing good to one's friends, harm to one's enemies. She recommends moderation and self-control (*sophrosune*) to mortals, but as a goddess she has no need of this virtue herself. Ajax disastrously believes that he can do without it as well. But, for Odysseus, the need for *sophrosune* is a given, since he recognizes the limitation of human power. And that recognition leads in turn to a broader human sympathy, a sense of our fragility and of the limitations of mortality – which we all share, beyond the categories of friend and enemy.

In the context of this prologue, Odysseus' refusal to endorse Athena's restatement of an idea that is more or less universally accepted in the world of heroic myth (the pleasure of laughing at an enemy) and his reframing of the fall of his enemy as a cause for pity and reflections on the instability of the human condition were hardly to be expected. That Odysseus goes so far as to identify Ajax's fate with his own is nothing short of astonishing. For the moment, it goes nowhere: the play-within-a-play of the prologue is complete in itself but end-stopped, and the next movements of the play turn our attention to the reactions of Ajax's *philoï* (family and friends) as well as to his own reactions as he recovers from madness. A seed, however, has been planted. Beyond that, it is important

to note that Odysseus, as the internal audience of Athena's "show" and of Ajax's degradation, gives the external audience a perspective that goes beyond that of vindictive god and vindictive mortal.

3 Ajax's Men

The prologue showed us Ajax in the midst of his enemies; next we hear from his loyal followers, the chorus of sailors who came with him from Salamis. Together with Tecmessa, they will painfully reconstruct the events of the previous night, of which we have just been informed. This might seem an inefficient way of conveying the facts of the case, but it is very effective in giving us different perspectives on their meaning. The long anapestic chant to which they march into the orchestra (ll. 134–71) is dominated by the expression of distress and fear brought on by the rumor now circulated everywhere that it was Ajax who destroyed the flocks and herds. They call it a slander and attribute it to Odysseus, but they admit that it is plausible and that Odysseus is very persuasive – everyone who hears him enjoys his mockery of Ajax's troubles even more than he does (ll. 148–53). The chorus fears not just for its leader; its members are afraid for themselves. Ajax is great, and greatness attracts envy; they are small, and without this great leader upon whom they depend they are defenseless. These fighting men liken their fear as they hear the allegations brought against their leader to "the trembling eye of a winged dove" (l. 140). When Ajax's enemies escape his eye, on the other hand, they are like flocks of chattering birds, but should he, "the great vulture," appear, they would cower in silence (ll. 167–71). These metaphors contrast the visual with the auditory code in order to emphasize not only the men's weakness without Ajax, but also his greatness in their eyes – rumor unchecked when Ajax is not seen, silence of his squawking enemies if he appears. The irony, of course, is that we know what Ajax looks like and what the reaction of his enemies is bound to be, while the chorus does not. Although in the strophic choral ode itself (ll. 172–200) the chorus seems to acknowledge the truth of the rumor by asking which god sent Ajax against the beasts and why, and by concluding that only madness sent by a god could have prompted such behavior, the men continue to hope that the rumors are lies, and they conclude by entreating Ajax to appear and put an end to the outrages of his enemies, which now rush like the wind. In their final formulation, it is Ajax's enemies who are mad and Ajax's men who suffer for it (198–200).¹

The *kommos* (lyric dialogue) that follows with Tecmessa imposes the new realities on the chorus and further emphasizes the degree to which the men's sense of themselves, and indeed their very existence, seem to depend upon their commander. Tecmessa's "unspeakable tale" (l. 214) of Ajax's madness is for them "unbearable and inescapable news" (ll. 223–4), for it brings the threat that their leader will perish for his slaughter of the herds and herdsmen. And, as they reflect upon the gravity of the situation, they begin to fear for their own safety: "I am afraid of sharing the pain of death by stoning, struck along with him" (ll. 254–5). The men hope that, if he sees them, he will come around to a more restrained frame of mind. Tecmessa opens the door of Ajax's hut and his appearance amidst the wreckage of his slaughter confirms their fears; his plea for them to kill him, too, only makes matters worse. The "evil cure" (ll. 362–3) of a suicide could only make their situation grimmer. For all their dependence on Ajax, indeed because of it, their interest in this crucial matter is antithetical to his. From their perspective, Ajax's

intention to kill himself is not a matter of reclaiming his honor but a sign of the persistence of his *nosos*, his mental illness.

This is nowhere clearer than in the first *stasimon*, where the chorus refers to Ajax as “hard to heal, [...] my opponent in a wrestling match who lives, alas, with god-sent madness” (ll. 609–11). In the final antistrophe of this ode, the only moment before Ajax’s suicide in which the men of the chorus seem willing to accept that he must kill himself, they allow that, for one who suffers from an incurable madness, “it is better to be hidden in Hades” (l. 635). This is not to say that they approve of Ajax’s choice or attribute any particular nobility to it, but they see it as the end of a terrible suffering for him – though not for his loved ones. In all of this the chorus reacts as one might expect ordinary people to react, and not in the manner of the great and mighty. There is an arresting phrase in the *Problemata* attributed to Aristotle that seems to speak to this case: “Only the leaders of past ages were heroes, the ordinary people [*laoi*] were human beings [*anthropoi*]; from them comes the chorus” (48.922b). And, for all the dependence of this chorus on the hero, its perspective is different, and not altogether uncritical.

The chorus takes an increasingly significant (albeit secondary) role in the drama as the situation changes. While Ajax is still alive, the men’s interventions are hopeful attempts to make the best of the terrible situation, as they urge Ajax to moderate his vehemence and to show pity for Tecmessa. They exult in Ajax’s apparent change of mind in his deception speech, as it is usually called, and also in his departure from the camp for what he describes as rites of purification. Their song (ll. 693–718), like the analogous ones in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Women of Trachis*, illustrates once more the close alignment of the chorus’ fate with that of Ajax; at the same time, however, it creates an effect of tragic irony, since the audience cannot fail to understand that the men’s joy is misplaced. Only after Ajax’s death do they move out of his shadow and assume a greater degree of agency. After the Messenger announces Calchas’ prophetic warning that Ajax must not be allowed to leave his hut, the change in their role is marked by the urgency with which they announce their departure from the stage to find him.

When Teucer arrives, it is the chorus that speaks with him; after his lament over the body of his brother, it is the chorus that urges him, in rather peremptory terms, to consider how to bury Ajax and what to say to his approaching enemy, Menelaos (ll. 1040–5). With that, the second movement of the play is under way, and at its heart is the question of whether the body of the disgraced Ajax is to be allowed burial. The usual role of a chorus in scenes of debate is to cap the opposing speeches with pithy remarks couched in generally conciliatory terms. This chorus, for example, will compliment Menelaos on his “wise notions” but will urge him not to commit *hubris* against the dead (*me* [...] *hubristes genei*, 1092). Then, after Teucer’s response, while allowing that his case is just, the chorus criticizes his words as being too sharp in the midst of his troubles (ll. 1118–19). Yet there is more to the chorus’ response. After Menelaos leaves, Ajax’s men anticipate another *agon* to come and assert with greater urgency that Teucer must prepare as quickly as possible “a dank tomb that mortals will remember always” (ll. 1166–7) for their fallen leader, thus championing the essential honor to be accorded him. Then, when the second *agon* closes with no satisfactory solution achieved – Agamemnon has hurled insults at Teucer, who defended himself with pluck, but in the end neither has budged – the chorus, rather than commenting, turns unexpectedly to Odysseus, who has just entered. Although the sailors have considered him all along to be the arch-enemy and, after Ajax’s suicide, they imagine that “he exults (*ephubrizei*) in his dark mind and laughs” at their leader’s defeat (ll. 955–60), Odysseus alone has the persuasive

power to bring about Ajax's burial. Boldly and unbidden, they bid him join in untying (*sulluson*, l. 1317) the knot of the impasse. With telling irony, they sense that to help Ajax, who adamantly rejected the idea that an enemy could become a friend, they must trust this enemy to become Ajax's friend after all.

In this context, it is worth remembering that Salamis had been absorbed into Attica long since, and that these sailors constitute a tragic chorus, "closer than most ... to the Athenian *demos* in terms of identity" (Hesk 2003: 49). The protracted debates have, as it were, moved the play from the army camp to the public square, and the chorus plays a significant part in what can be seen as an essentially political resolution, brought about in an environment that adumbrates the world of the *polis*. Despite their worst fears, they have survived their leader's death and have won a degree of autonomy and self-confidence that permits them to be not merely spectators, but – in their modest way – actors in the new world that Ajax rejected. They have in effect taken on the role of citizens, witnessing and evaluating the arguments of the speakers and finally urging that quiet persuasion end the noisy impasse of vaunts and threats (see Barker 2009: 309–24; Hawthorne 2009; Murnaghan 2011: 263–7).

4 Ajax's Woman

Tecmessa is not, strictly speaking, Ajax's wife, but rather a woman he has enslaved and made his "spear-bride." She is the mother of his son, and she is even more dependent upon him than the chorus. The crisis of his life is also hers. Again and again she makes this point to Ajax, only to be rebuffed. This has made many critics complain of Ajax's callousness, but surely we are not to take his behavior as a simple indicator of his relationship with Tecmessa (*pace* Ormand 1999: 110). We are seeing Ajax *in extremis*, after all. We must recognize, however, that Tecmessa has her own interests to defend and her own rhetorical strategies for defending them. Precisely because she is not a "legitimate" wife, but a spear-bride, she knows what faces her (and her child), should Ajax abandon them by killing himself. And she strives valiantly, though unsuccessfully, to persuade him to renounce his plan.

Tecmessa's voice has not been given its due in the scholarly tradition, although in recent decades there have been important attempts to see her as more than the figure (albeit highly sympathetic) of pathos and female emotional excess that dominated earlier scholarship (Easterling 1984; Ormand 1999; Foley 2001: 90–2). Even before her long plea to Ajax (ll. 485–524), Tecmessa is at work protecting herself and her son. It is significant that she includes herself among "those who care for [*hoi kedomenoi*] the house of Telamon from far away" (ll. 203–4). In Homer, *kedomai* is particularly used of caring for the dead; here it may suggest Tecmessa's role as mother of the descendant who will care for his ancestors – a role that is reinforced later in the play, as we shall see (OKell 2011: 219). Indeed, the entire scene involving Ajax, Tecmessa, and their child Eurysaces both mirrors and distorts the "farewell" of Hector and Andromache, and the intricate relations between these two texts are laden with complex and even contradictory connotations.

Countering Ajax's code of heroic competition with a claim for the primacy of affective bonds, Tecmessa employs several arguments that Andromache voiced in the *Iliad*. The parallels are striking: with Tecmessa's country devastated by Ajax's attack and her mother and father dead, she has no one to turn to but Ajax, no one but him to protect her

(ll. 514–19; cf. *Iliad* 6.410–13); she will be a widow and their child will be an orphan (ll. 510–13; cf. *Iliad* 6.407–9, 432). Tecmessa describes her fate of servitude in terms very similar to those used by Hector when he anticipates the harsh enslavement that Andromache would suffer if he falls and Troy falls with him (ll. 496–505; cf. *Iliad* 6.454–65). Particularly striking is the way each passage describes the response of an observer of the disastrous reversal of fortune (“Look at the bed-mate of Ajax, who was the mightiest man in the army [...]” (501–2); “This is the wife of Hector, who was the bravest of the Trojans, tamers of horses, when they fought about Troy” (*Iliad* 6.460–1). Tecmessa goes on to describe the misery that awaits Eurysaces, bereft of his father (ll. 510–13), as Andromache describes the fate of Astyanax after she sees Hector dead and being dragged around the walls (*Iliad* 22.485). There is even an echo of Priam’s appeal to Achilles to remember his father “at the threshold of sorrowful old age” (*Iliad* 24.487) in Tecmessa’s urging of Ajax to show regard for the “sorrowful old age” of his father (ll. 506–7). Most members of the Athenian audience could hardly have missed these striking similarities.

They may also have noticed some equally significant divergences: Tecmessa, in imagining herself called Ajax’s bedmate (*homeunetis*) implicitly distinguishes her situation from that of Andromache, Hector’s wife (*gune*). In *Ajax*, it is not the man who anticipates with dread the harsh servitude that awaits his widow should he die, as in the *Iliad*, but rather the woman herself. Ajax shows no concern about Tecmessa’s fate. The most glaring departure from the Homeric “original” may well be the transformation of Andromache’s famous plea to her husband that after Achilles had slain her father and seven brothers and Artemis killed her mother, “Hector, you are thus father to me and honored mother, and brother, and youthful lover” (*Iliad* 6.428–9). In Tecmessa’s speech, the same idea is given this much more guarded formulation: “For you destroyed my fatherland with your spear and another fate took my mother and father to Hades, to be dwellers there in death. Who then but you could be my fatherland?” (ll. 515–18). Hector rescued Andromache, made her his bride, and became her all; Ajax destroyed her country, captured Tecmessa, made her his concubine, and is now – not father, mother, brother, lover, but her new fatherland, her only refuge. Striking as these differences are, their interpretation is by no means self-evident. Though Ormand sees the implicit comparison between Andromache, the proper wife, and Tecmessa, the mere bedmate, as deftly undercutting the latter’s claim to a legitimate place at Ajax’s side, one might argue that the comparison elevates Tecmessa by showing how closely her situation matches that of Andromache. Ajax’s failure to respond may reflect a felt lack of obligation to a slave woman or of interest in her fate, but it might equally express the ineluctable withdrawal of this death-bound hero from whatever could still hold him to life.

Tecmessa’s role changes considerably after the hero’s death. That death paradoxically elevates her status. Her son is now the only offspring Ajax will ever have, and the treatment of her status no doubt reflects the desire to legitimize him as Ajax’s heir (Ormand 1999: 117–19). But, as she responds to the loss of her master and protector, she also becomes more active and decisive. When a Messenger reveals Calchas’ prophecy about the mortal danger in Ajax’s departure, she does not merely urge the chorus to search for him, but joins the sailors herself (l. 810). It is she who finds the body (ll. 896–9) and she who covers it with a cloak, acting as *kedomene* (caretaker) – a task that, as we have seen, she had already assumed in name. And she does this as an intimate of the deceased, sparing others a sight that, she says, even Ajax’s loved ones would find unbearable (l. 917). Thus, by implication only she is close enough to him to bear it. She joins the chorus in a

kommos that at once mourns the loss of “such a loved one” (l. 941) and expresses fear for the future in which Ajax’s enemies, the Atreidae and Odysseus, will have the upper hand.

Shortly after the arrival of Ajax’s brother Teucer, Tecmessa leaves the stage at his behest, to fetch Eurysaces. When she returns, Teucer places both boy and mother, as suppliants, at Ajax’s corpse (ll. 1171–84). There she will remain until the end of the play, without saying another word. This lengthy silence after so much activity is surprising to us and will likely have surprised the original audience as well, but the unconventional staging serves a particular dramatic end (see Ormand 1999: 119–23 for an explanation different from mine). Rather than another lament from Tecmessa, we hear a new voice, that of the fallen hero’s brother, Teucer, lamenting his loss. And at that point the focus of the drama moves from the death itself to the essentially political question: is Ajax to be allowed burial? This is a question for the Greek commanders to decide, and it is Teucer’s battle to fight, not Tecmessa’s. Menelaos enters to announce a ban on the burial. He departs after a long altercation and when Tecmessa returns with Eurysaces, Teucer places them, as suppliants, at the body of Ajax, so that anyone who tried to move it would be committing a sacrilege. Tecmessa, literally in contact with both her man and her child, becomes part of a tableau that will remain in place until the end of the play and will provide a kind of silent answer to the burial question. The tableau does several rather different things at once, all of which serve the same end. It reunites Ajax, so to speak, with the family whose legitimacy as a family the tableau helps vindicate. The locks of hair cut from the heads of loved ones prefigure the burial itself, since hair is a characteristic offering to the dead. Moreover, the fact that the corpse can be protected by suppliants placed in contact with it strongly implies a numinous power emanating from it, and this in turn suggests the hero-cult of Ajax, with which every Athenian was familiar (see Burian 1972). The tableau is thus visible evidence, so to speak, of how the strife over Ajax’s burial must end.

5 Ajax’s Brother and the Achaean Commanders

Teucer first appears on stage when the play is almost two-thirds over, but we have been expecting him. Ajax called out for him (see ll. 342–3 and 826–30, with the prayer that Teucer be the one to find him and protect his body from desecration by birds and dogs; and cf. ll. 688–9) and entrusted Eurysaces to his care (ll. 560–4). The Messenger who alerted Ajax’s friends to the danger of letting Ajax out of their sight told them that Teucer had been assaulted by a crowd of soldiers in the Achaean camp, who were angered by his brother’s attempt to slaughter them (ll. 721–32). It was to Teucer that Calchas gave his prophetic warning about Ajax, and it was Teucer himself who sent the Messenger to relay it (ll. 750–82). When Tecmessa found the body of Ajax, she hoped for Teucer’s speedy arrival to help with preparations for burial (ll. 921–2). Now at last he is here, and from this point on he will play a pivotal role in fending off Ajax’s enemies. First, however, we listen to his lament, which repeats a number of themes that we have heard before, but from his own particular perspective. For example, Ajax spoke about his reluctance to appear before his father, the notoriously ill-tempered Telamon, “naked without prizes of honor” (l. 464). Teucer pictures his own situation as even more dire than his brother’s: he is sure that the old man will be utterly implacable, accusing him – “the bastard (*nothos*) born from the enemy’s spear” (l. 1013) – of betraying Ajax in order to usurp his position.

The question of Teucer's illegitimacy will return in the coming debate, and it has already been prefigured in the situation of Tecmessa and Eurysaces. Telamon's taunt, as imagined by Teucer, makes the parallel explicit; "born from the enemy's spear" is a vivid synecdoche for the child of a spear-bride won as a prize in battle. The parallel with Eurysaces is made closer by the fact that Ajax's death assured both of their status as only sons, and thus made one of them Ajax's legitimate heir and should have made the other Telamon's (see Patterson 1990 on the Periclean citizenship law). The question of what it means to be a bastard and not a legitimate son, or a concubine and not a legitimate wife is hardly a casual one in this play, and it elicits further questions about the relation between nobility and birth – questions that come to the fore with special emphasis in Teucer's debates with Menelaos and Agamemnon, as we shall see.

It is a commonplace of the scholarship on this play to call Teucer a "stand-in" for his dead brother and then to complain that he is at best "a pale imitation" (Gellie 1972: 23). But it makes far more sense to admit that Teucer does not represent his brother either in stature or in kind, but rather defends him with considerable vigor, responding to the charges made in terms that reflect how the charges themselves are framed. Teucer's first test comes when Menelaos enters and orders him brusquely and without any ceremony not to take up the body for burial, but to leave it as it is (ll. 1047–8), on Agamemnon's authority. When Teucer asks for Agamemnon's reason, Menelaos gives a cogent answer – Ajax tried to kill the whole army and, but for a god's intervention, they would have suffered the fate that is now his (ll. 1055–9) – but he does not stop there. He exults in the power he now has over the dead commoner (*demoten*) who, in life, was intractable and disobedient and never felt he had to listen to those set over him (*ton ephestoton*), when fear and respect for authority are what an army needs most (ll. 1066–76). This gives Teucer an entrée, for Ajax, he says, did not sail to Troy as Menelaos' subordinate. He came not on account of Menelaos' wife, but for the sake of the oath he swore. And he insists that he will bury his brother, justly and without any fear of what Menelaos or the other generals may say. Teucer has neatly avoided the whole question of Ajax's crime, but there is nothing inept or confused about his reply.

Teucer began his speech by saying that it could hardly be surprising if a man who was "nothing" (*meden*) by birth made a mistake, when those who seem to be nobly born (*eugeneis*) say such mistaken things (ll. 1093–6). And he concludes it by telling Menelaos that Ajax placed no value on "nobodies" (*tous medenas*), and that he himself will "not be moved by your noise, as long as you are the sort of man you are" (ll. 1114–17). Here, then, the question of whether one's nobility can be judged apart from one's words and actions is raised directly (see Rose in this volume). Teucer will later defend the nobility of his birth – from a mother who was herself born a queen (ll. 1299–303) – and will impugn the family of Agamemnon and Menelaos as both barbarian and barbarous (ll. 1290–7). Thus, the category of nobility is destabilized in two directions: by casting doubt on who is truly nobly born, and by rejecting noble birth itself as a criterion of worth.

After a choral ode that takes for its subject the sailors' sorrows in the war at Troy – sorrows only increased by their leader's death – Agamemnon's arrival prolongs the impasse. Teucer's debate with him is in many ways a doublet of the Menelaos scene. The similarity of tone may indeed be calculated to underline the inability of the parties to reach any resolution unaided (Winnington-Ingram 1980: 65). The focus of the two disputes is somewhat different, however. Agamemnon, the commander with authority

over the entire expedition, does not engage the issue of burial directly, but rather focuses on the question of authority itself. What he sees as Teucer's insubordination bears the brunt of his outrage. He addresses him as "son of the captive woman" (l. 1228), accuses him of being "a nothing [*ouden*] who champions a nothing [*meden*]" (l. 1231), and even calls him a slave (l. 1235). Agamemnon calls Teucer's refusal to accept the fairness of the judgment of arms a failure to submit to the will of the majority, which he characterizes as an abuse that, if allowed to continue, would prevent the institution of law by thrusting aside the winners and giving precedence to the losers (ll. 1242–9). This might constitute a serious argument about the need for communal consensus, but it is soon undercut by the clear indication that Agamemnon's real purpose is simply to stifle dissent (Barker 2009: 304–9). Teucer, he says, "acts outrageously and speaks with a free tongue" (*hubrizeis kaxeleutherostomeis*, l. 1258). The combination of these two verbs, suggesting that speaking "with the mouth of a free man" is the equivalent of committing *hubris*, upends the Athenian democratic ideal of frank speech as the right – and even the duty – of every citizen. As if to justify this shocking denial of the legitimacy of dissent, Agamemnon ends his speech with the dismissive suggestion that a free man should come forward to plead Teucer's case for him and the ridiculous claim that anyway he cannot understand Teucer, since Teucer speaks a barbarian tongue (ll. 1260–4).

Rather than censure Ajax for his attempted attack on the Achaeans, as Menelaos had done, Agamemnon denigrates his legitimate accomplishments (ll. 1236–38). This gives Teucer an opening to reassert his brother's greatness. "How quickly gratitude slips away," he begins (ll. 1266–7), reminding Agamemnon (and us, for the first time in the play) of specific incidents in which Ajax served the common cause (see Winnington-Ingram 1980: 29–30, n. 50). He begins with Ajax's role in putting a stop to Hector's attack on the Achaean camp and ships, a moment when "you were shut up inside your fences and reduced to nothing [*to meden ontas*] by the turn in the battle" (ll. 1274–5). The second incident is the duel against Hector, for which Ajax was chosen "by lot and without orders" (l. 1284) – which is to say, both independently and through a communal process. In these exploits, Teucer adds, Ajax was not entirely alone: "I was there with him – the slave, the one born of a barbarian mother" (ll. 1289–90). And with that sardonic citation of Agamemnon's insult, Teucer pointedly pits the least attractive aspects of Agamemnon's ancestry against his own pedigree as the child of mighty Telamon and the royal daughter of Laomedon. He even manages to turn his resolution to die if necessary, before allowing his brother's corpse to be tossed away unburied, into an insult: better to die thus, he says, than to fight "on behalf of your wife, or should I say yours and your brother's?" (ll. 1311–12), thus making Helen doubly unfaithful and Agamemnon a despicable adulterer.

Once again, Teucer has bested his opponent in the rhetorical duel. Generations of commentators have been exercised to suggest that the tone of the debate has descended to the level of a petty squabble, but that is far from the whole story. Teucer has discredited in their own terms the attempts of his opponents to marginalize him, vindicating his own standing as a participant in the debate and achieving the assimilation into society that Ajax had rejected (see Murnaghan 1989: 188). But, although his courageous stance may be said to have opened up the possibility of rehabilitation for his brother, he has not done what he must have wanted to do – clear the way for Ajax's burial. The *agon* has ended in impasse once more.

6 Odysseus and Rehabilitation in a World of Change

Unlike the debate with Menelaos, and indeed unlike most formal *agon* scenes in tragedy, the speeches of Agamemnon and Teucer are not followed by acrimonious dialogue. Instead Odysseus arrives unbidden and the chorus invites him to resolve the undecided issue of Ajax's burial. That Odysseus is willing to take the side of Ajax's friends is clearly a surprise to Agamemnon. The spectator, however, has seen Odysseus reject a similar invitation, made by Athena herself in the prologue. An exchange of some fifty lines settles the question of burial at last, and does so in a way that can be said to provide a form of rehabilitation for the fallen hero. This is not because the argument is a shining vindication of the right to burial, or because Agamemnon is convinced that Ajax deserves burial. Rather Odysseus asks for it as Agamemnon's friend, and Agamemnon grants it to him as a favor (*charis*, ll. 1354 and 1371). Unlike Menelaos, who cheerfully accepts the principle of change by which Ajax "once flared with insolence, but now it is my turn to be proud" (ll. 1087–8), Agamemnon seems much closer in outlook to Ajax: he abhors instability, demands obedience, and considers that once an enemy, always an enemy (ll. 1355–60). And yet, unlike the unyielding Ajax, he abandons his rigidity in deference to his friend, and he participates in the reciprocity of favors that Tecmessa recommended (ll. 522–4) and Ajax rejected.

Odysseus uses a paradox to try to persuade Agamemnon to yield: "You rule by giving in to your friends" (*ton philon nikomenos*, l. 1353). Ironically, Ajax's burial depends upon the success with which Odysseus can persuade Agamemnon to accept an obligation to friends that failed utterly with Ajax. At line 330, Tecmessa uses the same idiom to ask for the chorus' help: "For such men give in to the words of friends" (cf. ll. 483–4, where the chorus urges Ajax to "allow your friends to rule over your intentions"). Ajax is utterly immune to such arguments, but Agamemnon is not, and Odysseus uses persistence and craft to win him over.

I point this out in order to underline what is perhaps already obvious: the rounds of debate and dialogue with which the play ends are not failed attempts at a serious treatment of the religious, moral, and political implications of the burial issue, but representations of the kind of strategic back and forth, give and take by which disputes are brought (or not) to settlement by words rather than by deeds of violence. The path that Teucer, the bastard brother of a disgraced and now dead warrior, takes from bitter and hopeless lament to the successful facing-down of the chief commanders of the Danaan armies may be, as Peter Rose puts it, "a process of the democratization of an aristocratic ideal" (Rose 1995: 77). Its limitation, however, is that it involves only the clash of opposing sentiments, biases, and insults. The only thing it can win is the satisfaction of winning. Odysseus, however, plays a different game, one in which you must find the right means to get your opponent to do your bidding while still considering you his friend. It is not precisely a question of ends justifying the means: no principles were violated during the making of these arguments. But it is also not yet a model for democratic speech. Odysseus uses his persuasive wiles in what is essentially a negotiation between aristocrats. And yet his intervention mitigates tyrannical behavior, analogous to that of Creon in *Antigone*, that might well have turned violent if left unchecked, and he brings a peaceful resolution where none had seemed possible. The world has changed in the final scenes of this play, as so many readers have observed, but the changes are not necessarily all diminution and decline.

One of Odysseus' effective rhetorical devices involves the theme of nobility. We have had occasion to notice the destabilization of this notion, as various definitions were proposed and contested. Here Odysseus cuts the Gordian knot by asserting Ajax's nobility as an uncontested fact. This verdict, so to speak, along with the final scene of reconciliation between Teucer and Odysseus and an *exeuunt omnes* staged as the beginning of the burial rites, completes a process of rehabilitation for the hero. In addition, of course, the presence of Ajax's corpse at the center of the action, with his loved ones clinging to him in supplication, reminds us of what the burial of a hero signifies. Ajax could not fully achieve his own rehabilitation, despite the great monologues that give him a powerful poetic and dramatic voice. For him there was no wrongdoing to expunge, only the shameful result of his madness. After his death, however, those who survive can begin to reconsider the meaning of his life from their own perspectives. That of Odysseus – formerly Ajax's enemy, as he repeatedly reminds us (ll. 1336, 1347, 1356–7) – carries a special weight.

At the beginning of the play we see Ajax and Odysseus together on stage as enemies who cannot meet; at the end, Odysseus is the friend who finally wins Ajax an honorable burial. As soon as Agamemnon has departed, Odysseus declares that he is also a friend to Teucer, "as much as I was once his enemy" (l. 1377). Teucer accepts this gesture with praise for the man who alone stood by his brother, "although you were the most hateful of the Argives to him" (ll. 1383–4). When Teucer adds that Odysseus refused to treat the dead Ajax with outrage (*ephubrisai mega*, l. 1385), we are reminded that Agamemnon had accused Teucer of *hubris* and recommended moderation (*ou sophroneseis*, l. 1259), while he himself was practicing the opposite. Odysseus, in becoming Ajax's *philos* and defender, is revealed as the true man of moderation and decency. The overarching irony, of course, is that Ajax abhorred immoderately the very idea that one's enemy could become a friend. This, too, is called to our minds when Teucer sets a limit on Odysseus' participation in the funeral rites: Odysseus may not touch the corpse, for fear of doing something odious to the dead man (ll. 1394–5). From what we know of Ajax, we cannot help but sense the rightness of Teucer's decision. At the same time, however, Teucer emphasizes his own appreciation of Odysseus by calling him *esthlos* ("noble," l. 1399), one of the words Odysseus has just used to denote Ajax's nobility (l. 1345).

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which Odysseus hardly belongs in Ajax's world. Odysseus provides not only the means by which Ajax's rehabilitation can be brought about, but also another model of subjectivity by which Ajax's rigid, indeed brittle, form of heroism is not so much rehabilitated as superseded, for better or worse. The play belongs to Ajax, of course. As many have seen, however, there is a sense that he takes the old heroic world with him to the grave, leaving the future to the "humane and compromising temper of Odysseus" (Knox 1979: 126). It is by listening to the voices of Tecmessa, the chorus, Teucer, Odysseus, and the rest of the play's polyphony that we step outside the limits of Ajax's brutal, stubborn, self-involved, and grandiose heroism to explore its limits for their world, for the new and different world in which the play was first presented – and for our own.

Guide to Further Reading

General studies of the *Ajax* are numerous. A discussion of the major themes of the play can be found in Poe (1987). Rose (1995) provides a thorough reading of the play in terms of class conflict in the fifth-century democracy. On the "deception speech," see

especially Taplin (1979) and Crane (1990). On the status of Tecmessa and her role in the play, see Ormand (1999).

Contributions to the literature on the relation between *Iliad* and *Ajax* include Easterling (1984), Hesk (2003: esp. 52–73), Kirkwood (1965), Sorum (1986), Winnington-Ingram (1980: esp. 24–5 and 69–71), Zanker (1992).

The thematics of sight in *Ajax* has been extensively discussed, for example, by Seale (1982: 144–80) and, from the perspective of madness as “dark, wrong seeing,” by Padel (1995: esp. 66–75).

Note

- 1 Reading βακχαζόντων (“running riot”), with Lloyd-Jones and Wilson, rather than κακχαζόντων (“mocking”), preferred by Garvie and others.

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Oedipus Tyrannus

Vayos Liapis

I Introduction

If Oedipus and the notorious complex that goes by his name have been household tags for the better part of the twentieth century, this is due not so much to the influence of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (henceforth *OT*), but rather to the use Sigmund Freud made of the play and of the Oedipus myth in his *Interpretation of Dreams* (see e.g. Freud 1999: 201–3; see further Rudnytsky 1987). Whatever one's stance toward Freudian psycho-poetics, the fact remains that Freud's reading of the Oedipus myth and of the *OT* has indelibly tinged our perception of both. From modern dramatists such as Thornton Wilder (Wilder 2007: 716) to classical scholars such as Roger Dawe (Dawe 2006: 2–3), readers have repeatedly felt that the universal appeal of Oedipus' story, despite the highly exceptional nature of the hero's circumstances, must derive from deep-seated, unconscious impulses common to all humankind. This seems to be confirmed by the occurrence of Oedipal motifs in myths of peoples living thousands of miles apart (see e.g. Edmunds 1985; Edmunds and Dundes 1995; Johnson and Price-Williams 1996). One might counter, of course, that those who find themselves fascinated by Clytemnestra do not necessarily nurture murderous designs against their husbands. Moreover, as Cameron observes, the Freudian model does not explain why, say, Voltaire's *Cedipe* fails to produce even a fraction of the emotional impact of Sophocles' play (Cameron 1968: ix). At any rate, I need not say more on the topic, since it is treated in detail in Armstrong's and Buchan's contributions in this volume. For an intelligent attack against facile Freud-bashing one will also want to read Lear (1998: 33–55); for a post-Freudian approach, see Ormand (1999: 124–38). My own concern here is rather to peel off the accumulated layers of modern interpretations and to concentrate on the play's remarkable plot construction, on its masterly use of dramatic irony, on its treatment of the epistemological gap between man and god, and on the mechanics of Oedipus' downfall. The reader is advised that what follows presupposes a familiarity with the plot of *OT*.

2 What's in a Name? *OT* and Ancient Audiences

Our evidence suggests that *OT* was intensely admired in antiquity. Aristotle (*Poetics* 11.1452^a22–6, 29–33) singles it out for its exemplary *peripeteia* (the sudden and unexpected reversal of Oedipus' fortunes), commends its *anagnorisis* ("recognition," or the realization of Oedipus' identity) for resulting naturally from the premises of the plot (*Po.* 16.1455^a16–18), and praises its deft combination of *anagnorisis* with *peripeteia* (the reversal of Oedipus' fortunes coincides with his realization that he is son of Laius and Jocasta). Such was Aristotle's admiration for the play that he was even prepared to condone its (minor) dramaturgical flaws, and indeed to praise Sophocles for adroitly sweeping such blemishes under the carpet (*Po.* 15.1454^b7, 24.1460^a29–30).

In spite of *OT*'s status in antiquity, very little factual information about it has trickled down to us. For instance, we do not know the titles of the other three plays together with which it must have been produced, to make up the requisite tetralogy. We are also in the dark regarding the date of its production. Developing a line of thought initiated by Musgrave, Knox argued for the Dionysia of 425 BCE on the basis of alleged echoes of, or allusions to, the Athenian plague (Musgrave 1800: 237 (*ad S. OT* 25), Knox 1979: 112–24). For instance, unlike most blights in literature, which affect crops and livestock only, the plague in *OT* attacks humans too (ll. 27–30, 54–7); also, the plague is envisaged, untypically, as an assault by Ares (ll. 190–2), which according to Knox would have made sense only in the war-torn, plague-infested Athens of the early to mid-420s. Although Knox's thesis has been recently defended with new and sensitive argumentation (Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 56–66), it is specious. First, the archetypical plague at *Iliad* 1.50–2 eventually spreads to humans too (cf. Jouanna 2007: 42 with nn. 77–8). Second, the plague's association with Ares in *OT*, far from suggesting a war-time context – this particular Ares is, after all, ἄχρακος ἀσπίδων (ll. 191), "denuded of his (usual) bronze shield" – merely reflects the common Greek belief that diseases are the work of supernatural agents assaulting the human body (cf. the Hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease* 1). For criticisms against Knox one should also consult Müller, who dates the play in 433 BCE (Müller 1984: 32–8).

Scraps of evidence found in late sources preserve the startling information that Sophocles was defeated, presumably in the Great Dionysia contest, by a certain Philocles; these sources are, notably, the Peripatetic scholar Dicaearchus (fr. 80 Wehrli = 101 Mirhady) and the second-century CE orator Aelius Aristides (*Oration* 46, p. 334 Dindorf), conveniently cited in *Tragicorum graecorum fragmenta* (*TrGF*1, 24 (Philocles) T 3a–b = *TrGF* 4 (Sophocles) test. 39–40 Radt). Surprising as the verdict may be, one should be loath to put it down to mere incompetence on the judges' part (see Revermann 2006): it probably resulted from the quirks of the voting system at the dramatic competitions (Marshall and van Willigenburg 2004: esp. 100–2). At any rate, the fact remains that the place of *OT* in the history of literature has been practically unchallenged for centuries.

Sophocles wrote for an audience already familiar with the major tragic myths, including the story of Oedipus. Antiphanes, a fourth-century BCE comic author, states (fr. 189 Kassel–Austin) that the Oedipus myth was so well known that tragic poets only had to drop Oedipus' name for the audience to figure out the rest of the plot. In roughly the same period, Aristotle (*Po.* 13.1453^a17–22) remarked that, in the past, dramatic poets used to choose their subject matter more or less at random from a wider range of myths,

whereas “now the best tragedies are those that concern a few households (*oikiai*),” including Oedipus’ own. Of course, both Antiphanes and Aristotle reflect fourth-century circumstances, but there is no reason to believe that fifth-century audiences were less familiar with the Oedipus myth. Episodes from Oedipus’ life – especially his encounter with the Sphinx – are depicted in Greek art from at least as early as 470 BCE, and there are no less than 22 surviving specimens from c. 470 to 440 BCE (see *LIMC* VII.1, pp. 3–9, nos. 3, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 22, 23, 39, 44, 45, 49, 50, 52, 53, 75, 76, 82, 83).

3 Dramatic Technique (I): The Teiresias Scene

Imagine, then, Sophocles’ predicament. However skilled and innovative an author, he was still constrained to base his Oedipus play on a myth whose essentials (parricide, incest, final revelation, and possibly self-blinding) were already known, at least in their broadest outlines, to his audience. How was he to hold the audience’s attention and interest? Sophocles solved the problem with a masterful stroke, thereby turning a potential handicap into an advantage: rather than pretend that his audience knew nothing about Oedipus’ crimes, he boldly chose to give the game away almost at the outset of the play. Whereas detective stories generally do not reveal the culprit before the last few pages, in *OT* we hear the offender’s name, the exact nature of his crime, and even the manner of his eventual punishment, as early as 350ff., and with greater precision in lines 449–62, from the mouth of no less an authority than the seer Teiresias:

TEIRESIAS: This man you have been looking for, issuing threats and proclamations about the murder of Laius – this man is here. Although said to be an immigrant, he will turn out to be a native Theban, but he won’t be any happier for it. A blind man who once had sight, and a beggar who once was rich, he will fare over foreign soil, exploring the ground before him with a stick. And he will turn out to be both brother and father to his own children, both son and husband to his own mother, both wife-sharer and murderer of his father. Now go inside and consider what I’ve just told you. And if you catch me out in misstatement, you can say that I know nothing about divination. (*OT* 449–62)

It is important to note that, with Teiresias’ warnings, the episode is concluded. At this point both the seer and Oedipus must exit, the latter without being given a final speech, as is customary in tragedy for principal characters (see Taplin 1977: 205, 309–10). This deviation from standard tragic practice ensures that audience attention is not distracted from Teiresias’ ominous speech of departure (see Poe 1993: 378–80).

By revealing the essentials of his plot right away, Sophocles achieves a twofold objective. First, he dispenses with the futile task of concealing crucial plot details that most spectators must have been already aware of (see § 2 above). Indeed, by summarily disposing of a dramatic device of dubious effectiveness (the delayed revelation of Oedipus’ guilt), he gives himself sufficient leeway to set the stage for a much more intricate plot and for a truly astounding *dénouement* (see below). At the same time he is filling in the audience on details of the plot that may not have been canonical at the time, such as Oedipus’ future blindness and exile (Edmunds 2000: 41–3). Further, Sophocles beats the audience at its own game, as it were, by managing to astonish it when it least expects it – at the beginning of the play, when the plot has barely been set in motion.

Let us move back toward the beginning of the Teiresias scene. When the seer first hints at the horrible truth concerning Oedipus, the king's reaction is a violent one: he flies into a rage and accuses the seer of conspiring against him, in collusion with Creon. This has seemed perplexing to a number of critics, at least as early as Voltaire (Voltaire 1719: 85–6): how are we to explain Oedipus' failure to take the seer's revelations to heart? Not only is Teiresias the mouthpiece of the gods; Oedipus himself is all too well aware of the possibility that he might commit parricide and incest, since he was apprized of it already as a young man (*OT* 789–93). Worse still, he knows full well that he has actually killed a man old enough to be his father (ll. 798–816). As we saw in the passage quoted above (p. 86), Teiresias uses the third person singular with reference to the guilty party, and this has suggested to some (notably Knox 1980) that Oedipus has left the stage in a fury, and so cannot hear the accusations. This is an absurdity, for, if Oedipus is no longer on stage, Teiresias' revelations are pointless: they can be meant neither for the chorus, whose members remain unconvinced (ll. 483–512), nor for the audience, who do not, of course, need to be reminded of Oedipus' true identity. More importantly perhaps, having Oedipus exit before Teiresias' final revelation would involve the indecorous spectacle of a blind man prefacing his tirade with a second-person address to an absent interlocutor (ll. 447–50: “without fear for *you*; for *you* cannot destroy me; and I'm telling *you*: the man *you* have been looking for [...]”).

A more popular solution has been to assume that Oedipus remains on stage but is too absorbed in his angry thoughts to pay any attention to Teiresias (Kirkwood 1958: 129), or that he is simply too self-deluded or intellectually blind to credit the seer's accusations (e.g. Lefèvre 1987: 41 with n. 18; 2001: 123). There may have been ways of rendering Oedipus' anger or self-absorption visually, and the multiple verbal references to his anger may have been intended to bolster the enactment of his emotions on stage (Edmunds 2000: 44–6). Nonetheless, at *OT* 747 Oedipus turns out to be very much aware of Teiresias' accusations: those spectators, if any, who may have been tempted to assume that Oedipus wasn't really paying attention to Teiresias will have been forced to reconsider soon enough. More importantly perhaps, this solution relies entirely on unwarranted psychologizing assumptions. Sophocles' Oedipus can only have such emotions and motives as his creator sees fit to give him; he cannot have independent inner thoughts or feelings, as a real flesh-and-blood person might; his mental or psychological states have to be made explicit instead of being left to be worked out by the audience. (For a much more sensitive approach to the problem, see Bain 1979, esp. 136–44.)

Upon closer inspection, one realizes that Oedipus' reaction is not only plausible, but indeed the only possible one under the circumstances. Unless the play is to come to an abrupt halt – unless, that is, Oedipus is to give in to Teiresias' admonitions and to go into exile or offer himself up for execution – the seer's warnings must be resisted. Indeed, by refusing to credit Teiresias, Oedipus paves the way for the next episode (ll. 513ff.), in which the suspicion of conspiracy voiced at 380–403 will be given full expression: the seer's accusations are merely part of a plot, Oedipus will claim, one hatched in collusion with Creon, to dethrone the rightful monarch and to seize royal power. Unsurprisingly, Creon will deny the allegations, and as a result the two men will become involved in a heated altercation, thereby causing Jocasta to intervene. Now, Jocasta's intervention is crucial to the plot, because by attempting to prove to Oedipus that divination and prophecies, and therefore Teiresias' revelations, are not to be trusted she will go into how Laius once received an oracle that never came true. Strictly speaking, neither Oedipus nor anyone else in the play had until that moment considered the possibility that Teiresias'

claims might be true, and so Jocasta's demonstration is superfluous; but this small inconsistency is a price Sophocles is willing to pay to move the plot forward (Ormand 1999: 144; Dawe 2006: 11–12). Her casual mention of Laius' death at a crossroads will trigger in Oedipus memories of a murder he himself committed at a crossroads a long time ago.

The "infernal machine" that will ultimately lead to Oedipus' catastrophe is set in motion precisely at the moment when Oedipus chooses angrily to disregard Teiresias' warnings – warnings that, as we shall now see, are all too easy to disregard, because they have been deliberately made to sound absurd. Significantly, the chorus reacts to Teiresias' revelations with horrified disbelief (ll. 483–511), and even goes as far as to doubt the validity of oracular knowledge as communicated through human agents (ll. 499–506). Sophocles has been careful enough to insinuate, by means of subtle but unmistakable touches, that no sensible person should have cause to suspect Oedipus, despite Teiresias' claims. As early as line 105 we are told that Oedipus never laid eyes on Laius (or so he believes). On at least two occasions (ll. 35–9, 391–8) we are reminded that, when the Sphinx was decimating the Theban population, it was Oedipus' intervention that rescued the city, *not* Teiresias', mouthpiece of the gods that he claims to be. Moreover, the crucial events of Oedipus' life (the encounter with Laius at the crossroads, his incestuous marriage to his mother) have not yet been spelled out at the moment when Teiresias confronts Oedipus, and so Teiresias' allusions to them can only come across to the king as outrageous fabrications. The implication is clear enough: it would be absurd to suspect the savior of Thebes of causing its destruction through the plague; by contrast, one has every reason to suspect that Teiresias' mantic revelations are but a sham. After all, as Oedipus compellingly argues during the altercation with Creon (ll. 562–8), it is simply unbelievable that Teiresias should have waited so long to reveal the person responsible, rather than pointing him out at the time of Laius' murder, when inquiries were in the dark.

For the time being Oedipus seems to carry the day by deploying his unsurpassable skills of ratiocination: Teiresias' accusations rest only on his (doubtful) authority as Apollo's mouthpiece, whereas Oedipus' counter-arguments are backed by seemingly irrefutable evidence – although we know that his impeccable logic leads him to all the wrong conclusions (cf. Garvie 2005: 46). Thus, Oedipus' guilt, rather like E. A. Poe's purloined letter, lies "hidden in plain view," since everyone (save Teiresias) fails to see the obvious.

4 Dramatic Technique (II): The Two Shepherds

Another dramaturgical conundrum Sophocles had to face was the precise manner in which Oedipus' true identity was to come to light. If the king is to ignore the seer's warnings, it is – as we saw in the previous section – for a good reason: the sleuth must discover, to his utter astonishment and dismay, that he is himself the murderer he has been looking for. For this kind of plot to work, external testimony is of the essence. This is supplied by two lowly characters: two shepherds who, in a feat of Sophoclean irony, turn out to have had a much larger share in determining their own monarch's fate than their social status might possibly warrant.

If Oedipus is to be proven guilty of regicide, no more than a single witness is required: one who will identify him as the man who attacked and murdered Laius and his retinue at the fateful encounter at the crossroads – let us call him Witness A. Oedipus' guilt or

exculpation hinges on whether this sole survivor will stick to the earlier version of his story, according to which Laius and his retinue were attacked by “several” marauders: for Oedipus was alone at the crossroads. Further, in order for Oedipus to be proved guilty of parricide and incest, a minimum of two witnesses is required: one who will testify that the infant once left by Laius to die has survived (Witness B), and another who will confirm that the infant in question was given for adoption to the royal couple of Corinth and is therefore Oedipus himself (Witness C). Neither witness can possibly know the whole story about Oedipus, which is why their *combined* testimonies are required for the jigsaw puzzle of his identity and past actions to be pieced together.

Thus, for Oedipus’ guilt to be established to its full extent (regicide, parricide, incest), a minimum of three witnesses seems to be required. In a masterly stroke of dramaturgical thriftiness, Sophocles has fused Witnesses A and B into a single person, so that the Theban shepherd who was ordered to leave the baby Oedipus to die turns out to be also the sole survivor from the scuffle at the crossroads. True, for this to work, dramatic plausibility has to be compromised, because Oedipus, who becomes aware of this survivor’s existence quite early in the play (see ll. 118–19), fails to summon him immediately, despite the admirable diligence he otherwise shows in investigating the murder of Laius: for by doing so he would simply have given the game away before he even got it going (cf. already Voltaire 1719: 84–5 and, more recently, Dawe 2006: 7). Nonetheless, Oedipus’ delay is consistent with the difference in dramatic pace between the first, rather slow phase of the action, in which relatively little happens to advance the plot, and the second, very rapid phase, which kicks off with the arrival of the Corinthian Messenger. As for Witness C, he turns out to be not only the Corinthian shepherd who presented the baby Oedipus to his city’s royal couple, but also the Messenger charged with the mission to announce to Oedipus that he is to be the next king of Corinth, following the death of his presumed father Polybus.

This fusion of roles has not only mere dramaturgical economy to recommend it; it is also a powerful *coup de théâtre*, which makes visible the underlying terms of Oedipus’ situation. As Schechner and Knox saw, Oedipus is at first a parvenu to the throne of Thebes (Schechner 1965: 242–4; Knox 1979: 89, 96); still, as he is also (ostensibly) the son of the king of Corinth: his ancestry gives him pride and justifies his position. When the Corinthian Messenger reveals that Oedipus is in actuality only an adopted son to Polybus, Oedipus loses his birthright. This is reflected in his unintentionally ironical words to Jocasta (ll. 1062–3): “Even if I turn out to be three times a slave born of three generations of slaves, there is no way for you to be proved low-born.” The irony is that fate will all too soon make it up to Oedipus for his loss of royal privilege by furnishing him with another birthright, one he will be none too pleased to obtain (cf. Teiresias’ warning at ll. 452–4): he turns out to be the biological son of Laius and Jocasta, and thus a native Theban and the rightful heir to the throne of Thebes – but only at the dear price of being proved guilty of both parricide and incest. Even more paradoxically, by insisting that he must know the truth about his identity, Oedipus finds that he must abdicate the throne he has just proved himself a rightful heir to: as soon as his claim to royal succession by blood is established, it is immediately invalidated, and Oedipus turns out to be both a king and a pauper at the same time. “In the remarkable inversion of this drama, then, legitimacy is a bigger problem than illegitimacy” (Ormand 1999: 134). This is a tragic quandary if there ever was one, and indeed a masterly example of a glorious and fortunate person tumbling into bad fortune, which Aristotle (*Po.* 13.1453^a7–12) saw as being the essence of good tragedy.

5 The One and the Many: The Collapse of Dichotomies in *OT*

We have just seen how the two shepherds are given twofold dramatic functions; but this duplication of roles is only one among several such duplications in the course of the play, most of which are both more striking and more significant.

Relatively early in the play (ll. 447–62), Teiresias describes how Oedipus' past deeds have caused fundamental dichotomies to collapse, principally within his immediate family. In exogamous societies each family member is allowed, with few exceptions, to have one and only one kind of relationship (“value”) with each one of the other members of the system; for example, if X is father to Y, he cannot also be Y's brother at the same time. However, Oedipus has anomalously acquired a double “value” in relation to each and every member of his family: for he is both a father and a brother to his own children/siblings (ll. 457–8; see 424–5); both a son and a husband to his mother/wife (ll. 458–9); finally, he is both issued from (i.e. structurally subsequent to) his father and structurally identical with him qua being Jocasta's husband and father of her children (ll. 459–60; see 260–2).

The distinctions that hold families together even by keeping their members appropriately apart are far from being the only ones that Oedipus has unwittingly confounded. The confusion extends to the most fundamental, even elementary, constituents of human reason, namely numbers – and especially to the self-evident bipolar distinction between the *one* and the *many*. This is especially well exemplified in the notorious ambiguity surrounding the question of the exact number of the person(s) who killed Laius – a question that remains unsettled until the play's final scenes. It is both ironical and significant that Oedipus' future should depend on elementary mathematics (Knox 1957: 151 with n. 141, 154 with n. 148; Dawe 2006: *ad* 845), but even elementary mathematics seems strangely unserviceable: the killer appears to be, paradoxically, both “one” and “many,” because Sophocles has the same character use the singular in one passage, the plural in the next (see Dawe 2006: 7).

This constant shift from singular to plural and vice-versa is much more than a dramatic trick allowing the playwright to sustain audience uncertainty right through to the *dénouement*: for in Oedipus' case “one” does literally become “many” (see Segal 1981: 214–16 with n. 21 and 2001: 91). The flashback on Oedipus' supposed origins at *OT* 771ff. plays up precisely the paradoxical tension between “one” and “many” in his identity: as Oedipus can never allay the doubts about his ancestry caused by a drunkard's remark (ll. 780, 785–6), he can never be sure whether he really is who he thought he was or whether he is someone else. Thus, his formerly single identity now splits into a double identity – or two alternative identities, both of which are (to Oedipus' mind) equally false and equally true. So, again, Oedipus can be both “one” and “many” – which means that he actually belongs to neither category. Ironically, when his painstaking rational investigation leads him to establish, at last, a *single* identity (he discovers that he is beyond doubt the son of Laius and Jocasta), the mind-boggling vacillation between the “one” and the “many” does not end. For, as soon as the new single identity emerges out of the previous double identity confusion, it becomes clear that this single identity is in fact constituted by a series of *dédoublements* of roles, or double “values”: husband *and* son to his mother, father *and* brother to his children, and so on (Ormand 1999: 131–8). A paradigmatically rational procedure, the investigation of Laius' murder, causes the very foundations of human logic – such as the simple assumption that “one” cannot be “many” – to collapse into chaotic disarray.

6 Nothing Is as It Seems: Dramatic Irony in *OT*

Dramatic irony arises from a disparity between what the characters say and the true meaning and application of what they say. Such disparity is by definition beyond the characters' grasp and accessible only to the audience, whose bird's eye view of the plot allows its members to know what lies in store for the characters on stage. To apply a famous Hitchcockian distinction, dramatic irony creates suspense rather than surprise, precisely because the audience is perfectly aware of all the facts involved (see Truffaut 1984: 72–3, 243–4) and awaits the *dénouement* in suspenseful anticipation.

Although it can be used in other literary genres, dramatic irony is a quintessentially theatrical mode: tragic narrative is necessarily fragmented, or refracted through the characters' various viewpoints; plays usually provide no single, unifying viewpoint, comparable to that of the epic "omniscient narrator." Thanks to this very fragmentation, dramatic characters (unless they are gods) tend to have a more limited range of vision than their respective audiences, and this is the necessary precondition for dramatic irony to obtain. The device is used in many Greek plays, but it is the *OT* that makes truly masterly use of it.

Appositely enough, *OT* is rife with reminders of Oedipus' fundamental ignorance of his condition. Thus, when near the play's outset Oedipus says that he knows of Laius only from hearsay and that he has never laid eyes on him (l.105), this is bound to send chills of horrified relish up the spectators' spines, because it reminds them that Oedipus has in fact seen Laius, if only when he murdered him (on ancient audiences' familiarity with the Oedipus myth, see § 2 above). The same goes for Oedipus' insistence that he is a complete stranger to Laius' murder (ll. 219–20), or for his statement that, by launching an investigation into the circumstances of the former king's death, he will be doing a favor, "not to some distant relative," but to himself (ll. 137–41); in the latter case, the irony is doubly poignant, because we know that Laius was anything but a distant relative to Oedipus, and also that Oedipus will not be doing himself a favor by bringing his own guilt to light. Admittedly, dramatic irony in *OT* may at times get somewhat heavy-handed, at least for later tastes – as is attested by the ancient *scholia* to *OT* 264, where Oedipus proclaims that he will vindicate the dead king "as if he were his own father." "Such ideas," say the *scholia*, "do not make for solemnity [οὐκ ἔχονται μὲν τοῦ σεμνοῦ], but can cause a stir in the theater [κινητικὰ δὲ εἰσὶ τοῦ θεάτρου]. Euripides is full of them, whereas Sophocles uses them only sparingly, in order to excite the theater [πρὸς τὸ κινήσαι τὸ θεάτρον]" (see *TrGF* 4 (Sophocles), test. 130 Radt). Irony aside, however, there is more to this passage than a mere concession to banal tastes: Oedipus is under the impression that he is a parvenu to the throne of Thebes, and is anxious to legitimize his rule by inserting himself into the royal line (see Knox 1979: 88–9; Ormand 1999: 143–4).

In point of fact, the whole scene from which the above passage has been extracted (ll. 223–75) is replete with ironical reminders of Oedipus' pathetically deluded state, of which at this point only the audience (and Teiresias) can be aware. Sophocles devotes no less than 52 lines to detailing the clauses of Oedipus' official and public curse against Laius' murderer and against those who may be sheltering him (on the legal and ritual implications of this curse, see Carawan 1999). On the face of it, Oedipus is merely doing his duty as a good king; but, of course, we know that every single item in the curse list is a nail in the coffin of the central character's presumed innocence. As Oedipus himself realizes at a later stage, if he turns out to be Laius' murderer, then he will have heaped all those horrendous curses on no one else but himself (ll. 819–20).

This scene may strike modern audiences as unduly protracted, overwrought, and even tedious; but it is indispensable insofar as it encapsulates in a relatively few lines the central paradox of the play: Oedipus is at the same time both sleuth and offender, both perpetrator and victim of his own past acts and present delusion, both guarantor of his subjects' well-being and responsible for the ritual and physical pollution decimating his dominion.

Still, the persistent recurrence of dramatic irony in *OT* has implications reaching further than we may perhaps realize at first sight. At the beginning of this section we defined dramatic irony as a disparity; and it should be stressed again that this disparity is essentially of an epistemological order, since it is based on the audience's superior knowledge (imparted by the dramatist or ensured by the audience's general familiarity with myth) of the characters' fate. One may safely assume that the proliferation of dramatic irony in *OT* must have caused many a member of the original audience – or of modern audiences, for that matter – to look down pityingly on hapless Oedipus from the vantage point of their epistemological superiority (their bird's eye view, as we called it above). To quote Garvie (2005: 45), the audience “is, as it were, in the position of the gods themselves.” Indeed, this sense of superiority is necessary, among other things, for the audience to feel *eleos*, pity, for the tragic hero – *eleos* being one of the fundamental emotions tragedy is supposed to induce in spectators according to Aristotle (*Po.* 5.1449^b27, 13.1453^a3–7). But any member of the audience who might be tempted to acquiesce or, worse, to exult in the deceptive, temporary omniscience granted him in relation to Oedipus will soon have his presumption tempered by a sobering thought: “Woe, generations of mortals,” sings the chorus as Oedipus is about to complete his headlong rush towards catastrophe, “how I reckon your lives as equal to nothingness” (ll. 1186–8). In other words, if Oedipus, one of the finest specimens of human intelligence, is crushed as a result of his confrontation with the infinitely superior knowledge of the gods, then *a fortiori* the common mortals in the audience, far from seeking false reassurance in the artificial omniscience they enjoyed within the all-too-limited confines of a play, should realize that Oedipus' epistemological inferiority in relation to them is analogous to their own epistemological inferiority in relation to those forces that surpass human reason and are not subject to human control. Those who may be tempted to see dramatic irony in *OT* merely as a source of transient theatrical thrill or, worse, as a source of comfort for their own seemingly sheltered lives would do well to remember that their lives, too, are subject to the same vagaries of fate and to the same caprices of the gods as Oedipus' was. This realization is bound to be accompanied by an onslaught of the other quintessentially tragic emotion, namely *phobos*, horror – which, as Aristotle implies (*Po.* 13.1453^a5–6), is stirred by the spectacle of “people like us” suffering. Thus, rather than segregating itself from the real world, theater serves – thanks, among other things, to dramatic irony – as a metaphor or a miniature for it.

7 “You Mean My Whole *Fallacy* Is Wrong?” Human Rationality and Divine Knowledge in *OT*

Probably the single most important driving force in *OT* is the clash between, on the one hand, the rational modes of thought employed by most humans and, on the other, the kind of supra-human knowledge acquired when divine vision is conferred upon a

privileged human agent (see further Ugolini 1987: 24–6). When Oedipus learns from the Delphic oracle that he is destined to murder his father and to commit incest with his mother, he immediately sets out to thwart destiny by avoiding Corinth – his putative birthplace, where his supposed parents live – and to seek his fortune elsewhere (ll. 787–99). Ironically, it is his very attempt to frustrate the prophecy that brings about its fulfillment; for it is by avoiding Corinth that he chances on Laius' *cortège* and kills him; and it is his desire to be as far away from his presumed birthplace that brings him eventually to Thebes, his true birthplace, where he ends up marrying his own mother.

This pattern, whereby Oedipus fulfills the designs of destiny even as he makes every effort to thwart them, is repeated several times in *OT*. His confrontation with Teiresias – the prophet who may be blind but “sees the same things as Apollo” (ll. 284–5) – is a prime example of the pattern (on Oedipus' and Teiresias' competing claims to knowledge, see further Edmunds 2000: 48–60). Faced with Teiresias' stunning claims (“you are the cause of the plague that is destroying Thebes!”), Oedipus strikes back with what seems an unassailable argument: it was his own intelligence, not Teiresias' mantic art, that saved Thebes from the Sphinx (ll. 390–6); if Teiresias proved himself ineffectual on that occasion, why should anyone credit his present revelations? However, as the audience already knows and as Teiresias insinuates (l. 442), it was precisely that triumph of Oedipus' superior intelligence that ultimately led to the present quandary; for it was his victory over the Sphinx that assured him, as a reward promised by the city, both the throne of Thebes and a place in his own mother's nuptial bed.

The disastrous outcome of this earlier attempt to foil destiny certainly does not bode well for Oedipus' dogged opposition to Teiresias' warnings in the play. The ominous parallelism between the two situations is cleverly brought out by one of Sophocles' subtle verbal legerdemains. Teiresias' prophecies come across as *riddles* (l. 439: “everything you say is always so riddling [ἀίνικτά] and unclear!”), which Oedipus is conspicuously unable to solve, thus failing to live up even to his partial and illusory success in outwitting the Sphinx by solving its riddle. Conversely, the Sphinx's riddle is referred to in terms of an *oracle* (at ll. 1199–200 the Sphinx is “the virgin of crooked talons, singer of oracles,” *χρησιμφοδόν*). To quote Segal (1981: 238): “Riddle and oracle come increasingly to look like mirror images of one another” (see also Segal 2001: 80–1).

The verbal mirroring of oracle/prophecy and riddle is highly significant. In both cases Oedipus pitches his exceptional intelligence against the overwhelmingly superior knowledge represented by the riddle of the Sphinx or by the prophecies of Teiresias. In both cases, his boldness in confronting a surpassing epistemological order boomerangs on him. In the past, as we saw, he consistently tried to forestall the Delphic predictions by deploying his intellectual resources in full, but all he has managed is to bring those predictions to pass, down to the last detail. In the present moment, likewise, Oedipus shows himself obstinately keen on proving Teiresias wrong; but, even as his anti-divinatory zeal receives welcome support from Jocasta's illustrative story on the falsity of oracles and prophecies, the tables are turned on him in a spectacularly ironic way, since Jocasta's chance mention of Laius' murder at a crossroads starts Oedipus on a fatal course that will eventually show him guilty of crimes far worse than regicide. Thus, the end of Oedipus' career replicates the circumstances of its beginning: both as a young upstart and as the middle-aged king of Thebes, Oedipus is determined to prove the oracles wrong, all the while ensuring their fulfillment, albeit unwittingly.

8 Oedipus' Downfall: Who Is to Blame?

In one sense, the question admits of a very simple, one-word answer: "Apollo." Indeed, Oedipus himself says as much at 1329–30: "it was Apollo, my friends, Apollo who brought about these terrible woes of mine." Even at the performative level, Apollo's presence is signaled clearly already at the outset: "within one hundred lines of the opening Creon arrives from the god's temple at Delphi, followed presently by his priest Teiresias" (Wilder 2007: 712); moreover, the altar of Apollo, which would have been a prominent stage object, "serves throughout the play as a constant, permanent reminder of the presence of the god" (Griffith 1996: 17, who has also shown (59–69) that *OT* is permeated by references to Apollo's overarching design). However, this is a long way from explaining *why* Apollo or "the gods" should care to heap those woes upon Oedipus and his family.

Unsurprisingly, Sophocles' reticence as to the reasons for Oedipus' downfall has engendered speculation (sometimes of the wildest sort) among scholars. As Lurie shows, Renaissance and later students of the play have generally sought to "justify the ways of God to man" – to quote Dodds' Miltonian formula – by arguing that Oedipus gets his just deserts for his moral defects (Dodds 1966: 37; Lurie 2004: 1–225). This view of the play is both hopelessly reductive and irremediably tinted by Christian moralism. As Dodds argues, Greek gods do not necessarily operate on the same moral standards as humans, and even less so on the moral standards that we, as a (post-)Christian society, set to ourselves (1966: 47). It is true that Oedipus is prone to rash anger, and it is true that he "thinks big" – especially insofar as he has shown himself, on at least one occasion, to be of a higher intellect than Thebes' official seer – and even believes (thanks also to Jocasta's abetment) to have outwitted the oracle of Delphi. There is no question that one will find many more flaws in Oedipus' character or moral outlook if one keeps a sharp lookout for them. However, as Garvie remarks, it would be hard to reconcile the notion that Oedipus is punished for, say, his intellectual pride with the fact that his crimes were foretold before his birth (2005: 51). If Sophocles wanted us to see in Oedipus an exemplum of defective morality getting its just deserts, then he failed signally to indicate his intention.

Just as there are those willing to read into *OT* moral considerations that are alien to its conception, so there are those who seek to outwit Oedipus by arguing that his downfall is the outcome of his own intellectual shortcomings. A case in point is R. Drew Griffith, who has suggested that, since Oedipus had been warned of future parricide and incest, he should have known better than to attack a middle-aged man who could have been his natural father or to marry a middle-aged woman who might well have been his mother (Griffith 1996: 45–58, esp. 51–5; see also Carawan 1999). But this is to miss the point completely. To argue that Oedipus *could* or, worse, *should* have prevented the coincidences that led to his downfall is to divest *OT* of its power to thrill and shock by exploiting precisely a number of "slight and easily preventable coincidences" (Wilder 2007: 712). More crucially, Oedipus' rise to greatness is inextricably intertwined with his parricide and incest: if Oedipus had refrained from killing Laius, we would no doubt find his restraint commendable, but then the throne of Thebes would not have been vacated just in time for him to occupy it. And, since the only way for Oedipus to ascend to the throne was by marrying the queen dowager, it follows that the road to royal power must pass through incest. Thus, Griffith's prudent, circumspect Oedipus comes at a rather heavy price: Oedipus he may still be, but he is no longer Oedipus the king.

A more promising approach is that taken, with typical learning and ingenuity, by Knox (Knox 1989: 45–60, esp. 57). According to Knox, *OT* evades the question of Oedipus' responsibility or lack thereof (a question that, by contrast, occupies a central place in *Oedipus at Colonus*); the parricide and incest were predestined, and Oedipus could hardly have avoided fulfilling the oracle. What he *can* avoid, but does not, is the bringing to light of his own past crimes; this is where his true greatness lies. All of this is shrewdly argued, and it is true that *OT* does not *explicitly* ask the question whether Oedipus was free to avoid parricide and incest or not, or whether he can be held responsible for doing so, given that he acted in ignorance. Still, as is cogently demonstrated by David Kovacs, the play contains sufficient evidence on the mechanics of Oedipus' downfall (Kovacs 2009); if properly pieced together, this evidence casts the question of Oedipus' responsibility in a wholly new light. Kovacs invites us to look at the play through the prism of a chess analogy, comparable perhaps to the sinister chess game between Death and the Knight in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. Suppose that Oedipus is a competent chess player matched against a grand master – Apollo. All of Oedipus' moves in this game are freely chosen, and no one, not even Apollo, can predetermine the hero's next move. Yet grand master Apollo can beat Oedipus easily; indeed, he can confidently predict the result of the match beforehand, insofar as he is able to lead the play in the direction he wants without his opponent (Oedipus) being able to guard against such an eventuality. To put it less figuratively, Apollo's prophecy is of the self-fulfilling kind, in that it engineers both Oedipus' estrangement from his natural parents and his fatal encounter with Laius at the crossroads; to do so, Apollo need only withhold information from Oedipus when he wants it and supply it where it will be most misleading.

Let us have a closer look at Apollo's chess-playing tactics. For one thing, by letting Laius know that his as yet unborn son would one day kill his father and sleep with his mother, Apollo makes sure that Laius will try to dispose of the baby Oedipus as soon as possible, thereby actually bringing about, in the fullness of time, the oracle's predictions. For if Oedipus had been raised as the son of Laius and Jocasta that he really was, it would have been unlikely that he would grow up to commit the heinous crimes prophesied (or engineered) by the god. For another, when Oedipus goes to consult the Delphic oracle about his true parentage, Apollo, as we are explicitly told, withholds the crucial information from him and prefers to inform him, quite gratuitously, that he is destined to kill his father and sleep with his mother (ll. 787–93). Again, Apollo's prophecy is calculated to bring about its own fulfillment: despite his doubts, Oedipus still thinks himself son of Polybus and Merope, and so it is not hard to foresee that he will react to the oracle by fleeing Corinth and his presumed parents and by taking the road to Thebes, which is to say to parricide and incest.

From this perspective, it is almost meaningless to ask whether Oedipus' actions are determined by decisions made freely, after weighing a range of available options without the burden of external constraints, or whether they are the result of a sort of Calvinist predestination *avant la lettre* (on this and other interesting questions see, however, the excellent expositions of Gould 1965a, 1965b, and esp. 1966). In principle, Oedipus is free to puzzle out the riddle of his destiny by exercising his superior intelligence, of which he is so proud (see ll. 390–8). In practice, however, this turns out to be impossible, since he is no match for Apollo, who is naturally possessed of an all-encompassing knowledge that no human can ever hope to have access to.

Guide to Further Reading

Dawe 2006 is a good running commentary (though at times overly selective), with a shrewd introduction on dramatic technique; for copious linguistic help Jebb 1893 is still indispensable. Bollack 1990 is a treasure-trove of information, but monstrously long. The best general introduction to *OT* is Segal 2001: forgoing the search for a unique meaning, it deploys a multiplicity of readings and contains an interesting section on reception. Knox 1957 is a classic study, focusing on *OT* as a dramatization of fifth-century political, cultural, and religious discourse. Dodds 1966 dispels many an interpretive fallacy and argues that *OT* presents the gods as inscrutable, beyond human moral standards, but august nonetheless. Cameron 1968 offers a subtle and vigorous analysis of key themes in *OT*, including Oedipus' self-blinding (not treated here). Finally, Kovacs 2009 has excellent remarks on the role of Apollo in manipulating Oedipus' course in life.

Acknowledgment

The author extends his warmest thanks to Professors Douglas Cairns (Edinburgh), Alex Garvie (Glasgow), and David Kovacs (Virginia) for their helpful criticisms. A special debt of gratitude is owed to Kirk Ormand for his assistance and encouragement. Naturally, none of the above is in any way responsible for the use I have made of their advice; all errors of fact or judgment are entirely mine.

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Electra

Francis Dunn

1 *In medias res*

Enter an old man and two adolescents. The old man, we learn, is the Pedagogue of Orestes (sometimes translated as “Tutor”), and the three have just arrived in Mycene with plans to avenge the murder of Orestes’ father, Agamemnon. The Tutor describes their mission and concludes by saying: “It is high time for action!” (ἀλλ’ ἔργων ἀκμή, l. 22). Orestes answers by going over their plans, then prays for success and says: “It’s the deciding moment” (καίρὸς γάρ, l. 75). So we prepare ourselves for a fast-paced drama, one that, like Aeschylus’ play on the same theme, *Libation Bearers*, unfolds swiftly toward its goal.

But now a voice cries out from inside the house. Is it Electra, my long-lost sister, Orestes asks? Never mind, the Pedagogue says, and leads them off stage by the way they came. What is Sophocles doing here? Reunion with Electra would propel the action forward, but now instead things come to a halt.

The stage is empty and the play in effect starts over again as Electra enters, singing a lament in endless sorrow for her father. With this new beginning we not only shift from dialogue to a musical register, but also into a melodramatic mode, as Sophocles borrows from Euripides, for the first time, the device of bringing a character on stage to sing an aria before the chorus enters.

Electra is then joined by the chorus – adult women who have come to console her. They plead with Electra to give up her excessive lamentation, but at each request Electra firmly refuses, and so a gesture of goodwill turns into a musical contest that ends in stalemate.

2 A Problem

The common denominator for all these striking effects is Electra's position as a problem or an obstacle. Her voice interrupts the plans of Orestes and the Pedagogue, and they abruptly leave the stage; her lugubrious aria strikes a melodramatic note unusual for Sophocles, and her stubborn resistance prevents the chorus from comforting her. In the scenes that follow, this pattern continues. The next person to enter is Electra's sister Chrysothemis, who at once exclaims: "What noise is this you are spreading this time in front of the house?" (ll. 328–9) – treating Electra as a nuisance that should be neither seen nor heard. In the following scene Clytemnestra enters and, echoing Chrysothemis, calls out: "You are loitering on the loose again, so it seems!" (l. 516). Thus, the dramatic strokes of the opening scenes not only seize our attention, but also introduce an important theme, which will recur throughout the drama.

3 A Paradox

This play is sometimes labeled "monodrama," because one character dominates it to an extraordinary degree. Electra is on stage for more than 93 percent of the lines (her closest competitor among Sophoclean protagonists is Oedipus, with 87 percent in *Oedipus at Colonus*); she delivers more than 43 percent of them (being matched in this only by Oedipus in *Oedipus the King*); and the sheer quantity of her lyrics is unrivaled (it is not matched even by Hecuba in Euripides' *Trojan Women*). It is therefore hardly surprising that the role has inspired so many memorable performances, from that of Polus in the fourth century BCE (Gell., *NA* 6.5) to those by Fiona Shaw and Zoë Wanamaker at the end of the twentieth. Yet, as noted above, Sophocles contrives to make Electra unwanted, presenting us with the paradox of a towering dramatic persona who interferes with his plot. Two other features of the play either serve to reinforce this paradox or intersect with it, as I show in the following sections.

4 A Play within a Play

Something interesting happens when the three men withdraw at the end of the prologue: with the entrance of Electra, the play does not just resume but in a sense starts over, only in a different mode. The Pedagogue and Orestes have carefully laid their plans for revenge: the old man will pose as a messenger from Phocis bearing the news that Orestes has died in a chariot race at the Pythian Games, and Orestes will bring a funerary urn supposedly holding his own remains. Their plans do not seem to include Electra; and indeed, on hearing her voice, they withdraw off stage, to return only when the time is right. As far as these two are concerned, Electra belongs to the world of the royal house, which is the target of their plot; the Pedagogue and Orestes have rehearsed their respective parts and each one will enter on cue, to ensure that the operation goes as planned. We thus have two different levels of dramatic action: the metadramatic level, which involves the Pedagogue and Orestes – who in a sense stand outside the plot they have devised and are directing it; and the internal level, which involves Clytemnestra, Aegisthus, and the scheme of revenge.

These two levels become progressively less distinct: although Electra seems at first to be one of the targets of the plot, in the central scenes the audience gets to observe her forceful hostility to Clytemnestra, and by the end of the play she has joined with the plotters against her mother and Aegisthus. Yet those moments at which the metatheatrical frame is most pronounced – the end of the prologue, when the Pedagogue and Orestes withdraw; the messenger speech, when the Pedagogue returns to set the scheme in motion; and the recognition scene, in which Orestes likewise returns – are also the very moments that make Electra’s irrelevance to the plan for revenge most conspicuous.

The metatheatrical frame induces what is often termed “alienation” – that is, an awareness in the spectators that they are outside and apart from the dramatic action taking place. A similar effect can also be produced by a sharp departure from tradition, whereby spectators are made aware of the playwright’s novel handling of events. The moment at which Orestes and the Pedagogue leave the stage produces also this second kind of alienation, as the reunion of brother and sister, which forms the crucial first stage of the plot in Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers*, is first hinted at, then abruptly forestalled. A problem that we have described in terms of dramatic action (why does Electra seem to obstruct the plot?) is thus compounded by a metadramatic problem (how will the frame and its subjects come together?) and by a mythographic one (how can Sophocles’ novel version of events be reconciled with the one made canonical by Aeschylus?).

5 A Thematic Problem

The separation of Electra from Orestes is further elaborated by what we might loosely call the drama’s poetic effects. As Thomas Woodard (1964 and 1965) has pointed out, Orestes is associated with action, the public sphere, and civic values, whereas Electra’s world is that of words, of the household, and of family ties. Orestes is rational yet devious; Electra is emotional and direct; Orestes presumes a cosmos that is linear, concrete, and objective; Electra, one that is unchanging, abstract, and subjective. Indeed, the drama’s “fundamental duality” (Woodward 1964: 163) is reflected both in a gendered opposition between male and female and in a conceptual contrast between horizontal and vertical. Charles Segal (1981: 249–91) has added to this list the oppositions between inner and outer, darkness and light, death and life. Whether or not we read into these thematic contrasts the dialectic design of Woodard or the structuralism of Segal, they nevertheless help to articulate Electra’s problematic status.

6 The Dramatic Problem

On the reading I propose, Electra is – at least in one sense – the drama. Every play involves a conflict that must be resolved, and commonly the opening scenes demonstrate the problem and heighten the stakes involved. Aristotle (*Po.* 1455^b24) called this a “binding-together”: *desis*, a term we usually translate as “complication.” In *Electra*, Sophocles has made his protagonist the problem: at issue is not how a conflict among individuals or parties will play out, but what to make of a single overwhelming character. For the conspirators, Electra is a problem because to their urgent, forward-driving scheme her presence is an unwanted distraction; for Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, she is

a problem because her noisy challenge unnerves their attempt to maintain unyielding control; and, finally, for the spectators, Electra is a problem because she single-handedly upstages both the protagonists of the revenge drama and their antagonists, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

7 Some Non-Problems

Electra's role as the central problem of the drama is underscored by the absence of other problems we might expect to find. In Aeschylus, the central problem is matricide: how can Orestes possibly perform such a crime and incur such pollution? The plot is directed almost exclusively toward this problem: the reunion of the siblings makes possible their joint invocation of Agamemnon, who in turn gives power and authority to the task of revenge; Clytemnestra's dream of the snake confirms the necessity of murder as well as its horror; and Orestes' confrontation with his mother stages as explicitly as possible the maternal bond he must violate, as well as (through Pylades) the command of Apollo that drives him on. In Sophocles, by contrast, matricide never rises to the level of a dramatic problem. There is no gathering at Agamemnon's tomb, no dream of blood and violence, no confrontation between mother and son, no last-second hesitation. In *Libation Bearers* the problem of matricide is so overwhelming that, at the end of the play, the resulting pollution is felt in the invisible presence of the Furies; Sophocles' *Electra*, by contrast, ends before the revenge is complete, pre-empting any expression of remorse or intimation of hideous consequences.

We might say that Aeschylus constructed his dramatic problem too well. The moral issue of matricide in *Libation Bearers* is so compelling that some critics assume it must have motivated Sophocles as well. Thus, MacLeod (2001: 30) takes the Delphic utterance in Sophocles as the personal intervention of a divinity (comparable to the threats and warnings he issues to Orestes in *Libation Bearers*, ll. 269–96), while Winnington-Ingram (1980) searches for oblique allusions to the Furies that may suggest the pollution Orestes has incurred. As a result, scholarship on the play has been excessively polarized into positive and negative interpretations: on the one hand, those who argue that Sophocles affirms the justice of the killings (thus March 2001), and, on the other hand, those who maintain that he questions it (thus Kells 1973). I argue instead that Sophocles upstages the social and religious problem of justice (which Euripides turns into an ethical one) with an entirely new problem of his own making.

8 A Problem Ironized

In the opening scenes Electra's very presence is a problem; and, as the drama progresses, the problem she presents is compounded. The two most powerful scenes of the play, the Messenger's speech and the recognition scene, drive Electra's emotions to new heights and at the same time force the spectators to see how misdirected those emotions are. The Pedagogue's speech describing the fictional chariot race and Orestes' supposed death (ll. 680–763) contributes, purely in its rhetorical orientation, to Electra's role as obstacle; it is vastly over-adequate to the end of convincing Clytemnestra and of gaining entrance to the house, and therefore it demands to be understood as directed at Electra.

It focuses attention upon her emotional state, allows her to claim that her reaction is more authentic and appropriate than her mother's, and triggers an emotional outburst at her new loss that is cut short only by the return of Chrysothemis. Yet from beginning to end the spectators are aware that the Pedagogue's report is false, and they are therefore painfully conscious of how inappropriate and unnecessary it is for Electra to monopolize their attention.

Sophocles commonly uses a technique of doubling scenes, and in *Electra* the recognition scene repeats and varies the Messenger's speech, again using the ruse of Orestes' death in order to help a conspirator gain access to the house; and, again, the speech is notable chiefly for its unintended effect upon Electra. In particular, the urn is even less integral to the plot than the description of the chariot race, since it is never used to deceive Clytemnestra and is thus not needed for gaining access to the house; its sole dramatic role is to draw attention to Electra's emotional state and to raise it almost to breaking point. Orestes' presence as the person bearing the ashes maximizes the irony of this scene; we are painfully aware that his sister's emotional ordeal is being wasted on someone who stands alive before her. Only after reaching these new heights is Electra's suffering cut short by the signet ring that Orestes displays as proof of his identity.

A third, earlier scene involves a different kind of irony. On Chrysothemis' return with the happy news that she has found offerings at their father's tomb, Electra first tells her that Orestes is dead and then tries to recruit her sister in a new scheme to murder the usurpers on their own. The spectators are aware, as the characters cannot be, that Electra's plan is not only far-fetched in itself, but also mythographically implausible: for Orestes to return from exile and to find that his sister has killed Aegisthus and Clytemnestra in his absence would both make his home-coming pointless and fundamentally violate the tradition. Although the irony here is less stark, the effect is similar, as it undermines Electra's awesome display of courage and determination.

9 A Noisy Problem

The long-delayed reunion with Orestes promises at last to incorporate Electra into the plot of the drama that bears her name and to turn her from being a problem or an obstacle into an active co-conspirator. But this expectation is quickly defeated: Electra's intense grief turns into equally intense joy, and her cries of happiness now threaten to betray the entire scheme of revenge. The Pedagogue bursts from the house saying: "What absolute dunces! Are you out of your minds?" (ὦ πλεῖστα μῶροι καὶ φρενῶν τετώμενοι, l. 1326). He calls for silence and for action and interrupts Electra just long enough for her to recognize the old household servant, at which point – in another instance of Sophoclean doubling – she breaks out into a second round of joyful exclamations and must again be silenced, this time by Orestes.

Electra does manage to restrain herself and the plot will finally succeed, but none of this ensures her active participation. That she is no longer an obstacle is registered in the staging: Orestes, Pylades, and the Pedagogue now enter the house together to kill Clytemnestra (l. 1383), and in doing so they correct for their abortive departure at the end of the prologue. Yet Electra does not join them. At the end of the prologue she emerged on stage as the men departed to one side, and now, as the men go indoors, she remains outside (Calder 1963).

10 A Marginal Plot

Complementary to Electra's prominence at "center stage" is the marginalization of the scheme of revenge. Yet, given that the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are the sole object of the plot, this is a paradoxical situation, which demands explanation. It may be helpful here to adapt narratological terms to distinguish between the "story" of Orestes' return and revenge and the "action" of Sophocles' dramatization. While the same story is told in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* and in the *Electras* of Sophocles and Euripides, in each drama its details are variously arranged and adapted; thus, the action of Sophocles' play is quite different from that of the others. In narratological terms, I am arguing that Sophocles adapts the story of Orestes in such a way that his revenge against the killers of Agamemnon – which in the dramas of Aeschylus and Euripides is both the chief goal of his return and the central event of the drama – is, paradoxically, marginal to the action of *Electra*.

For example, the stage is first occupied in the prologue by the Pedagogue, Orestes, and the silent Pylades; they review their plans and the Pedagogue announces that action is at hand; but on hearing Electra's voice the conspirators withdraw and remain off stage for almost six hundred lines. Eventually the Pedagogue re-enters with the report of Orestes' death, only to depart into the house, where he then remains for more than five hundred lines. Orestes, meanwhile, after waiting in the wings for over a thousand lines, enters with the urn of ashes and then, after the recognition scene, also goes inside. Thus, just as Electra dominates the play, the conspirators are generally nowhere to be seen.

The actual murders take place off stage, in accordance with tragic convention and in partial imitation of Aeschylus. Clytemnestra in her death-agony cries out twice from inside the house, just as Agamemnon did in the *Oresteia*; but the similarity ends there. In Aeschylus the murder is replayed for the audience in the following scene, when the queen displays the dead bodies and, standing over them, narrates exactly how she killed her husband and his concubine; in Sophocles there is no such re-enactment. Clytemnestra's body is indeed brought out of the house, but only in order to lure Aegisthus inside; it is completely covered, so Aegisthus will think it is Orestes' body; there is no description of her death; and, once Aegisthus uncovers the face, the decoy's value is gone and all attention turns to his own plight.

Thus, the first murder is marginalized because the audience has no opportunity to visualize the act or to contemplate the body. The second murder is completely and literally marginalized, since the action comes to an end before Aegisthus is killed. The probable staging of the *exodos* reinforces the effect: at the end of the play the conspirators and their victim Aegisthus disappear into the house, while Electra remains standing triumphantly on stage. Thus, the plot of revenge, absolutely central in Aeschylus, is here secondary to the powerful presence of Electra.

11 Plotting Revenge?

There is no doubt, of course, that Aegisthus will die and that the conspirators' scheme will then be brought to completion. What is strange, however, is the lack of internal preparation for this end. As we have seen, there is abundant external preparation: the metadramatic frame in the prologue announces that the scheme to murder Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is well under way, and the mythographic tradition hardly allows any other

outcome to Orestes' return from exile than the successful murders of the usurpers. Yet little in the action of Sophocles' *Electra* leads the spectator to see this end as the necessary outcome of the plot.

By contrast, in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* the internal momentum is almost relentless. The timely convergence of brother and sister at their father's tomb, the complicity of Orestes' desire for revenge with Apollo's explicit instructions, the careful planning of the conspirators, and the propitious report of Clytemnestra's dream – all give such forward impetus to the scheme that, from the point at which Orestes first knocks on the door (*Ch.* 653), the action hurtles through two murders and their aftermath to the end of the drama in barely four hundred lines.

This is not the case in Sophocles' *Electra*. Agamemnon's tomb lies out of sight off stage and therefore cannot lend authority to the conspiracy, and the reunion of brother and sister takes place so late in the action that, rather than add momentum, it only slows things down and must be interrupted by the Pedagogue. Orestes' desire for revenge is not a factor in the drama, and, whereas his counterpart in Aeschylus describes at length the threats and enticements that motivate him (*Ch.* 269–305), in Sophocles he confines himself to a brief prayer for his rightful wealth and station (ll. 71–2). The conspirators' careful plans are in Sophocles of little consequence. The Pedagogue's false report of Orestes' death, spun out into a long and tangled description of a chariot race (ll. 680–763), is over-adequate for the goal of entering the house. The urn that Orestes brings does not at all help him get inside, and the plan for the Pedagogue to reconnoiter inside the house (39–43, 73–4) is all but forgotten and comes back only as an afterthought to his urgent warning (ll. 1326–71) that the others should stop talking and get moving: “The moment to act is now! Clytemnestra is now alone, no man is now inside” (νῦν καιρὸς ἔρδειν· νῦν Κλυταιμῆστρα μόνη·/ νῦν οὔτις ἀνδρῶν ἔνδον, ll. 1368–9). Likewise the dream, although clearly symbolizing the return of Orestes in the image of a tree that grows from Agamemnon's scepter, offers no hint of murder or revenge, let alone a definite reference to matricide, as in Aeschylus' version – when Clytemnestra dreams that she gives birth to a snake that draws blood from her breast (*Cho.* 527–33). Thus, the details of the story, which might have been harnessed in order to build momentum toward the murders, fail to do so.

12 An Interpretive Problem

Our curious problem has grown curiuser. Not only is *Electra* the character a problem because she intrudes upon the conspirators and upstages their schemes, but *Electra* the drama is a problem because it lacks the normal machinery to drive its plot forward. At the same time, this play's perennial popularity with audiences yields a deeper paradox. Not only is a mesmerizing protagonist an impediment to her own story, but the compelling drama as a whole seems to impede its own success. How then do we, as critics, make sense of *Electra*?

13 Plotting Endurance?

Several critics, as noted above, have drawn attention to *Electra*'s position apart from, or in opposition to, the conspirators and their plans. Cedric Whitman (1951) in particular has focused on her resulting success in monopolizing attention and in upstaging Orestes

and his companions. By comparison with his counterpart in Aeschylus, Sophocles' Orestes is, according to Whitman, a figure of "no special dramatic interest," and "it seems almost as if Sophocles conceived him as a sort of frame for Electra, who is the real tragic picture" (1951: 155). Whitman goes on to point out that this picture consists not of action but emotion, and in order to explain the paradox of a powerful, willful protagonist who does nothing, he invokes Electra's spectacular endurance, *tlemosune*:

Tragic tlemosyne is the moral activity of the will divorced from outer action – the vital necessity of the soul to function, even if it be violently detached from every instrument of external effect, even if it must function only upon itself and to its own ever-increasing pain. (1951: 167)

This notion of tragic endurance is a way to describe our problem which, while including its own paradox of active suffering, nevertheless fails to explain how this works dramatically. In fact, at this point in his discussion, Whitman backs away from claiming that Electra or her play is exceptional, and instead assimilates *Electra* to a standard Sophoclean pattern. The heroic strength and dignity of the central Sophoclean character is demonstrated, in Whitman's thinking, either by this character falling prey to an evil, irrational cosmos, as in earlier plays such as *Oedipus the King*, or by the character withstanding and somehow transcending it, as in the later plays *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*. Whether applicable to other plays or not, this scheme finds little confirmation in *Electra*. From Electra's endurance and from her brother's belated revenge, Whitman somehow extrapolates her own triumph: "Electra is victorious. Her will is complete, and she is at once emotionally spent and infinitely strong" (1951: 168). And that is not all: Electra's "moral salvation consists of turning the oppressive length of time to the inner uses of tragic knowledge" (1951: 170) and in the process achieving divinity within herself (1951: 171). Yet the attentive reader will look long and hard before finding any trace of moral salvation or tragic knowledge, let alone divinity, in the woman whose final words urge Orestes to kill Aegisthus without letting him speak and to throw out his body unburied. On the contrary, the fast pace of the epilogue, its premature conclusion, and the marginal role of Electra all preclude a conclusive transformation of the kind Whitman describes. To put this another way, Whitman correctly observes that the drama lacks a strong plot trajectory at the same time that he wrongly imposes a corresponding trajectory upon the soul of Electra.

14 "The Finest Colours"

To make sense of Sophocles' experiment, it may help to turn to an analogy that Aristotle uses in the *Poetics* to explain how *not* to compose tragedies. After arguing that *muthos* ("plot"), not *ethos* ("character"), is of primary importance, the philosopher summarizes his case thus:

Plot, then, is the first principle and, as it were, soul of tragedy, while character is secondary. (A similar principle also holds in painting: if one were to cover a surface randomly with the finest colours, one would provide less pleasure than by an outline of a picture.) (*Po.* 1450^a38^b–2, trans. Halliwell 1995)

The analogy with painting offers a useful way to address the anomalies we have observed in Sophocles' *Electra*. The protagonist, whose powerful emotions take center stage,

reveals different aspects of her character in successive scenes. In the *parodos* we see a woman so absorbed in her grief that she can think of nothing else, rejecting the townswomen's kind attempts to console her. In her exchange with Chrysothemis we simultaneously see the extremity of her feelings and the justice of her position as she first welcomes Aegisthus' threat to bury her alive, then persuades Chrysothemis to discard their mother's offerings and to pray for Orestes' return. Next, the scene with Clytemnestra shows the vehemence of her hatred and also, by Electra's own admission, its shamelessness (ll. 616–21). After the Pedagogue's speech, we witness first raw grief at the news of her brother's death, and then mad delusion in her proclaiming that she herself will play the role of tyrant-killer and thus win a prize for heroism. Finally, the recognition scene displays an unprecedented swing from intense grief to intense joy as she first touches the urn containing her brother's ashes and then recognizes him standing, alive, before her.

If *Electra* succeeds as theater (and it certainly does), it does so not with the linear and teleological pleasures of a plot that carries the spectators through complication (*desis*) to resolution (*lusis*), but with the supposedly inferior pleasures of a character displaying an extraordinary range of emotions. In the terms of Aristotle's analogy with painting, we might add that these are immediate and sensory pleasures, like those of "the most splendid pigments poured out at random" (a more literal translation of *καλλίστοις φαρμάκοις χύδην*).

15 Personality, Character, Spectacle

We can further parse Sophocles' experiment by drawing on a typology proposed by Bert States. In *The Pleasure of the Play* (1994), States expands upon Aristotelian terms such as *mimesis* and recognition to consider the varied forms of Western drama. In particular, he revisits Aristotle's treatment of character, which many have found inadequate. "Character" is often distinguished from "Personality" as constituting the internal as opposed to the external aspects of an individual; the former is dramatized through moral traits and ethical choices, the latter through social interactions and exchanges. States uses this distinction to propose (1994: 147–8) a spectrum of dramatic types, from those that emphasize Character (with a corresponding interest in *dianoia* or thought) to those concerned with Personality (with an interest in *opsis* or spectacle). I pass over his examples from various points along this spectrum and I turn to the intriguing fact that Sophocles' *Electra* exemplifies the latter extreme: the drama focuses upon Electra's Personality – specifically, her emotional exchanges with those about her. It engages the audience through the display or spectacle of her emotion and, as a consequence, it renders moral issues irrelevant, since in such cases "the display of behavior is more interesting than the questions of right and wrong it provokes" (1994: 148).

States himself illustrates the same extreme with Restoration comedy, a genre "which has always puzzled us because we cannot agree on whether it was endorsing its immorality, satirizing it, or simply making money with it" (1994: 148–9). A notable difference between these examples is that in Restoration comedy the plot does little more than connect one display of wit to the next, whereas in *Electra* the plot is actively impeded by demonstrations of the protagonist's personality. More telling, perhaps, is that States places at the other extreme of Character and *dianoia* plays "which focus on the problem of freedom and choice, self-authenticity, and the search for values in a godless world" (1994: 148). Sophocles' *Electra*, in other words, is poles apart from the category where we would expect to find most tragedies.

16 The Play of Character

The opening scenes of the drama confront the spectators with a problem, namely the presence of Electra, which becomes more complicated the closer we look at it; yet in a sense this problem is its own solution, for the spectacle of Electra's personality holds an interest in its own right, which effectively upstages both the scheme of revenge and the issue of justice. This theatrical innovation has partial parallels in *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, both of which are plays from late in Sophocles' career and both of which display a novel interest in *ethos* (see Van Nortwick's chapter in this volume). *Philoctetes* presses to its very limit the spectacle of Personality insofar as Philoctetes' social identity is defined by his wounded, festering body – the raw pain of the abandoned hero is the only thing more elemental than the raw emotion of Electra. Yet Philoctetes has a counterpart and polar opposite in Neoptolemus, the innately virtuous son of Achilles whose reservations about cheating Philoctetes of his bow constitute a spectacle of Character. At the sight of Philoctetes' suffering, the younger man's initial decision to fall in with Odysseus' scheme does not hold up, whereas the older man's intransigence remains unaffected by Neoptolemus' theatrical display of virtue in returning Heracles' bow. As in *Electra*, *muthos* – plot – is upstaged, only in this case twice over, as first the scheme of Odysseus is aborted, then the plan of Philoctetes is overruled by Heracles *ex machina*.

In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Sophocles brings the old king back on stage to face a long series of challenges, but these are a far cry from the confrontations between a willful hero and larger forces, so common in Sophoclean tragedy. At the very beginning of the play, Oedipus arrives at Colonus and, shortly before its end, he departs to his death; in between he does little but stand his ground – although he does so in a spectacular manner, dominating this play much as Electra does hers. Oedipus stands firm against the Stranger in the prologue and against the members of the chorus. He wins Theseus to his side, then denounces Creon and curses his son Polyneices. Finally he leaves, promising benefits to Athens in the remote future. To apply States' theory, the strong, outwardly directed Personality of *Oedipus the King* is replaced in this drama by a Character whose inner virtues give him strength, though exactly what these virtues are remains a mystery, even as the hero's Character somehow transcends the human realm.

17 Difficult Times

Philoctetes was produced in 409 BCE, *Oedipus at Colonus* soon after Sophocles' death in 406/5 BCE, and *Electra* is often placed in the same general time period, on stylistic grounds (for example, the opening song of *Electra* noted above). If we assume that *Electra* was produced a few years before *Philoctetes*, then all three plays fall late in the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta – after the disastrous Sicilian expedition, at a time when allies were defecting from the Athenian empire and oligarchs were planning revolution within the city of Athens itself. Under these circumstances, Athenians would be hard pressed to conceive of an edifying or instructive conflict between human will and the world at large; when the world is undergoing radical upheaval, how can we imagine it placing constraints on human action from which we might learn?

Sophocles' response, in these difficult times, was not to create the chaotic or overwhelming dramatic action of Euripides' *Orestes* and *Phoenician Women*, but rather to

probe the dramatic individual more closely. Can a heroic individual be exemplary when the force of her personality is not directed against powerful antagonists, but remains a largely ineffectual display by a generally marginal person (Electra)? What if one heroic individual is pitted not against kings or cosmos, but against another, whose personality is categorically different and equally unyielding (Philoctetes and Neoptolemus)? Is there any way in which Character on its own, without performing heroic deeds and thus winning immortal fame, can achieve the transcendent stature of a hero or *daimon* (Oedipus)?

18 The Human Subject

In such difficult times one possible response would be to question the ability of humans to influence events meaningfully, to challenge their claim to agency. For a dramatist, this would amount to undermining the very premise of tragedy – that, by exploring both the potential and the limitations of human agency, we learn or gain something – and Euripides seems to follow this subversive tack in *Phoenician Women*, where the multiplication of plots and sub-plots, sequels and “prequels,” reduces and trivializes the space for human agency (Dunn 1996b: 180–202). Sophocles, by contrast, shifts the locus of dramatic interest from agency to subjectivity, from what it means to have (or not to have) an effect upon the larger world to the possibilities and limitations of the person itself.

In subverting the tragic norm and shifting its interest to *ethos* or character, both these stratagems might seem to be signs that the genre has reached a dead end and, as society undergoes profound change, can no longer continue modeling experience. This conclusion finds superficial support in the accident that these are the latest surviving tragedies from the Greek world – except for *Rhesus*, whose date and author are uncertain. However, the canonization of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides by scholars of a later era does not mean that great drama was not written in the fourth century (Xanthakis-Karamanos 1980), nor that subsequent tragedians did not take their cue from the late work of Sophocles and Euripides; the silence of our record means that we cannot know. All the same, it is intriguing that fourth-century authors took a great interest in *ethos* and human character, especially Aristotle in his *Ethics* and Theophrastus in his *Characters*. The latter are short, somewhat satirical sketches on stock figures such as “The Flatterer,” “The Gossip,” and “The Miser,” and each portrait is built up from small details. “The Distrustful Man,” for example, while lying in bed, “asks his wife whether she has closed the chest and sealed the sideboard and whether the front door has been bolted, and if she says yes he throws off the bedclothes anyway and gets up with nothing on and lights the lamp and runs around in his bare feet to inspect everything in person, and so he hardly gets any sleep” (18.4, in Diggle 2004). There is an artful coherence between these snippets of action and the character in question, even though the action is entirely subordinated to the presentation of *ethos*. I would guess that this kind of attention to the strange diversity of human character has an antecedent in the experimental form of Sophocles’ *Electra*.

19 The Dance of Death

Ironically, it is easier to trace Sophocles’ influence on the Western dramatic tradition than on his immediate successors. Just as the trilogy of Aeschylus has been re-imagined in many ways, from Eugene O’Neill’s *Mourning Becomes Electra* in 1931 to Ariane

Mnouchkine's *Les Atrides* of 1990–2, and just as Euripides' *Electra* has likewise been re-told in 1937 in Jean Giraudoux' *Electre* and in 1962 in Michael Cacoyannis' film *Electra*, so too Sophocles' *Electra* was memorably re-staged, both in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's 1903 *Elektra* and in Richard Strauss' 1906 operatic version of the play. As Hofmannsthal's play comes to an end, Chrysothemis comes out of the house and asks Electra to come inside and join the celebration of revenge; but Electra refuses, announcing instead her wish to dance in silence:

Be silent and dance. Come hither all of you!
 Join with me all! I bear the burden of joy,
 And I dance before you here. One thing alone
 Remains for all who are as happy as we;
 To be silent and dance. (Hofmannsthal, *Electra* 1224–8, in Symons 1912: 83)

After a few more steps she falls to the ground, and the play ends with her body lying lifeless on stage.

Electra's death is one of Hofmannsthal's more striking innovations; yet in terms of staging it is very conservative, preserving Sophocles' final tableau, in which the protagonist remains outside the house while Orestes completes his revenge indoors. It is also thematically conservative. Martin Mueller argues that, because one cannot imagine Electra returning to normal life, her death is "the most 'Sophoclean' feature of Hofmannsthal's version" (1986: 86), thus making an excellent observation on dubious grounds. As we have seen, the spectacle of Electra leaves the course of events, both present and future, irrelevant. Neither the abrupt ending in Sophocles nor the dance of death in Hofmannsthal is designed, like a *deus ex machina*, to avoid portraying the natural aftermath; rather, both demonstrate that no finer colors can be added to this display and that the drama of Electra's personality is complete.

Guide to Further Reading

For a fuller introduction to the play, see the "companion" of Michael Lloyd (2005). For those delving into the Greek text, the best all-around commentary is still that of Sir Richard Jebb (1894); more helpful for the student is that of J. H. Kells (1973), which champions an "ironic" reading of the play. There are many good translations; that of Anne Carson (2001) is poetic and direct, useful both to the reader and to the actor. The amount of scholarship on *Electra* is vast; therefore I mention a few pieces in English that offer various perspectives on the play – the interested reader can delve more deeply by turning to the scholarship cited in those works. The short article that sparked the "ironic" or negative interpretation is that of J. T. Sheppard (1927). J. F. Davidson (1988) traces the Homeric influence on Sophocles' play, especially in the story-pattern of Odysseus' return home. The final chapter of Mark Ringer's book (1998) gives a lively account of metatheatrical effects. Helene Foley (2001) ponders on the implications of Electra's obsessive lamentation, while the remarkable speech describing Orestes' "death" is examined by James Barrett (2002). On performance and adaptation, theater practitioners contribute their own insights in my collection (Dunn 1996a). Concerning stage history, Edith Hall (1999) provides an illustrated account of performances in Britain.

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The Divided Worlds of Sophocles’ *Women of Trachis*

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1 Introduction

Sophocles’ play, the *Trachiniae* – *Women of Trachis* – dramatizes the last day of Heracles’ life on earth, the day he is poisoned by his wife Deianeira. Sophocles uses this last episode in the story of the mythic hero’s labors to explore, more explicitly than in any other of his surviving seven plays, the tension between male and female sensibilities and circumstances – a tension manifested within the universal human context of the inevitability of change and of the impossibility of sufficient understanding to move in harmony with it. The play cannot be dated with any certainty, although most scholars would group it with Sophocles’ earlier surviving plays (*Ajax* and *Antigone*) rather than with his late plays (*Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*) (*contra*, Hoey 1979). But, whatever its date, *Trachiniae* shares certain structural characteristics with a number of Sophocles’ plays from both these groups. By exploring some of its structural features, this chapter will not only suggest a way of viewing the drama but will also illustrate how important the question of dramatic structure is to a general understanding of Sophoclean tragedy. Where he begins and ends the action, the sequence of scenes he chooses, how he designs the alternation of choral song and actors – all of these features, and more, transform the mere enacting of a story well known to the audience into Sophocles’ own unique creation, revealing his take on its implications for the human condition.

Dramatic structure has been central to many critics’ understanding of the *Trachiniae*. In one view, the action builds slowly through Deianeira’s scenes to the climax of Heracles’ appearance, two-thirds of the way into the play. His appearance completes the trajectory introduced in the prologue, when we learn of an oracle that predicts Heracles’ imminent “release from toil.” Heracles’ realization, at the end of the play, that it is his enemy Nessus’ poison that is killing him allows him to make sense of his death and brings his life into a satisfying – if tragic – balance. On this view of the play, the structure creates a focus on the problematic nature of Heracles’ heroic but brutal destiny; Deianeira is simply a

part of that story (McCall 1972: 143–4; Bowman 1999: 347; Fowler 1999: 165). Other critics have focused on the divided structure of the play, on the fact that Deianeira and Heracles never share the stage. The one dies before the other appears; they occupy different worlds. These critics suggest that Sophocles has organized his play to contrast the mutually destructive worlds of men and women (e.g. Musurillo 1961: 382–3).

The fact that Deianeira and Heracles never occupy the same space is structurally and dramatically important to consider, but its importance emerges fully only in connection with another structural feature: the uncertainty of Heracles' fate at the end of play. Although many critics write as if Heracles dies at the end – and certainly Heracles thinks he is going to die – the play ends before his death. There are allusions at several points to the story that Zeus resurrects his son from death and immortalizes him, but Sophocles leaves it completely open whether we are to imagine the apotheosis as we see him and his son Hyllus exit to Mt. Oeta – the site either of his apotheosis or of his death (see Roberts 1988 for the indeterminacy of Sophoclean endings). Why does Sophocles evoke the story of Heracles' apotheosis in the *Trachiniae* but allow no certainty that this is what awaits the hero after his final exit? And how does this ambiguity work dramatically within the sharply divided worlds of Deianeira and Heracles?

Let me suggest in rough outline a way of responding to these questions, before looking more closely at the text. The divided worlds of Deianeira and Heracles are gendered. In the first two-thirds of the play Deianeira's remarkable monologues reveal the usually hidden inner space of the private, female world. In that world Sophocles locates values and attitudes that are important not just for women but for all civic or communal existence. As part of a woman's world, however, they have no place in public discourse. In the dramatization of male power – erotic, physical, and mental – through the allusions to, and then the appearance of, Heracles, the male members of the audience see aspects of their own position as citizens with the power to shape others' lives (Segal 1977: 121; Zeitlin 1996: 364). But through the inability of these two worlds to occupy the same space simultaneously the audience also experiences the cost for the civic community of the stark and destructive division between female and male.

Characteristic of the dramatic effect that Sophocles achieves here and in other plays through the dramatization of vividly opposing perspectives are also the moments where the audience glimpses the possibility of these stark divisions dissolving, or at least blurring: male agency, as it transforms the world, might be informed by the need Deianeira's character illustrates for stability in flux, for a private as well as a public self, and for openness to an understanding of the experience of another. We cannot say whether, in the end, these glimpses only underline the starkness of the division or open up a real alternative. Do the characteristics with which Sophocles endows the fragile Deianeira offer a potential counterbalance to Heracles' power, to the aggressive, powerful, creative, and destructive male world?

The possibility for balance, and even unity, between the different perspectives of male and female becomes more or less compelling depending on the end one imagines. If, on the one hand, members of the audience assume that Heracles is going to die, they can see, in his and Deianeira's common fate, some kind of balance between them (Slater 1976: 57). Human mortality erases the privileged position that Heracles lays claim to as a male and as the son of Zeus (on the dual nature of Heracles, see Friis Johansen 1986: 57). But if the audience assumes that Zeus will privilege his son by granting him immortality, while Deianeira's death is shrouded in silence, then the audience is confronted with the idea of a universe where the qualities that the “best of men” so

uncompromisingly demonstrates transcend human limitations and become part of the divine order and of the forces that shape human lives (Holt 1989: 76–8). By granting Heracles' immortality, Zeus would create an imbalance between Deianeira's patient acceptance and Heracles' violent, impulsive action, between Deianeira's understanding of others and Heracles' imperviousness to them, between her privacy and longing for stability and his heroism. The ambiguity of the ending opens up two very different visions, each with profound implications for the way human relationships, familial and civic, can be structured; and the audience is left with these irreconcilable perspectives to ponder.

2 First Things

As in many Sophoclean plays, the prologue introduces an idea that the action will elaborate and complicate. From the start Deianeira sees herself in a world apart. Although she views her situation as unique, her feeling of isolation is characteristic of sensibilities and attitudes that are associated in the play with women and that have no place in the male world. Deianeira enters and says:

λόγος μὲν ἔστ' ἀρχαῖος ἀνθρώπων φανείς
 ὡς οὐκ ἂν αἰῶν' ἐκμάθοις βροτῶν, πρὶν ἂν
 θάνῃ τις, οὐτ' εἰ χρηστὸς οὐτ' εἴ τῃ κακός·
 ἐγὼ δὲ τὸν ἐμόν, καὶ πρὶν εἰς Ἄιδου μολεῖν,
 ἔξοιδ' ἔχουσα δυστυχή τε καὶ βαρύν.

On the one hand there is the ancient saying of men
 that you can't know the life of a mortal until
 he dies, neither if it's a good one nor if it's bad.
 On the other hand I know mine, even before I go
 to Hades; I know it is unfortunate and burdened. (*Tr.* 1–5)

The opening lines divide Deianeira's story from all other stories, in that she claims to know, rightly it turns out, that the rhythm of her life is a downward spiral. She is an exception to the truth – grounded in the instability of human fortune – that no life can be judged until it ends. There is no ambiguity or uncertainty about Deianeira's view of her own position or about her end. When she goes on to explain herself in a series of monologues, it becomes clear that she can predict the shape of her life because she is a woman and, as such, her life is structured and defined in inescapable ways.

Heracles, too, may prove to be an exception to the rule, but one that reinforces a basic assumption of the instability of human fortune. The anticipated “end” of *his* life might not be an end at all; in fact, we can't be sure what his end is. But, true to the ancient saying, how we think about his life will vary radically depending on the end we imagine for him. There is a radical disjunction, then, between Deianeira's and Heracles' different stories. The difference between Deianeira and the rest of mankind, announced in her opening lines, is developed by Sophocles as a difference between women's and men's lives. Deianeira offers an exceptional articulation of the conditions that make a woman's path through life predictable and unfortunate, and Heracles offers an exceptional manifestation of the radically open shape of a male destiny. In essence, then, these first lines introduce the idea of a contrast in the human condition between a kind of stability, created

by the certainty of human vulnerability and suffering, and a rhythm of change and reversal that allows for the expectation of extraordinary, unforeseeable opportunity. And this contrast is also one between female and male.

Deianeira's monologues are a dominant structure of the first part of the play. Deianeira enters. Although she is accompanied by the nurse, Deianeira's first words, a 48-line monologue, are not addressed to her. All the other plays we have from Sophocles open with two actors on stage (an actor and a crowd of citizens in *OT*), and in every case one actor immediately addresses the other actor (or the crowd in *OT*) in the vocative. Deianeira's opening monologue is therefore unique in its lack of an addressee. To my mind this signals at least two things. The first is that, in a special way, the theater audience is to view itself as the stage audience of Deianeira's monologues – even when she speaks later to the chorus, or to Lichas, or to the silent Iole. Therefore – and this is the second point – Deianeira reveals her character to the audience in a particularly intimate, extensive, and self-reflective way.

This second point is confirmed by another unusual feature of the play's structure: Deianeira speaks seven monologues, which constitute almost 70 percent of her lines – a number only equaled by Electra in the play of the same name; and that character also has to establish a unique perspective in the first half of the play (Kitzinger 1991: 301). There is therefore a clear indication, with this first monologue, that Deianeira's role is to explain herself – not, I would argue, as a particular personality, but as a woman revealing what the male audience does not usually see or pay attention to: the shape and texture of a woman's life. The purpose of Deianeira's revelatory monologues is not, I think, to explore female subjectivity or agency (and to reveal its destructiveness), but to show characteristics that are valuable, even necessary, in dealing with the human condition and are alien to Heracles and the world he inhabits (see Ryzman 1991 for a discussion of Deianeira's agency). In this way Deianeira makes it possible for the men in the audience to view their world, their acts, their character from a different perspective – one they are not used to seeing (Wohl 1998: 15–16). Women, as Froma Zeitlin has remarked, are, functionally, “never an end in themselves”; rather they can “serve as [...] hidden models for the masculine self” (Zeitlin 1996: 347). In the *Trachiniae* the extreme divisions of the male and female worlds, and their mutual destructiveness, challenge the very idea of a masculine self that can survive without absorbing – or at the very least allowing space for – the feminine, as it is articulated in Deianeira's monologues.

When Deianeira finally acts, it is to preserve a space for the perspective her monologues create. Although critics have argued that erotic passion drives her to use the poison (e.g. Easterling 1968: 64, 66), she states clearly that it is the thought of losing her place that is intolerable (ll. 550–1; see Carawan 2000: 203). To understand the force of Deianeira's perspective we must look more closely at what the monologues show us.

Her first monologue (ll. 1–48) focuses on her fear. She talks about the battle to claim her that the river god Acheloos and Heracles fought. She cannot describe the battle, she says, because she was overcome with fear and did not watch it. And she goes on to describe the fear she has continued to feel throughout her life with Heracles, because of his constant absence. What are the sources of this fear? Is it idiosyncratic? Is it a feature of Deianeira's own, peculiarly hesitant approach to the world? I would argue, rather, that Deianeira's fear is a reaction to the instability, flux, and change that she associates with the male; her fear arises out of her own desire for permanence and stability, which is, through her, associated with the female. Her description of Acheloos (ll. 9–14) centers on his changing forms; she cannot watch the contest between Acheloos and Heracles

because of her uncertainty about the outcome. When the seemingly more stable Heracles wins her, it turns out that his most striking characteristic is his movement into the unknown: his constant going away for unknown stretches of time to unknown places, and for unknown reasons. Implied also in the speech is her fear of male erotic passion, its impetuosity and violence.

Her reactions may seem extreme, but the contrast she draws between the woman's self-contained, physically defined, and ordered world and the mobility, physical activity, and competitive aggression of these male figures is indeed broadly true of men's and women's lives in Athens. And, although the fear Deianeira constantly feels may seem pathological from a psychological perspective, it is better understood as the emotional coloring that Sophocles uses to dramatize the fundamental tension between the human need for stability, containment, and predictability, on the one hand, and for ambition, challenge, agency, and engagement, on the other. In the play these two conflicting needs are starkly divided between the male and the female; but in reality the tension between them is inherent in the human condition.

The other monologues add texture to this picture. They deepen the audience's understanding of the perspective that is particularly Deianeira's, particularly female, and particularly aligned with the human consciousness of the cost of constant movement and change. In her second monologue she contrasts the sheltered stability of a girl's childhood, vividly pictured as a secluded space that neither heat nor wind nor rain can penetrate, with the life of a married woman plagued by worry for her husband and children. The secluded, stable place is her natural home; married life involves the necessity of confronting life's flux and uncertainty. Some have argued that Sophocles is creating in Deianeira a character who is unable to make the natural transition from girlhood to adulthood (see Ormand 1999: ch. 2). If, however, we view her as a character who articulates an understanding born out of female experience but applicable more generally to all humans, we can see a different kind of resistance in her. Her nostalgia for the young girl's life typifies a natural and universal human desire for permanence in defiance of death, and the woman's worry for the fate of her husband and children captures an awareness of the suffering inherent in mortality. Her pessimism implies that the human desire for stability, continuity, and permanence, however real and essential, struggles to survive in the face of the alliance between action, change, and the inevitable movement of time.

Her other monologues all concern Iole, the young captive sent by Heracles to be his concubine in Deianeira's house. In her first encounter with Iole (who never speaks in the play), Deianeira, not knowing who she is, reacts with her characteristic sensitivity to change and loss (ll. 293–313). She sees in Iole's suffering evidence for the instability of human fortune. She addresses her with pity, seeing in her misery the universal suffering of (hu)mankind. Deianeira looks at a stranger and feels a connection to her because she understands human fragility. Her quick understanding of Iole, her fellow feeling for her, her expressiveness and warmth towards her are the counterpart of her pessimism and fear and introduce into the world of the play values that are necessary for human community. The irony that Iole, as Heracles' concubine, in fact represents a threat to Deianeira's own stability only sharpens the audience's awareness of the fragility of that fellow feeling in the face of the alliance of erotic passion and physical power with the universal necessity of change and flux.

In her next monologue (ll. 436–69) Deianeira for a moment brings the inevitability of change and her desire for a stable reality into balance. She has heard a report that Iole is

Heracles' concubine, and she speaks to persuade Lichas, Heracles' agent, who claims that Iole is an unidentified captive, to tell her the truth. In the first part of the speech Deianeira explicitly equates eroticism with the need for change: she says that she is not a woman who "doesn't know the human condition, that man's nature does not allow him to enjoy the same things constantly," ἥτις οὐ κάτοιδε τὰνθρώπων, ὅτι/ χαίρειν πέφυκεν οὐχὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς αἰεὶ (ll. 439–40). And so she doesn't blame Heracles for his "sickness." But in the second part she blames Lichas for his unwillingness to tell her the truth; truth – that which is "not to be forgotten" in Greek (*to a-lethes*) – in contrast to eros, implies singleness and permanence. The speech thus balances Deianeira's acceptance of inevitable change with her desire for the certainty that truth offers her. The speech ends with a *men...de...* sequence, capturing the contrast between eros and truth and her association with the latter: ἀλλὰ τὰτα μὲν/ ρεῖτω κατ' οὖρον· σοὶ δ' ἐγὼ φράζω κακὸν/ πρὸς ἄλλον εἶναι, πρὸς δ' ἔμ' ἀψευδεῖν αἰεὶ (literally, "let these things [Heracles' passion for Iole] on the one hand flow with the wind, but to you on the other hand I say be evil to another, but to me tell no falsehood ever," ll. 467–9). Her acceptance of the "sickness" of eros constitutes an acknowledgment of the necessity of multiplicity, instability, and change, while her passionate desire for the truth betrays the need to believe in an unchanging reality.

In this speech Deianeira achieves for a moment a balance between accepting the changeability of passion and insisting on the moral superiority of truth as a kind of absolute. Critics have been puzzled by the fact that she reverses her position almost immediately, in her next monologue, with her admission that she cannot face the truth that Lichas has revealed or tolerate the presence of Iole in her house. In this dramatic and almost instantaneous reversal Sophocles dramatizes the fragility of the balance Deianeira had achieved for a moment – a precious, brief moment of calm in the play, which collapses with the movement of Iole and, with her, of Heracles' world into the house.

Deianeira finally acts to negate the change brought by Iole: she makes use of the charm that Nessus gave her – the liquid taken from his fatal wound, which has remained immobile and hidden in the deepest recess of the house all these years (see Carawan 2000 for a discussion of Deianeira's use of the poison). Her action, as she describes it in this and the next speech (ll. 531–87; 672–722), replicates in a subtle way the tension between truth and eros in the previous speech. Nessus has left her with strict instructions about the use of the potion. Its effectiveness depends on its having been kept in an enclosed, dark, and defined space for all these years; and each step for its use has been laid out carefully. Nessus has promised that the potion will "fix" Heracles, that he will never love another woman more than he loves Deianeira, that, among his many women, her place will always be unique. So in one way the instructions for the use of the poison mark a single form of action, and the promise of its effect delineates a kind of unchanging permanence, like the fixed shape of truth. In fact, though, the potion's power lies in its evocation of the burning, destructive passion that characterizes Heracles' heroism and the monsters he battles, his masculinity and eroticism, his physical being. It eats his body and changes his shape. It causes him to jump and writhe in constant movement, as Hyllus describes his behavior later on (ll. 786–90). Thus, when Deianeira's desire to preserve her place causes her, uncharacteristically, to act, her action reveals the inseparability of permanence and flux, as her pursuit of stability ends in violent disruption.

The complex opposition of forces that Deianeira is inevitably drawn into is beautifully captured in the description she offers, in her last monologue, of the disintegration of the piece of wool she has used to anoint Heracles' shirt with poison. The piece of wool, which is emblematic of the women's world within the house, disintegrates when the

light and heat of the sun activate the poison. She immediately knows that Nessus' promise of a kind of secure permanence really entails the destruction of Heracles. Here again we are struck by Sophocles' dramatization of the swiftness of Deianeira's realization. Critics argue that the speed of her understanding implies that she could have figured out the true nature of the potion before she used it, if she had been willing to face "reality" (Scott 1997: 45). To me, her quick understanding dramatizes effectively the vulnerability of Deianeira's world to the force and energy of Heracles' world. What she immediately accepts is the inevitability of the failure of her attempt to preserve her space. The image of the piece of wool turning to dust and of froth foaming from the earth has deservedly received much comment (e.g. Segal 1977: 126, 138; 1981: 90–1). In this context I just wish to point to the words that start her description: *ρεῖ πᾶν ἄδηλον*, "it all flows into unclarity" (l. 698). She sees the power of the potion and of the sun to transform the shape of things, to change their very nature, and she realizes that that force for change – a masculine force – is, in the end, irresistible.

Deianeira's monologues, I have argued, dominate the first part of the play through their revelation of a world that associates the feminine with the desire for permanence and stability and through the compassionate bonds created by suffering – as humans are caught up, often painfully, in the change that time and agency bring. Others have pointed out that Deianeira's world is also associated with images of darkness, shelter, and privacy (Segal 1977: 121; Lawrence 1978: 298). As she walks about touching the "household things" before she kills herself, it is the loss of that space that she mourns, not the loss of Heracles. Her death seems to erase the world she has revealed in her monologues and the sensibilities and concerns she has endowed it with. The challenge the play poses to its viewers is to understand the significance of the loss of Deianeira's perspective as Sophocles shifts the play's focus, immediately upon her death, to the vocal and vivid suffering of Heracles. Do we say of Deianeira, as the chorus says of Heracles: "Poor Greece, what grief I see you will have if you lose this [wo]man?" (ll. 1112–13). Sophocles does not make it easy to recognize and embrace the importance of Deianeira's sensibilities for humanity, as her fear and passivity invite us to dismiss her. Though her perspective is fragile, pessimistic, and perhaps frustratingly passive for those who believe that action and change are clear goods, we must also see that Deianeira expresses desires and instincts without which human society cannot survive. She offers a crucial counterbalance to the dominating presence of Heracles and to the attitudes he brings in the second part of the play (Wohl 1998: 52).

3 Enter Heracles

If the two worlds of Deianeira and Heracles can be seen as a kind of *μὲν/δέ*, a construction used heavily at the beginning and end of the play, Heracles' *de* requires less space to reveal than Deianeira's *men*. Partly this is because, as many have pointed out, Heracles is very "present" in the minds and words of Deianeira and of the chorus during the first part of the play. Partly, also, Heracles, in contrast to Deianeira, is a known quantity to the audience, both as the hero of myth and cult and as a male whose actions take place in the public world (Wender 1974: 4). Although Heracles' first appearance shows him in what he himself describes as a "feminized" state, plagued by pain and able only to weep and groan, within fifty lines he recovers enough to deliver a long monologue, the rhetoric of which defines his character. Heracles' rapid shift, during his time on stage, from suffering to control, from female to male, and from song to forceful rhetoric, takes the

audience from the female world into the male world, with a sharp awareness of the change, as Heracles recovers his male authority. Heracles' two monologues offer a perspective that is explicitly male, but critics have differed in their understanding of whether in this Heracles we see the Panhellenic hero, the son of Zeus, who already belongs to a space out of reach (Fowler 1999: 167), or the husband of Deianeira who displays to the male audience a set of assumptions and values familiar from their own civic and domestic contexts. This tension between a Heracles who is paradigmatic of male ways of being in the world and one whose divine parentage and heroic status place him beyond the audience's judgment mirrors the ambiguity we have pointed to in the ending of the play: is Heracles a mortal man, who will meet his death on the pyre on Mt. Oeta, or will Zeus finally confirm his place among the immortals? Understanding the nature of Heracles' language in his monologues will help to define the character Sophocles has created, as we shall see; but that character's status, especially as it relates to Deianeira's and to the world she inhabits, is precisely the problem the play forces us to confront and, in the ambiguity of its ending, refuses to resolve.

The first of Heracles' two monologues is delivered while he still thinks that Deianeira is responsible for his pain, before he learns from Hyllus that its cause is Nessus' poison (ll. 1046–111). Heracles struggles to make sense of what is happening to him and reveals the resources he has to deal with his intense and precipitous reversal of fortune. We recall Deianeira's reaction to Iole's reversal of fortune. In it she saw the fragility of the human condition and so she felt fear for Heracles, despite the news of his victory and despite compassion for Iole. In contrast, Heracles is entirely focused on making sense of his own suffering as the culmination of his particular story. In so doing he transforms the stage world, which until now Deianeira has defined. The speech has three striking features: the use of lists weighted to bring out the superiority of one element; abundant imperative verb forms; and vocatives, which summon an audience for Heracles' story. The first 19 lines of the speech involve two constructions that I label "agonistic" because they mark Heracles' competitive nature. The first is a priamel in which he lists all his previous suffering and labors, only to claim their inferiority to this present suffering, which is "superior" in its intensity and force. In the second rhetorical move he recites the causes of his prior suffering in order to emphasize the extraordinary cause of his current pain: a woman. This passage consists of a series of five negations, οὐτε ("not"): not this monster, not that, not the other, but a woman! Here again the impulse behind the rhetoric is competitive, designed to allow the extraordinary nature of the present circumstance to emerge through comparison with a set of other – inferior – examples.

The next 17 lines of the speech are addressed to Hyllus, and, at the end, to all those present; they contain 11 imperatives. As we shall also see in his following speech, Heracles, despite his physical powerlessness, acts on the world with his words, attempting to shape events through the commands he gives others. He is the quintessential agent. In this case his imperatives are directed at Hyllus, as he demands him to show the world that he is Heracles' true son. This demand has an agonistic component too, as the proof that Heracles requires forces Hyllus to side with him and implicitly to reject Deianeira's claim on his understanding (ll. 1067–8). Heracles demands Hyllus' loyalty and his pity, and he finally orders him and all the others on stage to bear witness to his suffering, commanding them to look as he reveals his body. The agency that these imperatives represent, the demand that his suffering be witnessed, and the justice that he wants to exact belong to a public, active life, familiar in its preoccupations, if not in its power, to the male citizens in the audience.

In the last 27 lines of the speech, Heracles expands his audience through a series of vocatives. Summoning an audience with repeated vocatives makes his anger a public matter, in telling contrast to the absence of any addressee in Deianeira's first speech and to the intimacy of her revelations. Heracles addresses Hades, Zeus, his hands, his back, his chest, his arms. He orders Hades and Zeus to end his misery. He addresses his body as the agent of his labors, and he makes a list of those labors in order to compare the victory he achieved then with the defeat he now suffers. He ends the speech with an imperative: "know well," he insists – to Hyllus, to the old man, to the chorus – that, though he is "nothing," he will still achieve his just revenge against Deianeira. Sophocles endows Heracles' language with characteristics of public discourse, almost as if he were arguing his case in court, claiming his just revenge as a man whose acts have earned him the attention and respect of his audience. Heracles brings the resources of a competitive spirit, of a power of agency exercised even through words, of the assurance that his suffering has a place in the public world. Through him we witness what might allow a human being to face the reversals and challenges of a changing, unpredictable world, even as we wonder whether his power is human.

Heracles' second short monologue (ll. 1157–78) explains how his discovery that the poison destroying him came from Nessus makes sense of an oracle predicting that he could only be killed by one who is already dead. Heracles realizes with relief that his present suffering is the fulfillment of that prediction and that his death will be consistent with the life he has led – it will not be a humiliating defeat by a woman (Fowler 1999: 165–6). He says not another word about Deianeira; he makes no acknowledgment of the world that Deianeira has tried to defend and preserve. Heracles' relief comes from the confirmation of his own agency: Nessus' potion was created by Heracles' arrow and serves as Nessus' revenge for his defeat at Heracles' hands. Heracles' sense of control over his own story is so strong that it is hard to keep in mind what we have witnessed in the first two-thirds of the play as a competing reality. Indeed, Heracles' interpretation of things has overwhelmed even critics. No reading of the play that I have seen acknowledges the fact that this oracle about the agent of Heracles' death could refer just as well to Deianeira as to Nessus. Does the audience allow Heracles to blot out its awareness of Deianeira and of her world as rapidly as all that? Are the rhetoric and the vision of this character – who is able to replace the evidence of his vulnerability (the feminine tears with which the scene began) with the certainty of his control, who seems able to manage all the changes life throws at him without nostalgia or regret – too compelling to resist?

The speech ends with a command to Hyllus to "become the ally of your father; do not delay and so sharpen my tongue: yield and act with me, reveal the truth that the best law is to obey one's father" (ll. 1175–8). This command and the orders he gives Hyllus in the following stichomythia continue the trajectory from helplessness to control that structures this scene. We witness Heracles' ability to shape the future according to his will, to take control and make sense of the reversals and change that time brings. He gives two commands to Hyllus: he is to build him a pyre on Mt. Oeta; and he is to marry Iole. Both actions, complicated as they are at many levels, show an imagination that innovates in the face of dire circumstances. The pyre will produce a fire that outdoes the burning of Nessus' poison and wrests victory once again from his enemy, even if it is a victory of self-destruction. The marriage of Hyllus and Iole improvises a satisfactory replacement of his own frustrated erotic impulse and effectively completes the displacement of Deianeira, in that it requires Hyllus to abandon all loyalty to his mother. It not

only assures the continuation of Heracles' line but, as the audience knows, it establishes a royal house at Sparta that has survived to shape the audience's own world (Vickers 1995). As a perfect counterbalance to the fear that Deianeira feels about male agency and the vicissitudes of fortune, a fear that originates in the human longing for stability and permanence, Heracles displays the power and inventiveness that allow him to face and capitalize on the changes that fortune and his fellow agents present him with. The emotional coloring that Deianeira's fear gave to her perspective is matched in this scene by the brutal indifference to others' feelings that Heracles displays as he imposes his will. This emotional coloring gives "flesh" to the different perspectives that each character embodies. It also engages the audience on an emotional level in the question whether pessimism and fear or ruthless, unquestioning action is a more comprehensible reaction to the human condition.

The trajectory of this scene, then, takes us from Heracles' despair at finding himself crying like a woman to his final command, given to his "hard spirit" (*ψυχὴ σκληρά*), to put an "iron clamp on his mouth and stop his cries" – and it captures the essential contrast between Heracles' control and the vulnerability and contingency of Deianeira's position. We have seen that Heracles' resources, as they are revealed in the rhetoric of his great speech – his will to act, his desire for public justice, his competitive spirit – evoke characteristics associated with a male existence. He brings those resources to bear on the flux and impermanence of human fortune. The question we have raised about this opposition and tension between female and male perspectives and different human desires is whether, in the end, they find common ground and equal footing in the shared reality of death. The answer to that question depends, in part, on how we understand Heracles' end. Is the movement of the final scene a demonstration of Heracles' instinct and capacity to take control, only to negate this control in the human reality of death? In that case the differences between Heracles' and Deianeira's positions as subjects are resolved in their common fate. Or is the control that Heracles exerts in this scene only the beginning of a movement that ends in *his* father, Zeus, removing him entirely from the state of flux and struggle and granting him immortality? Does the male perspective of the last third of the play rise to a dominant status, being endorsed by Zeus' paternal care, while the world that Deianeira has composed in the first two-thirds of the play fades into the silence that surrounds and follows her at her death?

4 Final Words

To some degree, the way each member of the audience would answer these questions depends on the assumptions s/he makes about the ambiguous ending of the play. To explore this ambiguity, we turn finally to the last eight lines of the play and to the enigma they create for the audience. Here there are uncertainties about the text that contribute an unintentional difficulty to the intentional difficulty of interpretation that pervades this play. The uncertainty of the text arises from accidents of time, but those accidents may have gained impetus from the difficulty of tolerating the indeterminacy of Sophocles' ending. Specifically, scholars are divided about who speaks the last four lines, who the young girl is to whom the last four lines are addressed, and what she is told to do. The way we decide to answer these textual problems will depend on how we imagine the final tableau of the play. Here are the last lines of the play:

HYLLUS αἶρετ', ὄπαδοί, μεγάλην μὲν ἐμοὶ
 τούτων θέμενοι συγγνωμοσύνην,
 μεγάλην δὲ θεῶν ἀγνωμοσύνην,
 εἰδότες ἔργων τῶν πρᾶσσομένων,
 οἱ φύσαντες καὶ κληζόμενοι
 πατέρες τοιαῦτ' ἐφορῶσι πάθη.
 τὰ μὲν οὖν μέλλοντ' οὐδεις ἐφορᾷ,
 τὰ δὲ νῦν ἐστῶτ' οἰκτρὰ μὲν ἡμῖν,
 αἰσχρὰ δ' ἐκείνοις,
 χαλεπώτατα δ' οὖν ἀνδρῶν πάντων
 τῷ τήνδ' ἄτην ὑπέχοντι.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER λείπου μηδὲ σύ, παρθεν', ἐπ' [οἱ ἀπ'] οἴκων,
 μεγάλους μὲν ἰδοῦσα νέους θανάτους,
 πολλὰ δὲ πήματα <καὶ> καινοπαθῆ,
 κούδεν τούτων ὅ τι μὴ Ζεὺς.

HYLLUS Raise him up, men, and give me, on the one hand,
 generous forbearance, and know, on the other hand,
 the vast indifference of the gods
 to what is taking place
 who, having sown their seed and being called fathers,
 look over such suffering.
 On the one hand, no one sees ahead to what's coming
 on the other, the things that are here before us are, on the one hand,
 pitiable to us, on the other, shameful to them, and most difficult
 for the one of all men who undergoes this destruction.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER You also, young girl, do not be left in [or away from] your house,
 a witness to many new deaths, on the one hand,
 and many new pains, on the other.
 Nothing here is not Zeus.

In the lines that are securely Hyllus', we find three *men/de* constructions, which contrast the gods' indifference with human feeling. They make the firm assumption that Heracles is going to his death on Mt. Oeta. The last *men/de* adds a third element to the contrast between human pity and divine shame that Heracles' fate invites: the present moment, Hyllus says, is "most difficult for the one [...] who undergoes this destruction." The superlative, "most difficult" moment, trumps both divine and human feeling with the complexity of Heracles' own state. "Difficult" is an interesting word in this unbalancing third element of the *men/de*; it suggests, of course, the extremity of Heracles' physical struggle, but it also suggests the complex nature of his suffering – as the son of Zeus ignored by his father, as the lover of Iole whose erotic desire shattered his home, as the victim of Deianeira's attempt to protect her home, and as the victor over Nessus who suffers Nessus' revenge. The idea of Heracles' difficulty as the third and most intense element of the *men/de/de* construction creates a kind of imbalance within the form that seems to call for some kind of resolution of that difficulty. A resolution can exist only in the imaginations of the audience, as it pictures what is to happen on Mt. Oeta. Hyllus warns against this very act of imagination ("no one sees ahead to what's coming"), but at the same time the play compels us to think about what we cannot know (Hoey 1977: 273–5).

The last four lines of the play take us into that future, since they contain an imperative that motivates the final physical movement of the play. It is particularly frustrating,

therefore, that we cannot know who speaks these last four lines, to whom they are spoken, or what the action is that the addressee is being told to perform. This final address to a young girl is a startling gesture that cannot remain dramatically neutral; it replaces the traditional ending of a play, where the chorus speaks a kind of coda to the audience: an often formulaic utterance signaling the end. These lines, instead, open up a next stage beyond the final moment of the play, a future full of questions that need answers. The different possibilities for the text of the final lines correlate with different resolutions to the tensions that have developed in the course of the play. In examining these different textual possibilities, we will imagine different endings, but only in order to discover how the final tableau might keep the audience's imagination open to all the possibilities.

Does the final tableau show Hyllus and Heracles exiting in one direction, and Iole, as one possible addressee of the last lines, or the chorus, as the other, exiting in a different direction, into their own homes? In these two scenarios, Hyllus would be the speaker of the last two lines and he would be saying: "You also, young girl, do not be left away from your house" (in other words, "go inside"). Or does the speaker, either Hyllus or the chorus, address Iole, who has come silently out of Deianeira's house during the scene, and tell her "Do not be left in your house," so that we see Heracles, Hyllus, and Iole exit together toward Mt. Oeta, with the chorus left alone on stage? Or does Iole never emerge from Deianeira's house, so that it is the chorus that departs with Hyllus and Heracles, either at Hyllus' command or of its own accord? Let us explore these different possibilities in the light of the questions we have posed about how the ending might reflect back on the tensions of the play.

If the addressee of these lines is Iole and she is being told by Hyllus to re-enter Deianeira's house, the play seems to end with a reassertion of the divisions that structure it. The final action would show Iole replacing Deianeira in the house, while Hyllus takes Heracles to Mt. Oeta, and we seem to have returned to the beginning of the play, confirming Deianeira's assertion about the predictability of her miserable fate and generalizing it to other women. Then we are perhaps led to imagine that Heracles' life will be illuminated by his apotheosis, fulfilling the other half of Deianeira's *men/de* sequence – that other people's lives can only be judged to be good or bad in the light of their end. But in this case Heracles' apotheosis would bestow on his life, and on the characteristics he has displayed, an extraordinary place of privilege. Or does Iole take her place by Hyllus' side, as they both accompany Heracles to an unknown future on Mt. Oeta? Does this final movement open up the possibility for a different way for men and women to communicate and learn from each other's engagement with the world? In this scenario we might imagine that Heracles dies on Mt. Oeta and that his death allows his and Deianeira's stories to end on the same note, as a new possibility emerges out of their shared fate in the very different union of Iole and Hyllus.

Another scenario shows us the members of the chorus, after what they have seen, not only silenced but finally disbanded and sent away to their homes. The chorus' songs, which I have not had the space to discuss, offer a different vision from the actors', one characterized by a balance between male and female perspectives and by the evocation, through song and dance, of an order that encompasses opposition and balance, stability and motion, absence and return (see Kitzing 2006 for a discussion of the difference between the actors' and the chorus' perspectives in Sophocles' drama). The chorus members have been present but silent since Heracles' entrance. Do they leave now in silence in the opposite direction, taking with them the possibility their song and dance

have offered – of a balanced order and of multiple perspectives, which defy the simple contrast and tension of opposites? Or are they to accompany Heracles to his death, because that death, counterbalancing Deianeira's, confirms the balance their song has evoked, finally bringing into equilibrium men's and women's suffering in the face of mortality? Or do they accompany Heracles to Mt. Oeta because there, when Zeus lifts his son to Mt. Olympus, they will have to sing a new song, which acknowledges the imbalance between male and female in the divine and human order?

There are no certain answers to these questions. In my understanding of the play, the final movement must leave the audience in uncertainty about Heracles' end, and with a sense of urgency about the consequences of not being able to see it. Let me suggest how I, as a director staging the play with our imperfect text, would end it, to preserve the unresolved questions that I believe Sophocles' drama raises. The chorus would speak the last four lines, in a kind of response to Hyllus' last lines. Hyllus' several *men/de* constructions are balanced by those of the chorus; his address to the male attendants accompanying Heracles is balanced by the chorus' address to the young girl, and Hyllus' contrast between divine indifference and human pity is balanced by the chorus' recognition of Zeus' presence in all that has happened. Its members would address Iole, who has silently emerged from the house during Hyllus' lines. They would tell her to accompany Hyllus to Mt. Oeta, not to be left behind in the house. The end of the play would leave the chorus on stage alone with the line: "There is nothing here that is not Zeus."

The *men/de* in the chorus' description of what Iole has witnessed contrasts suffering and death, but emphasizes the novelty of her experience of both. If, on Mt. Oeta, Hyllus and Iole together witness Heracles' death, then the emphasis on novelty may promise a different future for them, in which the oppositions and divisions in the play may be transformed. Hyllus' sympathy for his mother earlier on and Iole's silence, which makes her an unknown whose point of view we are free to imagine, allow us to think that this new generation might find different answers. If we imagine that Heracles meets his death on Mt. Oeta, the equalizing of his fate with that of Deianeira sets the stage for this new configuration to develop. On the other hand, if we imagine that Hyllus and Iole will witness the apotheosis of Heracles, a "new death," his demand that Hyllus take his place will gain a new imperative, and the privileging of Heracles' experience will lead us to imagine that there is in Iole's silence the same kind of fear that we witnessed in Deianeira. The future for Iole and Hyllus, then, would be a repetition of the past (Wohl 1998: 56), now reinforced by a universal order ensuring the imbalance between male and female perspectives.

The chorus' last line also leaves us with a question. What is Zeus' order? Their assertion that it is imminent awakes us to the realization that we cannot understand what we have witnessed without trying to answer that question. But the fact that we cannot know what awaits Heracles exposes our ignorance. Sophocles has structured his play so that we may feel the absolute limitation of our understanding, the need to attempt to overcome it, and the consequences of the inevitable failure to do so.

Guide to Further Reading

Two editions of the *Trachiniae* with useful commentary are Easterling (1982) and Davies (1991). The translation of the play by Williams and Dickerson (2010) in vol. 2 of the *Complete Sophocles* is readable and actable; for an interesting interpretation of the play

through a translation, see Pound's and Flemming's version (1989). Levett (2004), in the Duckworth Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy, provides useful background and interpretive suggestions for the student unfamiliar with Greek tragedy.

For the *Trachiniae* as a meditation on Greek marriage, see Ormand (1999) and Wohl (1998). For a more general discussion of gender in the play, see Zeitlin (1996).

A broad consideration of the myth of Heracles as it appears in the play can be found in Segal (1977). Holt (1989) offers specific and helpful discussion of the question of Heracles' apotheosis in myth and in the play; for a more detailed discussion of the apotheosis in lost versions of the myth, see Holt (1992).

For more general interpretations of the play, especially useful are Easterling (1968), Lawrence (1978), and Kane (1988). The ending of the play receives interesting interpretations from Easterling (1981) and from Roberts (1988).

For the chorus in Greek tragedy in general, see Wiles (1997); for Sophocles in particular, Kitzinger (2008). For articles about specific *stasima* in the play, see M. Finkelberg (1996) and (1997).

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The *Philoctetes* of Sophocles

Paul Woodruff

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* won first place in the Great Dionysian festival of 409 BCE, when the poet was over 85 years old. It remains a dramatic work of great power on stage; in its time it touched on themes that came home sharply to its audience. This was four years after the Athenian defeat in Sicily and only two years after the constitutional crisis of 411 BCE – a brief period of oligarchy followed by the restoration of democracy. This was a period of moral and political tumult; civil wars raged through the city states of Greece, polished speakers used noble words to cloak ignoble actions, and young men learned the art of persuasion from the traveling teachers Plato would later call sophists.

I Myth

Philoctetes was the friend of Heracles who lit the funeral pyre from which Heracles emerged as a god; in return for this favor Heracles gave Philoctetes his bow, which had divine powers. Philoctetes joined the Greek army that was to sail for Troy. When the army learned from an oracle that they must sacrifice to the goddess Chryse, Philoctetes guided them to her island shrine, where he was bitten by a snake. The resulting wound separated him from both men and gods; it would not heal, it stank, and it hurt him into shrieking with pain. His shrieks could not be allowed where gods were invoked, and so the Greek leaders, on advice from Odysseus, decided to abandon him on the nearby island of Lemnos, so that they could sacrifice to Chryse and continue on their way.

Now, in the tenth year of the Trojan War, a prophecy has told the Greeks that they will not defeat Troy until two conditions are met: Philoctetes must rejoin them with his bow, and Achilles' son Neoptolemus, who has just reached military age, must also join them. Achilles' armor had gone to Odysseus after his death – to the consternation of Ajax, who thought he deserved the prize. But, when Neoptolemus was brought to Troy, Odysseus turned the armor over to the boy as his birthright. Meanwhile, Diomedes has sailed to

Lemnos and brought Philoctetes to Troy. Such is the story told in the lost poems of the epic cycle, as summarized by late sources (see Jebb 1898: vii–xix). We learn the sequel from other sources: the Greeks did sack Troy, where Neoptolemus killed Priam at the altar of Zeus – an act of gross irreverence, for which Apollo brought him an early death (Pausanias 17.4; some other sources record more favorable accounts of Neoptolemus).

Athenian audiences would have known versions of the story from the earlier plays by Aeschylus and Euripides. Outlines of these plays are provided by Dio Chrysostom, who read them in the first century CE (*Discourses* 52). In Aeschylus, the mission is entrusted to Odysseus; Philoctetes does not recognize Odysseus and is therefore more easily taken in by Odysseus' lying account of disasters in the Greek army, a lie that somehow brings him to Troy.

In Euripides, whose play was performed in 431 BCE, Odysseus arrives in company with Diomedes; disguised by Athena as a fugitive from the Greek army, he tells a false tale and wins a debate. Dio's summary of the prologue to Euripides' play (*Discourses* 59) tells us that Odysseus was competing with a delegation from Troy, which hoped to win over Philoctetes to their side. The false fugitive (Odysseus) says that he and Philoctetes have a common enemy – Odysseus, who has forced him to flee from the army under a false accusation of treachery against his friend Palamedes.

Sophocles changes the story in three striking ways:

First, though Odysseus is mission commander, he brings along someone whom Philoctetes is more likely to trust – Neoptolemus, the young son of Achilles. Achilles was notoriously honest and was, moreover, close in friendship to Philoctetes. Philoctetes would never believe a story told by his tricky enemy Odysseus, even if it were true; but he might well believe lies from Neoptolemus. (In other versions Neoptolemus is on his way to Troy or still at home at the time of this mission.)

Second, though the other plays use people of Lemnos for the chorus, Sophocles uses Neoptolemus' sailors, on the premise that Lemnos (or at least this part of it) is uninhabited. Sophocles' chorus supports Odysseus' mission; it speaks for the whole army in wishing for Philoctetes to join it and bring victory. At the same time the chorus represents Philoctetes' only chance to rejoin the human race; there are no other people around and, if other sailors stray to the island, they always reject Philoctetes on account of his smell and his loathsome cries. Philoctetes is angry at the leaders who decided to abandon him; he is too angry to rejoin their army – too angry, perhaps, to live among other humans at all. Through this chorus, Sophocles has presented him with his first opportunity to take part in a human endeavor, and this opportunity sharpens the conflict.

Third, Sophocles ends the play with an intervention by Heracles as *deus ex machina*, a device not reported for the other two plays. Athena is Odysseus' protector and she may have helped resolve the other two plots. But Heracles is a human being turned god and a close friend of Philoctetes. Human friendship will be at least as influential in Sophocles' version as divine power and foreknowledge.

2 Conflicts

The play is built around two conflicts. The overarching conflict is between an angry Philoctetes and his god-appointed destiny to be cured and to win glory along with his fellow Greek soldiers. Much of the action, however, concerns a choice thrust on the

young Neoptolemus between two moral exemplars: his teacher Odysseus, who will do anything to achieve success, and his father Achilles, whom he remembers as a man of honor and honesty, and whose values are represented by Philoctetes.

Some critics emphasize Philoctetes' conflict with destiny: "The hero's task is to grasp his destiny in its largest terms" (Segal 1995: 117). Anger and a mind clouded by pain stand between Philoctetes and the choice he must make. Philoctetes thinks he has set himself against Odysseus and the Greek commanders; but, as the play develops, we see that he has set himself against his entire world – not just his commanders, but his peers and his gods. The whole rank and file of the army, as represented by the chorus, wants him back, and to refuse them as he does requires him to overcome his longing to be reunited with his own kind.

At the end of the play he learns that, if he stays on alone, he will set himself not only against the army but also against the will of the gods and against the advice of his greatest friend, Heracles, who appears mysteriously at the moment of need. As a human being who rose through death to divine status, Heracles represents both the best of friendship among mortals and the will of the gods. The voice of Heracles suffices to change Philoctetes' mind. Philoctetes chooses to rejoin his army of his own free will. By the end it appears that Philoctetes had to choose his destiny freely, without compulsion, and without a cloud of deception fogging his mind.

For a hero to choose the destiny given to him by fate was no paradox for ancient Greek audiences; choice and fate were not held to be exclusive (Woodruff 2008: 75–92). But the resolution to this conflict is nevertheless mysterious. Odysseus and Neoptolemus attempt *dolos* (deceptive trickery), theft, force, and honest persuasion. Additionally, Neoptolemus softens Philoctetes by showing compassion and by recreating his father's friendship. These factors take turns driving the plot through a series of false endings to its conclusion. The audience is left wondering why Heracles is necessary if the other means would turn the trick; and, if only Heracles would serve, why we are asked to watch the action of the play. *Dolos*, theft, and force could not bring Philoctetes into harmony with his destiny; honest persuasion by friends, accompanied by compassion, could do the job.

Other critics emphasize Neoptolemus' moral choice between the values of Odysseus and those of Achilles/Philoctetes (Blundell 1989: 184–225). Some scholars take Odysseus to be the villain of the piece, "a degenerate descendant of the Homeric hero," so that Neoptolemus' moral assignment is to throw off Odysseus' teaching (Knox 1964: 124, 136). Others are more balanced. Reinhardt argues that Odysseus and Philoctetes represent equally weighted opposed values, and that "both are justified" (Reinhardt 1947: 194 = 1979: 185). Odysseus, a master of words and deceptions, holds that it is right to tell lies in a good cause. The good cause here is not merely personal glory in battle, but also the success of friends in the army and, beyond that, compliance with the will of the gods. Philoctetes, by contrast, is so obsessed with the injustice done to him that he is prepared to cut himself off permanently from human society, and even from life itself. He is right about the facts, but wrong to take so small-minded a view, separating himself from the world (Reinhardt 1947: 200 = 1979: 191).

Neoptolemus wants it both ways; from the start, he is trying to be true to the nature he believes he has inherited from his father, who was famous for abhorring all falsehood. But, like his father, he wants glory, and he learns from Odysseus that the price of glory for him will be participation in *dolos*. As the play proceeds we see Neoptolemus first as a malleable student and later as an independent agent who seems to defy Odysseus. In the

end we see that he has partially recovered his truthfulness, but we cannot be sure that Odysseus' teaching has not weakened his character.

The moral conflict is never fully resolved: in the end, Neoptolemus has tried both deceit and honesty, failing at both, and faces an uncertain moral future. When he lies, he does not win over Philoctetes; when he tells the truth, he does not tell the whole truth; and, when he sacks Troy, he will commit a crime of extreme irreverence by killing the old king at his altar – a future adumbrated by the *deus ex machina* (1440–4). Like any question of character, apparently, this one cannot be settled until the man's life is over. The boy's inherited nature is only a potential, which he can develop in action or not, as he chooses (Blundell 1988: 147). The play will be packed with action, agitated from beginning to end by sudden or apparent shifts, as Neoptolemus is moved by one or another of the older men. We will have to ask, in the end, whether he really is developing a character at all, or whether, like Odysseus, he takes on qualities as situations require (l. 1049).

3 Plot and the Questions It Raises

Uncertainty about Neoptolemus' character puts the audience on a knife-edge of suspense, which Sophocles exploits to the full. What do the young man's actions mean at each stage? When is he sincere, and when is he contributing to the *dolos* – the trap Odysseus is weaving for Philoctetes out of a tissue of lies? Questions of interpretation abound, many of which cannot be answered with conviction from the text. Some of them might pass unnoticed by an audience, but others will stand out and add to the excitement of the play.

In this section I will summarize the plot, giving the plain meaning of the text as best I can. After each scene I turn to italics and write with an editorial voice, laying out questions as they arise. In later sections I will address the questions that have caused the most interesting controversies among scholars.

The scene on which this drama will be played shows Philoctetes' cave opening toward the audience; this has a second entrance, which may be visible to the audience through the front opening. Only one of the entrance/exit ramps is used – the path to the anchorage where the ship lies. The anchorage is not visible from the stage. Lemnos is inhabited, but not this part of it (Taplin 1987: 72–3).

The prologue shows Odysseus revealing his plan to Neoptolemus and persuading him to play his part. The plan is to steal the bow, after deceiving its owner with a whopping set of lies in order to win his friendship. Neoptolemus is to say that he is sailing back home after burying his father, and that the Greek leaders have insulted him by giving his arms to Odysseus, who is his enemy. The young man resists at first, pleading that it is not his nature to deceive. But Odysseus argues that their target is too angry to be persuaded and too powerful to be taken by force – his bow, the bow of Heracles, is invincible. Moreover, Neoptolemus will gain double glory if he succeeds – fame for cleverness in outwitting Philoctetes, and glory for valor in defeating Troy. Lured by glory, the young man consents (l. 120), and Odysseus returns to their ship so that Philoctetes will not recognize him and kill them both. He promises, if too much time passes, to send a sailor disguised as a sea captain to assist Neoptolemus with a clever story.

Could Odysseus have waited till now to explain the mission to the young man? Why does he plan to steal only the bow, when (as we learn later) the prophecy calls for him to bring Philoctetes and the bow? Perhaps Odysseus' plan is that Philoctetes would follow his beloved

bow and board the ship for Troy. A further question: have they come in one boat or two? Only one boat is mentioned in the text, but Neoptolemus' plans for independent action, if sincere, require that he has his own boat and can sail without Odysseus.

The chorus enters on a sung dialogue (the *parodos*) in which Neoptolemus gives them his instructions and they express pity for Philoctetes in his pain and isolation.

Philoctetes limps into view, preceded by the miserable cries of pain that have caused his isolation. He is pleased to hear human voices and delighted to find them speaking Greek, after so many years of isolation. Neoptolemus introduces himself and feigns ignorance as the older man tells his story – how he was bitten by the snake and marooned on this lonely island by Odysseus and the sons of Atreus, Agamemnon, and Menelaus. Neoptolemus responds with his own story – the whopping lie concocted by Odysseus – that the sons of Atreus and Odysseus made him their enemy by withholding his father's armor, an insolent crime. The chorus confirms the crime in the context of a prayer, where no one would expect a falsehood (ll. 391–402, cf. 510). Philoctetes is happy to find that he and Neoptolemus are united in hatred for Odysseus. He asks after Ajax and learns that Ajax, Antilochus, and Patroclus are all dead, while the evil Odysseus and Thersites still live.

Is the chorus complicit in the lie when it appeals to Neoptolemus' enmity with the sons of Atreus? Or is the chorus also deceived? If complicit, the chorus is line perfect. When was it briefed on the scheme? (Webster (1970: ad loc.) defends the chorus; Bers (1981) shows that it lies; of the use of prayer to support the falsehood, Reinhardt says: "What should be most holy has become a means of betrayal" (1947: 180 = 1979: 171).)

Now is the time for Neoptolemus to prepare his departure. Philoctetes throws himself as a suppliant on the young man's mercy, begging to be taken home. The chorus supports him and Neoptolemus agrees to take him aboard, though without specifying his destination (ll. 524–9).

Do Neoptolemus and the chorus feel real compassion, or are they pretending? If real, could Neoptolemus be considering a return to Greece with his passenger? If not, he would be planning to cheat a suppliant, a major violation of reverence (on the importance of reverence in the play, see lines 1440–4 and Segal 1995: 95–118).

A man appears disguised as a merchant sea captain; this is the man Odysseus had promised earlier to send (ll. 126–31), or perhaps it is Odysseus himself in disguise. The False Merchant (as he is known to scholars) urges Neoptolemus to take ship immediately, warning him that the Greeks have sent a force to bring him back to Troy, while they have also sent Odysseus and Diomedes to bring back Philoctetes by persuasion or force. The Merchant explains that Odysseus had trapped a son of Priam, Helenus, who was a prophet. Helenus told them they would never conquer Troy until they had persuaded Philoctetes to leave his island and join the army. Philoctetes responds with rage and determination: "He would sooner persuade me to rise from the dead than to go back and join the Achaeans" (ll. 624–5). Having told his tale, the Merchant departs.

Who is the False Merchant? Is he the Sailor Odysseus promised to send, or is this Odysseus in disguise, come to make sure his young pupil carries out his mission? Who but Odysseus could tell Neoptolemus "I make you responsible for this" (l. 590)? Note that the three-actor rule entails that the actor who played Odysseus would play the Merchant. Could Odysseus have been eavesdropping? Does he now suspect, as the audience might, that Neoptolemus' compassion is genuine? In any case, Odysseus devised the message; why does he make it so offensive to Philoctetes? Is Odysseus being an incompetent brute (unlikely), or is he weaving another strand in his trap, trying to frighten Philoctetes on board the ship that would take

him to Troy? Once on board, is Philoctetes effectively disarmed, if his bow is ineffective at short range?

Philoctetes starts packing his few necessities for the voyage with Neoptolemus, which he believes will take him home. In return for the promise to take him home, Philoctetes promises to let the young man hold the bow. This exchange of good deeds establishes them as friends. The chorus sings its only major ode (*stasimon*, ll. 676–728), a lovely expression of pity for Philoctetes and a celebration of the promise of the voyage home.

Does the chorus know that the promise it celebrates is false? Probably so, and yet they sing with conviction. Are they using the beauty of poetry to support the dolos? Why is there only one choral interlude in this play? This chorus takes a direct part in the action; other Sophoclean choruses are more reflective, more lyrical. Once he made the chorus untrustworthy, did Sophocles feel that he could no longer use it in its traditional role as wise commentator?

Philoctetes is stricken by an attack of unbearable pain, which will fell him to the ground and be followed by sleep. He hands his bow to the young man (l. 762) and begs him not to leave him alone (l. 809). Neoptolemus promises to stay and Philoctetes declines to put him on oath. The young man agrees: “It would be wrong for me to go without you” (l. 812), a line that is true either way, whether he plans to take Philoctetes to Troy or to his home. The chorus sings a lullaby and modulates suddenly into a plea to Neoptolemus to take action. Neoptolemus replies that to take the bow to Troy without its owner would be a waste of time. The crown of victory at Troy is reserved for Philoctetes (ll. 839–42). The chorus renews its call for action.

What action is the chorus calling for? Stealing the bow and taking ship? Tying up the sick man so that he can be carried aboard?

Philoctetes awakes. Declining help from the chorus, whom he does not trust to be able to abide his smell, he accepts support from Neoptolemus. Neoptolemus now confesses he is at a loss what to say (l. 897). Philoctetes is afraid Neoptolemus may balk at his unbearable illness, but what Neoptolemus balks at is a moral wound: “Everything is hard to bear,” he says, “when a man abandons his own nature” (ll. 902–3). Neoptolemus has made a moral dilemma for himself, which he feels but has not made entirely explicit: If he takes Philoctetes home, he will betray the army, but if he takes him to Troy he will betray their new friendship. Nevertheless, he is firmly committed for Troy, and he tells Philoctetes for the first time that Troy means a cure for him, followed by the glory of victory (ll. 919–20).

Philoctetes asks him to return the bow, but Neoptolemus refuses: “Justice and advantage make me obey those in authority” (ll. 925–6). Philoctetes is enraged. He will starve to death if left without his weapon, but he blames the boy’s teachers more than he blames the boy (ll. 971–3).

Neoptolemus hesitates, asking the chorus for advice, but Odysseus intervenes. Sudden entrances are impossible in an ancient theater except from the central stage building, so Odysseus must have been on stage eavesdropping, visible to the audience. Now Philoctetes sees who it is that has tricked him, and Odysseus admits it (l. 980). Odysseus proposes to force Philoctetes on board, now that he is unarmed. Philoctetes tries to thwart him by leaping off a cliff but is prevented by two men under orders from Odysseus. Philoctetes pleads passionately with Odysseus, who agrees to release him to stay on the island. Odysseus insists that he can be as just as anyone when competing for a prize in justice, but, “whatever sort of man is needed, that’s the sort of man I am” (l. 1049). He says he or Ajax’s brother Teucer can handle the bow; they do not need Philoctetes.

Odysseus and Neoptolemus leave with the bow, but the chorus stays to give Philoctetes brief comfort and a chance to change his mind.

Does Odysseus believe that he can accomplish his goal by force – that an unwilling Philoctetes can defeat Troy? When Odysseus exits, is he bluffing (yes, Calder 1971: 161; no, Knox 1964: 134)? Will he really sail off with the bow and not its owner? Or does he hope that Philoctetes will follow his beloved bow, his only means of livelihood? This depends on how Odysseus understands the prophecy.

Odysseus is proud that he has no fixed character (l. 1049). Has Sophocles modeled him on unscrupulous politicians? The oligarchs to whom Sophocles' board gave power in 411 BCE turned out to be far worse than they had represented themselves at first. Or has Sophocles modeled him on teachers such as Gorgias, who said they could teach young men to be persuasive on either side of any issue?

In sung dialogue with Philoctetes, the chorus tells him first that this situation is his fault (l. 1095) and then that it is due to heaven-sent destiny and not to the *dolos* in which the chorus now admits it took part (ll. 1116–17). Philoctetes is unmoved, resolved to die on the island, but the chorus continues to try to persuade him. He orders them to leave and they gladly begin to obey, but he calls them back. He cannot bear to be left alone; he cannot bear to be left alive. He begs them, without result, for a weapon with which he can kill himself. Philoctetes exits into his cave.

Enter Neoptolemus, closely followed by Odysseus. Neoptolemus has come to return the bow; he did wrong, he says, to trap a man by means of shameful deceit and *dolos* (l. 1228). Odysseus threatens him with the whole force of the Greek army, but Neoptolemus is obdurate: he is not afraid to fight if justice is on his side (l. 1250). The two debate in vigorous stichomythia (an exchange of single lines). Unable to change Neoptolemus' mind, Odysseus leaves and Philoctetes returns from his cave. Neoptolemus puts the bow back in the hands of its still suspicious owner. Odysseus suddenly reappears, vainly forbids the return of the bow, and proposes to take Philoctetes by force. Philoctetes notches an arrow to kill Odysseus, but Neoptolemus catches his arm and saves Odysseus' life.

The return of the bow seems to mark Neoptolemus' recovery of his natural character, and so most critics have taken it. But could this be yet another strand in the grand trick they are playing on Philoctetes? The bow is no use without its master, so this may be yet another attempt to soften Philoctetes for persuasion by Neoptolemus to go aboard the ship (Calder 1971: 163–6).

The sudden entrances and exits in these scenes are puzzling, as ancient theaters are entered by long ramps visible to the audience. Why does Philoctetes go back into his cave? When Neoptolemus calls Philoctetes out of his cave, is Odysseus hiding and eavesdropping, as we have suspected before?

The return of the bow cements the friendship between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes more strongly (even though Neoptolemus has saved the life of the man Philoctetes still believes is their common enemy). On the basis of this friendship, Neoptolemus now attempts to win Philoctetes over with a display of honesty. For the first time he lays out the full prophecy – that Philoctetes will go of his own will to Troy, that there he will be healed by the sons of Asclepius, that he will share with Neoptolemus the main glory of conquering Troy, and that the source of the prophecy staked his life on its truth (ll. 1330–47). Philoctetes is unconvinced; Neoptolemus' earlier lie now ruins his case. “His past words are now part of him, and he must live with the consequences” (Taplin 1987: 70). How can either Philoctetes or Neoptolemus now trust Odysseus or the sons of Atreus? “When a mind has become the mother of evil, it goes on teaching men to be

evil" (ll. 1360–1; Lloyd-Jones' emendation of "begets" for "teaches" is unsupported, 1994: 394). In the beginning Neoptolemus had lied to Philoctetes, telling him that the sons of Atreus have wronged him over his father's armor. At this late stage Philoctetes still believes the lie and is puzzled over Neoptolemus' willingness to fight for the men who had done him wrong (ll. 1362–5).

If Neoptolemus has really changed heart and abandoned the dolos, why does he not tell Philoctetes that the story of enmity between him and the Greek leaders was false? How does Neoptolemus know the full prophecy, since he has not heard it during the action of the play? Why did no one tell Philoctetes the whole prophecy before now, realizing that it is more persuasive than the truncated account given by the False Merchant? And why, if the Greeks knew that Philoctetes must come of his own will, did they attempt to subvert his will by deception or force?

Philoctetes wants to hear no more about Troy. Suddenly, Neoptolemus changes course again: "If you think it right, let's go" (l. 1402), and Philoctetes believes he is offering to take him home, a belief Neoptolemus supports by worrying about the wrath of the Greeks if he does so.

Could the play end here, with Neoptolemus taking Philoctetes home to Greece? Or does he plan to abduct him to Troy once he is on board? If the latter, why would Neoptolemus continue to disregard the requirement that Philoctetes go of his own will (l. 1332)? Either way, why does the playwright beguile us with this gesture at a false ending?

The play is not over. Heracles makes a sudden appearance, probably arriving as a *deus ex machina* and landing on the stage building, above the cave. He repeats the message of the prophecy and warns the two men to be reverent to the gods in their conquest (ll. 1440–4). Both Philoctetes and Neoptolemus agree. Philoctetes delivers a formal farewell to the island and its deities, and the chorus closes the play with a prayer to sea nymphs for their safe return.

Is Sophocles really unable to resolve the play's conflict without recourse to a god? And, finally, what is the importance of Heracles' lines about reverence?

4 Aristocracy and Politics

Scholars have been tempted to read allusions to contemporary events into the play since the eighteenth century. At the time the play was produced, Athens was desperate for strong leadership. Many Athenians hoped to bring back an exiled general of great talent named Alcibiades. Recurrent attacks of plague and 22 years of war with Sparta had left Athens weak. The war had been successful at first, but in 415–413 BCE bad decisions and bad leadership had led to huge losses in Sicily, complicated soon after by a revolt of the allies.

The crisis of 411 BCE had threatened to replace democracy permanently with oligarchy. Sophocles' role in this was complex. He had served on the board of ten advisors who apparently gave the nod to the oligarchs, not realizing how bad they were going to be. Aristotle, who is our source for these events, tells us that Sophocles saw the change in government as at best a necessary evil (*Rh.* 1419^a25 ff.); he and the other advisors may well have been misled by deceitful oligarchs, who represented a political revolution as a temporary expedient. If the *Philoctetes* is an attack on deceptive politics (as some believe), it may represent Sophocles' reflection on the events of 411 BCE (so Calder 1971: 169–74).

Alcibiades was a young aristocrat of great wealth and extraordinary promise. In 415 BCE he had proposed going to war in Sicily; he was elected to command the expedition and would probably have led it to victory, but he was condemned on a charge of gross irreverence after he and the sailors (who were his supporters) had departed for Sicily. Athens' official ship sailed to bring him back to suffer the death penalty, whereat Alcibiades escaped to Sparta and from there went on to advise the Persian leader. In 411 BCE, when oligarchs ruled in Athens but democrats controlled the fleet at sea, he negotiated first with the oligarchic and then with the democratic leaders. He succeeded with the latter, was given a command, and won two major victories over the Spartan fleet (411 and 410 BCE). In 407 BCE he would finally return to Athens, but his success there would be short-lived; he would flee again to Persian territory and be assassinated in 404 BCE.

The *Philoctetes* may be read as illustrating various parts of this story. As Philoctetes was alienated from the Greek army, Alcibiades had been alienated from Athens – so much so that he had given the Spartans the advice that turned the war in their favor. But now Athens needs him, and many in the city must have wondered whether he could overcome his anger and come to their aid. Perhaps Sophocles meant his audience to see Alcibiades in *Philoctetes* (Vickers 2008: 59–81).

Conflict between aristocracy and the democracy had been endemic to Athens for generations. Tragic poets and other authors of the period often reflect on questions of inherited quality or inequality (Woodruff 2005: 127–43; cf. Rose in this volume). Xenophon reports a speech by a democratic leader, Thrasylbulus, in which he argues the point: aristocrats are not superior in any virtue to ordinary people (*Hellenica* 2.4.40–1). A fragment from a lost play of Sophocles includes these lines: “No one is by birth superior to another,/ But fate nourishes some of us with misery/ And some with prosperity” (*Tereus*, fr. 591).

Does the *Philoctetes* tell us that aristocrats are morally superior by nature to ordinary people? Apparently not: Odysseus is as aristocratic as his young pupil, but he lacks the moral character we hope to find in Neoptolemus, and he appeals to Neoptolemus' aristocratic parentage in persuading the young man to take part in the *dolos* (Blundell 1988: 185). What makes Neoptolemus special is not merely his class status, but the extraordinary virtue he is supposed to have inherited from his father along with that status.

The more interesting question philosophically is whether people are born with fixed characters at all. Thinkers of the period engaged in what we call the nature/nurture debate; the principal debate in Plato's *Protagoras* is over whether virtue can be taught. The *Philoctetes* is especially interesting in this regard. From the prologue to the end the play teases its audience with the question whether Neoptolemus will be true to the character he is supposed to have inherited from Achilles. Does the play support the idea that a young man's nature can trump his circumstances and his education? Or is it ultimately skeptical about nature in human character? We will treat this in the section on Neoptolemus' character.

5 Education and the New Learning

Few scholars have been convinced by attempts to line up Sophocles' characters with specific historical figures, but the thematic parallels between this play and Sophocles' period are inescapable (Calder 1971: 170). As we can tell from Aristophanes' *Clouds*, many Athenians were disturbed by the intellectual revolution I will call the “new

learning” – the rise of naturalistic cosmology and anthropology, the beginnings of scientific medicine, and the teaching of the art of persuasion. The new learning undermined religion by offering naturalistic explanations in place of those based on the gods. And the new learning threatened politics by teaching unscrupulous young men the tools to win votes.

The opening dialogue between Neoptolemus and Odysseus alludes to this latter threat, and here scholars have suspected that it is Neoptolemus who is modeled on Alcibiades (Vickers 2008: 69). Alcibiades had been exposed both to the demanding philosophical questioning of Socrates and to education from figures whom Plato would later identify as sophists. He had turned out to be a man who would do anything and join forces with anyone – Spartan, Persian, Athenian democrat, or Athenian oligarch – in order to achieve his goals. Critics blamed his moral flexibility on his education. When Anytus accused Socrates of having corrupted young men (as recorded in Plato’s *Apology*), he was surely thinking of Alcibiades among others.

Sophocles’ audience saw Neoptolemus as a noble youth (like Alcibiades) in the hands of a teacher who valued cunning words over deeds (ll. 98–9) and believed that deception is fine if it brings success (l. 109). The ancient commentator says this line is an attack on the demagogues (*rhetores*) of the day; and this appears to be true.

This play is not a direct attack on the teachers of the new learning, however. First, Odysseus does not use sophisticated rhetoric at any point; quite the contrary, he uses blunt language that undermines his persuasiveness with Philoctetes (Heath 1999: 146–7). He wins over Neoptolemus easily with a promise of glory, and then Neoptolemus succeeds because he is able to lie with a straight face, standing on his father’s reputation for honesty. No fancy rhetoric needed.

Second, Sophocles appears favorably disposed to the new learning both in this play and elsewhere. He has adopted humanist theories of human motivation and cultural development from the new learning (Woodruff 2009). Also, he has shown that he can make good use of rhetorical devices when he wishes, as in the Creon–Haemon debate of the *Antigone* or in Creon’s defense speech in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which appeals to the probable in sophistic manner (ll. 583–615). Peter Rose points out ways in which the *Philoctetes* reflects the new humanist interest in the origins of human culture through its revelations about the manner in which Philoctetes has been living outside human society (Rose 1976: *passim*). Plato indicates that Protagoras taught that human beings could not survive without a combination of technology and the political virtues that would help them maintain social groups (*Protagoras* 320C7–2D5), and Sophocles has shown his interest in the evolution of both technology and political virtue in the first *stasimon* of *Antigone* (“Many wonders, many terrors ...” – ll. 348ff.).

6 Neoptolemus’ Character

The young man wants to be like his father, but the play does not clearly show him as having taken up Achilles’ moral legacy. The various myths are ambivalent about Achilles, and this play offers various possibilities for his son. Is Neoptolemus as honest as his father was said to be? Is he a monster of irreverence, as his father was to the body of Hector? Or is he compassionate and reverent, as his father became to the suppliant Priam? Are we supposed to be aware, as we hear Heracles’ parting lines about reverence, of the story that Neoptolemus killed old Priam brutally at an altar? If so, then we are to know at the

end that Neoptolemus is a moral failure. Or are we instead to think of him as the noble hero of the *Odyssey* (11.505–37), a worthy son to his father (Roisman 2005: 37)?

At the start, Neoptolemus is far off the Achillean mark: “In fact, the lies Neoptolemus proceeds to tell present him as a sort of spurious Achilles; words, mood, and pretended action are all a lying parody of his great-hearted father” (Knox 1964: 123). Neoptolemus says falsely that he was deprived of his prize; Achilles really was. Achilles would never have started on the path of *dolos*.

Neoptolemus is superior to his father, however, in his capacity for pity. Pity comes hard to Achilles, though it does come in the end, when he yields Hector’s body to Priam. “Achilles, despite his pity for the weeping Patroclus [*Il.* 16.5], does not allow this emotion to influence his actions, and is generally conspicuous for his pitilessness (11.664f., 16.330–5, 24.44)” (Blundell 1988: 143).

Neoptolemus seems to be displaying his father’s character, or even outdoing it when he returns the bow to its owner – and again when he offers to take Philoctetes home. “Neoptolemus’ decision adds a new dimension to the nobility of his great father. He sacrifices his own cherished ambition of glory to make up for shameful conduct” (Knox 1964: 138).

But Neoptolemus may not be sincere on either occasion. He has never wavered in his commitment to bring Philoctetes to Troy, and he has shown himself deceptive right to the end, when he allows Philoctetes to continue believing his original lie – that he has been wronged by Odysseus. When can we ever trust a man who has told so many lies? He appears to be in genuine pain as he reflects on his dishonesty; it is unlikely that this is staged to win Philoctetes’ trust, though one scholar has argued that his expression of pain is just such a ruse (Calder 1971: 163–4). The sudden change of heart at line 1402, however – when Neoptolemus says “Let’s go” to Philoctetes – is not so obviously sincere. The audience is astonished at this moment, puzzled, uncertain what to believe. They are waiting to see whether Neoptolemus will really do as he says. But they will never find out. Heracles intervenes.

Sophocles makes great theater by weaving the ambiguity typical of Greek tragedy with the malleability of Neoptolemus’ character.

One of the finest examples of Sophocles’ sustained use of ambiguity comes in [the *Philoctetes*]. When Neoptolemus is carrying out the plan to trick Philoctetes, almost everything he says can be interpreted two ways, either as direct deceit or as an indication of his growing reluctance to take part in trickery at all. (Easterling 1977: 126)

We want to know how long Neoptolemus keeps up the *dolos*, but the text does not give us an unambiguous answer. In a given production, however, an acting company could give the audience visual clues on this point. I conclude that the play leaves in doubt the question whether his nature has survived the bad nurture of Odysseus (if he has a nature at all). Much depends on whether Neoptolemus really does plan to take Philoctetes home at line 1402.

7 The False Ending

“Almost all critics, I suspect, would agree that the profoundest moment in the play is Neoptolemus’ decision to take Philoctetes home [...]” (Easterling 1978: 39). Dio

Chrysostomus, who has reported the plots of all three plays on this theme, says explicitly that Neoptolemus is prepared to carry out his promise. Most modern scholars agree that the boy sincerely intends to take Philoctetes home.

But this interpretation leaves many questions unanswered: what has made the boy change his mind so suddenly? Neoptolemus has so far been unwavering in his commitment to bring Philoctetes to Troy. Sophocles allows his characters to change, but usually under a stimulus the audience recognizes. The change at line 1402 is too sudden to be entirely credible. The ancient commentator thought this was another act of deception: “He is deceiving and wants to take him to Troy” (393.3–4 Papageorgius, cited in Calder 1971: 167). A small minority of modern critics, whom Blundell labels “perverse,” have agreed (Blundell 1989: 224 n.).

On this point, I hold that the minority is correct. Why should anyone believe a man who is still showing himself to be a consummate liar? Although Neoptolemus makes a gesture at honest persuasion at lines 1314–47, he allows Philoctetes to continue believing the big lie that he was deprived of his father’s armor by the Greeks (1364–5), with the result that Philoctetes still believes, falsely, that Neoptolemus has no reason to fight for the Greeks at Troy. Since he has not given up the *dolos* at this stage and is still bent on taking Philoctetes to Troy at line 1392, it is odd that he should change heart suddenly a few lines later, at line 1402. Philoctetes has said nothing to change Neoptolemus’ mind; and yet, at line 1402, Neoptolemus says: “If you decide to, let’s go!” He plainly means Philoctetes to think that he will take him home, as we infer from the context in which Neoptolemus expresses his fear of the Greek army.

In any case, we cannot see how Neoptolemus could pull off a voyage home. Will he kill Odysseus? Maroon him on the island? The text mentions only one boat (ll. 132, 1076), aside from the imagined boat in which the False Merchant says he cast anchor (ll. 542ff.), and Dio understands there to be only one boat. Although Neoptolemus is in command of the sailors of the chorus, he recognizes Odysseus as his superior (ll. 54, 925–6). Odysseus is the mission commander (ll. 125–9), and the sailors, though compassionate, want to take Philoctetes back to war; victory at Troy is in their interests too.

How would the boy and the cripple – even armed with the bow – expect to hijack the boat successfully? Philoctetes would not be concerned about this if he believed Odysseus came in the Merchant’s boat, but Neoptolemus would know they have little hope of success. Raubitschek (1986) and Calder (1971) have argued for the single boat hypothesis; Avery (2002) considers all options and shows that a case can be made for a second boat.

As a matter of dramaturgy, I think Sophocles was wise to leave open the question of Neoptolemus’ sincerity, so that the audience would teeter in suspense until Heracles appeared. The plot trajectory is smoother if the audience is uncertain; then Heracles’ role is not to change the result – which the audience knew from the start. Philoctetes must go to Troy. Heracles’ role is to cast that result in a better light, and to ensure that Philoctetes goes willingly. “Sophocles shows here, as he does in the *Electra*, that *dolos* is not incompatible with the right course of action; what matters is the purpose which the action serves, and this purpose is fulfillment of the divine will” (Raubitschek 1986: 199). Perhaps Neoptolemus’ true character has come to light in the end – or perhaps not. The young man himself may not be sure what he would have done had Heracles not intervened.

8 Heracles, Reverence, and the Gods

None of Sophocles' surviving plays uses a *deus ex machina* to resolve the plot – a device that appears here to be used in imitation of Euripides (Reinhardt 1947: 199 = 1979: 190). Why would Neoptolemus' friendship not suffice to persuade Philoctetes to rejoin the army? Is Heracles' influence on Philoctetes due more to a persuasion based on their disinterested friendship (Easterling 1978: 35), or to his recent elevation to divine status? Reinhardt emphasizes his divine point of view, but Philoctetes also refers to “the judgment of friends” (l. 1467), which must include that of Heracles.

In considering the role of Heracles, we should remember that Sophocles is the most reverent of the ancient tragic poets (Woodruff 2009). This play culminates in a reconciliation with the gods for the two main characters – Philoctetes, who has slandered them (ll. 451–2), and Neoptolemus, who has already committed the gross irreverence of violating a commitment to a suppliant. This reconciliation requires the presence of a god, and Sophocles supplies one (Segal 1995: 112).

Heracles, the most human of divinities, has a close human friendship with Philoctetes. He arrives by the machine (otherwise he could not appear suddenly) in such a way that Philoctetes hears him before he sees him. Heracles speaks both as a human friend and as a god. If we think that Neoptolemus had decided to take Philoctetes home, then we must see Heracles as intervening to fix a plot that has gone out of synch with destiny. If we think the matter uncertain and suspect *dolos*, then we may see Heracles as presenting the ending in a new light – that of reverence.

Some scholars (and some audiences) have suspected that Heracles' arrival is another *dolos*: Odysseus, eavesdropping again – as we may have seen him do before appearing as the False Merchant – slips on a Heracles disguise and leaps up on the rock behind the cave (e.g. Roisman 2005: 109–10). This is an attractive hypothesis, but it is untenable (Rose 1976: 1000, n. 101). Odysseus in disguise would have had no reason to speak in favor of undying reverence. Heracles' lines may well look forward to Neoptolemus' violent irreverence in the sack of Troy, as the ancient commentator asserts (cf. Roberts 1988: 188).

The play ends with Philoctetes' reverent farewell to the island and its divinities. Our heroes are, at least for now, in harmony with the gods.

Guide to Further Reading

Many good translations are available. Meineck has produced a version that has been tested on stage and is accurate enough for classroom use (in Meineck and Woodruff 2007). Heaney's version (1991), the work of a great poet, is true to the spirit of the original. Closest to the latest Greek text is Lloyd-Jones (1994). The interpretation of *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* depends on decisions about the Greek text – which, after much copying and recopying, may contain many errors. Luckily the *Philoctetes* does not; the text is not perfect, but its imperfections do not materially affect questions of interpretation.

The *Philoctetes* has stimulated scholars and critics to some of their best work. An excellent summary overview of interpretive issues is Roisman (2005). Sir Richard Jebb's famous nineteenth-century edition is designed for scholars, but its introduction is readily

accessible and gives the best overview of the myth behind the play. Edmund Wilson's 1947 essay "The Wound and the Bow" is a classic, accessible to non-scholarly readers. Charles Segal's "Philoctetes and the Imperishable Piety" (in Segal 1995: 95–118) is the work of a brilliant Sophocles scholar; and so is Knox (1964: 117–42). Reinhardt's (1947, 1979) chapter on *Philoctetes* should also be required reading. Nussbaum (1976–7) provides a useful discussion of character. Herzog (2006) brings out the importance of cunning in the ancient Greek tradition. Kitto (1956) responds to Bowra (1944) and shows how minor inconsistencies make theatrical sense. Blundell (1988) treats the play as a critique of the traditional view that justice consists in helping friends and harming enemies. Heath (1999), who takes this as a problem play, responds to Blundell and Goldhill. Gill's essay (1980) brings out the value of friendship in the play. The contest between compassion and justice is a frequent theme in tragedy; on compassion, see Konstan (2001) and Goldhill (2003). Beer (2004) examines the play's treatment of political morality and brings out the way in which the play, in questioning role-playing, questions the very foundation of theater.

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Last Things

Oedipus at Colonus and the End of Tragedy

Thomas Van Nortwick

You ask about the last things of life; what comes before you have forgotten or count as nothing.

Oedipus at Colonus 583–584¹

1 Introduction

It is one of the great exits in Western theater. Oedipus, old and blind, dressed in rags, leads his daughters and Theseus off stage, through the central doors of the *skene*. Lately abject and dependent, the old man walks with serene confidence toward his own death in the grove of the Eumenides. We know that *Oedipus at Colonus* was first produced posthumously in 401 BCE, and, though the play might have been written at any time, the subject and some stylistic features have led scholars to assume that it represents the playwright's final vision of the tragic hero. Oedipus dies where Sophocles was born – a confluence that cannot be coincidental, suggesting that the playwright was also seeing the end of his hero's life through the prism of his own impending death, itself just two years before the final defeat of Athens by Sparta in 404 BCE.

That Sophocles meant this play to be the summation of his work is further suggested by its radical re-imagining of the tragic hero. Sophocles has been called the most “Homeric” of Athenian playwrights, and in the story of Oedipus' last day we can see much that reaches back to the *Iliad*. At the same time, from his first words after shuffling on stage, the blind old man moves decisively away from the self-destructive *cul-de-sac* awaiting most Greek tragic heroes and toward a new way of understanding his place in the larger order of things. Taking his leave of Athenian tragedy, Sophocles looks back at the form and its characteristic features from the detached position offered by a new perspective.

2 The Stranger

Sophocles' inventive response to the traditional heroic story is evident from the first lines of the play. Like so many Greek heroes, the old Oedipus arrives in Colonus as a stranger (*xenos*), arousing in the chorus of locals an intense curiosity tempered by fear:

Look! Who was he? Where does he live?
Where has he rushed off to, most
shameless of all, of all?
Look! Speak out!
Seek him out everywhere! A wanderer,
the old man is a wanderer, not a
native! (ll. 118–25)

This dynamic affords opportunities for any storyteller, as the new arrival immediately creates a ripple in the tightly woven fabric of the society he enters. A hero usually comes with an agenda, driven by his intense will to control others and steer events to the desired outcome: Odysseus must get home; Orestes must avenge his father; in the earlier *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus will defeat the Sphinx, rule the city wisely, protect his subjects.

The heroic will is not much in evidence when Antigone leads Oedipus on stage in this play. He wonders who will receive “the wandering Oedipus with his meager gifts,” asking for little, happy with even less. His teachers have been suffering, time, and the facts of his lineage (ll. 3–8). These are not the words of a man determined to get his way. Heroes are usually poor students, especially if the lesson involves acceptance of forces beyond their control. The younger Oedipus of *Oedipus Tyrannus* was conspicuously resistant to learning anything that did not fit with his ideas about himself and how the world worked. More likely that Creon had bribed Teiresias to help him steal the kingship than that he himself might be connected in any way to the murder of Laius. The aged Oedipus, feeble and leaning on his daughter, says that he and Antigone have come as strangers, to learn from the citizens and then to do what they are told (ll. 12–13).

Heroes strive to win *kleos* – the fame that comes in recognition of doing things ordinary mortals cannot. To be *known* is essential. For the old Oedipus, notoriety is lethal. The chorus members, once they have moved the stranger out of the grove, become curious:

Oh unhappy man, now that you are released,
tell me, who are you among men?
Who are you, led in so much pain? May
we find out your fatherland? (ll. 203–6)

Oedipus is evasive, then desperate:

Do not ask me who I am!
Do not question me, pressing further! (ll. 210–11)

Being known will bring back not his glorious victory over the Sphinx, but all the horror of patricide and incest.

We may think of Odysseus here, concealing his identity among the Phaeacians or in the cave of the Cyclops. For him, being “Nobody” can have its advantages. So, too, Oedipus thinks that, if he can hold off the chorus' questions until Theseus arrives,

hospitality may trump the fear of pollution. But though being known may temporarily put Odysseus at a disadvantage, eventually his identity, once revealed, will bring access to *kleos*, with all its attendant power. Oedipus can never again hope to trade on the facts of his past. He does have some leverage, as it turns out, but not from what he himself has done. Rather, he can offer to Theseus and Athens a gift, the value of which is guaranteed not by his *kleos* but by the gods.

The elders are horrified to discover that the accursed Oedipus is among them and demand that he leave immediately. There follows a long speech from Oedipus in his own defense. What good is Athens' fine reputation for mercy toward suppliants, if the city is now prepared to drive him away? Surely they cannot fear him for his body (*soma*) or his deeds (*erga*)? The latter he has *suffered* rather than *performed*. As for his mother and father, how can he be evil by nature (*kakos phusin*) if he was merely reacting to things done to him and acting in ignorance of the true state of things? If, on the other hand, he acted knowingly (in killing his father and sleeping with his mother), would he not then be evil (ll. 258–72)?

We return here to the moral quandaries that informed *Oedipus Tyrannus*. It is hard to judge the function, in the overall thematic structure of the drama, of the arguments Oedipus offers the chorus. On the one hand, it is plausible and appropriate that the old man should want to set the record straight, now that he has had many years to distance himself from the horror and shame that swept over him when he first discovered what he had done. In any event, he must deal with the immediate crisis caused by the elders' rejection, and he grabs for any argument he can find to stall them until Theseus arrives. At the same time, the atmosphere created in the play up to this point seems to put these issues, once matters of immediate and potentially mortal import, into the wider perspective of Oedipus' long life. It fits the character to be determined to make his case here, but the play's moral center will not be found in these issues.

Having reasserted his innocence as best he can, Oedipus now plays his trump card:

I have come, sacred and reverent, bringing
profit for the citizens here. Whenever the ruler
should arrive, whoever leads you,
then you will hear and understand all. (ll. 287–9)

Oedipus calls himself “sacred” (*hieros*), a startling claim. In Greek, this adjective indicates that the person or thing so described is under the protection of the gods – something we would not expect in this case, given Oedipus' history. But when Theseus arrives we will discover that a prophecy given to Oedipus years earlier supports his assertion here. For now, what Oedipus says is enough to convince the chorus to wait for their king to decide what to do with this alarming visitor.

Antigone interrupts Oedipus as he questions the chorus further about when Theseus might be expected, with news that she has sighted a woman approaching on horseback, wearing a Thessalian sun hat. It can only be Ismene, she reports excitedly. Sophocles has primed us to look for Theseus, and uses our anticipation to give this entrance an extra charge. Oedipus has left his second daughter in Thebes, to be his eyes and ears, and she does not disappoint. There is news about his sons, bad news. After Oedipus denounces both boys for deserting him in pursuit of their self-aggrandizement – they live like Egyptians, he says, leaving all the work to the women, sitting fecklessly at home – Ismene recounts their latest troubles. Initially they left the kingship of Thebes to Creon, but now Eteocles, the younger son, has driven his older brother away and claims the throne for

himself. Polynices, meanwhile, has allied himself to Argos through marriage and raised an army, with which he aims to attack Thebes and win back its kingship (ll. 361–84).

Amid all this depressing news there is one bright spot. Recent oracles have predicted that Oedipus will have some influence over the situation:

ISMENE One day, when you are dead and even when still alive, those there [i.e. Thebes] will seek you out for the sake of their preservation.

OEDIPUS Who could succeed through such a man?

ISMENE They say the power of those people will be in you.

OEDIPUS When I no longer exist, then I am a man?

ISMENE Yes, because now the gods lift you up, who destroyed you before. (ll. 389–94)

The mysterious power the oracles have foreseen will emanate from his grave. The city where he is buried will have power. The nature of that power, and how it might be manifested is never made entirely clear. Ismene tells Oedipus that Creon is coming as they speak, to take Oedipus back to some place near Thebes, though not within the limits of the city. He can never enter Thebes again because of his past crimes, but they hope to keep him close enough to control his grave once he dies. Oedipus asks what help he can be from outside the city. If something goes wrong with his grave, she says, there will be trouble for them (ll. 396–402).

These oracles, like others in the play, remain somewhat vague as to their exact meaning. For our purposes, their importance lies in the fact that Oedipus has been told once again that the gods, who cast him down before, will raise him up and make him powerful. And we hear once again that the power he wields will not depend on what he does, but rather on where he is. Heroes usually win *kleos* and the power that comes with it through physical action or, as in the case of Odysseus and of the young Oedipus, through intelligence. In either case, the hero is understood to be expressing power outwardly, so as to impose his will on the world. From the first scene of the play onward, the old Oedipus' importance, to himself and others, depends on his physical location. He must be moved, painstakingly, out of the grove of the Eumenides before the chorus will address his request for help. Now we hear that proximity to his dead body will confer power on whatever city the grave is near. Old and blind, without the means to express traditional heroic agency, Oedipus is becoming instead a locus and conduit for the power of the gods. The reasons for this new status are mysterious and will remain so. As the play progresses, Sophocles will explore this new way of expressing power and the implications it has for how we understand heroic agency.

Sophocles keeps us waiting for Theseus a little longer, while Oedipus revisits the pain of being driven into exile and his anger at his sons for not intervening. He hopes that the gods will not end their quarrel – oracles have revealed to him that he himself will decide the issue between them – and that neither will survive. Meanwhile, let Creon come. If the citizens of Athens, along with the goddesses of the grove, will protect him, he in turn will be a “great savior” (*megan ... soter*, ll. 459–60) for Athens and will give pain to his enemies. Here we see the old man articulating a traditional aristocratic moral code, which requires those who practice it to help their friends and harm their enemies. At the same time, he keeps the prospect of his new power before us, whetting our appetite yet further for the meeting with Theseus.

While they and we await the king, the members of the chorus tell Oedipus that, having violated the sacred grove, he must perform certain purification rites. In response to his

anxious questions about the required acts, the chorus – as it did when moving him out of the grove – issues minute instructions, involving the newly sheared fleece of a lamb, approved buckets, facing the rising sun, and so forth. In the rapid exchange, we see Oedipus revert to the acquiescent and passive old man he was in the first scene. Revisiting his past and his grievances enlivened him, anger displacing his passivity and dependence. But, once he turns away from the past and toward the present, the anger subsides. He asks that one daughter perform the rites for him and that the other stay at his side. His body, he says, does not have the strength to move without a companion (ll. 501–2).

The chorus, encouraged by the old man's reveries, presses for details about his dark past. Since the momentum of the plot is pointing us toward a meeting with Theseus and the elders have said they will await the king's decision about Oedipus' request for protection, their curiosity takes on a certain prurient quality here: While we wait, how about some more juicy details? As he did in the response to their initial prodding, he tries to deflect their questions, then offers another defense. He acted in ignorance when killing his father; nothing of what he did was his own choice (*touton d'authaireton ouden*, l. 522); Jocasta came to him as a gift (*doron*, l. 540) from the Thebans, one he should never have accepted. The use of the word *doron* by Oedipus here reminds us of his earlier claim that he will bring "profit" (*onesis*, l. 288) to Athens if they receive him as a suppliant, that he will be a "savior" (*soter*, l. 460). He has so far portrayed himself as a benefactor, one who confers gifts – unlike Jocasta, who was herself the gift. This distinction will disappear in his coming exchange with Theseus.

The king finally arrives. Sophocles has made us wait for him, building up his importance. Theseus recognizes Oedipus immediately from his clothing and his wretched appearance. He is loath to deny a request from the old man, having been, he says, an exile himself, who suffered dangers to his life that no other man has (ll. 563–5). In reply, Oedipus gets to business quickly. He wants something for which he can offer benefit in return:

I have come to offer this my wretched body [*demas*]
to you, a gift not comely to look at; but from it will come
benefits that are better than a beautiful form. (ll. 576–8)

Theseus and his subjects will have to wait until Oedipus is dead and buried to find out the nature of the "profit" (*kerdos*) that will come to Athens if they grant his request. In return for this gift, Theseus and Athens must agree to defend Oedipus against the Thebans, who want to take him to the outskirts of their city. There they can control his grave and avoid being struck down in Athens.

3 The Hero's Body

Now Oedipus will not only confer benefit on Athens in return for protection; he will *embody* the benefit. By focusing on the disposition of Oedipus' corpse, Sophocles brings the play into phase with an enduring theme in Greek literature. The last third of the *Iliad* is dominated by the specter of the hero's unburied corpse, beginning in Book 16 with the battles over the dead bodies of Sarpedon and then Patroclus, and continuing as a connecting thread through the death of Hector and the funeral of Patroclus to the final burial of Hector. The motif is marked first by Zeus' pondering over how to respond to

Sarpedon's death, and builds in richness through the subsequent chain of deaths, concluding with the poem's moving depiction of the funeral at Troy, which circles back to echo in its tranquil beauty the final journey of Sarpedon.

Each hero's death generates anxiety at the possibility – first appearing in the poem's prologue (*Il.* 1. 4–5) – that his remains will be mutilated and/or left as carrion for dogs and birds. When Patroclus' ghost visits Achilles at the beginning of Book 23, we learn that, if a warrior's body is not properly buried, his soul cannot pass over the river in Hades and find rest but wanders in limbo forever, trapped between life and death. Achilles' subsequent savage abuse of Hector's corpse, only ended through the intervention of the gods at the beginning of Book 24, becomes a vehicle for articulating the Greek hero's struggle to accept his own mortality. By finally returning the corpse to Priam, Achilles signals that acceptance, which is the centerpiece of the poem's thematic resolution.

An unburied corpse always lies on the boundary between life and death, not still alive but present as a reminder of the dead person, inert but not yet at rest. The *Iliad's* increasing preoccupation with unburied heroes keeps our attention squarely on that boundary, which in turn draws our attention to the poem's central questions: What does it mean to be a creature who knows s/he must die? What is the place of human existence in the larger structures of the cosmos?

Sophocles' status as the most "Homeric" of the tragedians could be traced to many features common between the two poets; but one mark of its appropriateness would be the ways in which Sophocles picks up and develops, in his surviving plays, the Iliadic preoccupation with the unburied body of the hero. In Sophocles' *Ajax* the title character dominates the stage throughout, raging at his comrades and his fate in the first half, lying dead on stage for the remainder. The problem that occupies everyone in the play is this: What to do about Ajax? Alive, he is powerful and intractable, an archaic figure who cannot or will not bend to fit the needs of his community, in this case the Greek army; dead, he becomes the focus of a battle between his family and the leaders of the army, the former arguing for a hero's burial, the latter refusing to see him as anything but an enemy. The corpse of Polyneices functions in much the same way in *Antigone*. The struggle over the fate of his remains revolves around whether the Thebans are to recognize him as one of their own (as Antigone urges them to do) or obey their king, who insists that Polyneices' actions have permanently alienated him from them, an enemy whose corpse they should leave unburied.

In both of these plays the dead body of a warrior demands, from those around him, a decision about the deceased's status as a part of the community and as a part of the human race. Similar issues are raised by the living, yet ravaged, body of Heracles at the end of *The Women of Trachis*. Though physically absent for the first two-thirds of the play, he dominates the stage like Ajax – first, as everyone waits for his return, and then, raving in agony, as he tries to control the treatment of his own soon-to-be-dead body. Because we know that Heracles is doomed to die soon, he speaks as if from the familiar boundary between life and death. And, though his apotheosis is not mentioned in the play, the prospect of his translation to the world of the gods – the subject of other myths – prompts consideration of yet another crucial boundary, that between mortal and immortal.

By focusing on the location of Oedipus' body both in the physical geography of Attica and on the metaphysical boundary between life and death, Sophocles draws on themes that begin in Greek literature with the *Iliad*. At the same time, in his immobility and lack

of traditional heroic agency, the old hero brings to final expression a new understanding of heroic power, which Sophocles develops over the course of his last three extant plays: *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*.

4 The Immobilized Hero

Electra, though difficult to date with any degree of certainty, is generally considered by scholars to have been first produced somewhere around 413–410 BCE. Since we also have complete treatments from Aeschylus and Euripides, it is natural to focus on the similarities and differences between the three plays, and doing so has led most commentators to view Sophocles' version as the most difficult one to understand. The opacity of the play's ending and its ambiguous perspective on the justice of the matricide seem troubling. Viewed, however, through the prism of the themes we have identified in *Oedipus at Colonus*, the play emerges as the beginning of a striking new direction in Sophocles' dramatic practice, which culminates in Oedipus' last walk into the grove of the Eumenides.

Part of the challenge in understanding *Electra* lies in the play's depiction of the relationship between its main character and the mythic action that supplies the basis for the plot. Electra is certainly a part of the traditional story, but here she has little to do with the heroic action that articulates the plot. Those tasks fall to Orestes and the Pedagogue (along with Pylades, a silent character), who carry out the requisite revenge with cold efficiency while Electra stands to the side and reacts. The split between action and emotion is stark and, for the most part, gendered. As the play opens, Orestes, Pylades, and the Pedagogue enter and reconnoiter, the playwright using their conversation, all in trimeters, to lay out the relevant past history of Orestes' family and the mission enjoined on the two men by Apollo. At line 87 Electra enters, singing a lugubrious monody about her despair and suffering. The men, now in hiding, overhear her. Orestes, wondering whether she might be Electra, asks if they should stay and listen. The Pedagogue briskly dismisses this suggestion: they must get on with the job that Apollo has given them.

The contrast between male action and female emotion continues after the men leave the stage. After 45 lines of Electra's monody, the chorus of Theban women enters. In place of the usual three-part song, they sing a lyric dialogue with Electra, in which she laments her bitter fate and resists advice from the chorus to curb her emotions. She is fixated on her suffering: abused by her mother and Aegisthus, abandoned by Orestes, childless with no husband to protect her, she dresses in rags, consumed by bitter regret. The lyrics continue to line 250, followed by another 75 lines, in trimeters, with no change in Electra's dark, self-pitying tone. Next comes a lengthy exchange (ll. 329–471) between Electra and her sister Chrysothemis, who has entered on an errand from Clytemnestra. The queen, it seems, is bothered by nightmares and has sent her daughter to propitiate the spirit of Agamemnon by placing offerings on his grave. Electra is appalled by her sister's acquiescence to the oppression of the rulers and eventually convinces her to substitute locks of their hair for the queen's offerings.

Electra's bitter tone and obsession with past injustice persist, reaching a nasty crescendo in her confrontation with Clytemnestra immediately following. Now we revisit the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the murder of Agamemnon, the queen's sexual relationship with Aegisthus. Clytemnestra gives as good as she gets, while the chorus hovers nervously. These issues are at the heart of the myth's moral complexities. Aeschylus makes their resolution the goal of his treatment. But, as with the question of Oedipus' guilt or

innocence in *Oedipus at Colonus*, so here the function of the conflict between mother and daughter in the larger structure of the play is not easy to grasp. Whereas Aeschylus' characters are largely defined by their status as king, queen, son, or daughter, here the powerful portrait of Electra's obsessions, of her physical and emotional ruin, tends to skew our perception of her arguments. We begin to wonder whether "justice," understood by her as retaliation against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, can possibly restore the shattered and rather forbidding figure we have seen dominating the stage for the last 575 lines.

The gendered disjunction between action and emotion is marked again by the entrance of the Pedagogue at line 660. He comes pretending to be a messenger from Phocia, bearing news of the death of Orestes in a chariot race. His description of the race and Orestes' fatal accident is over 80 lines long, filled with exciting details. Its scale and narrative style recall Homeric epic, particularly the funeral games for Patroclus in Book 23 of the *Iliad*; its tone is markedly different from anything we have heard since the first 86 lines of the play, the last time we saw a man on stage. It is, of course, all lies. Efficiently moving the revenge plot along by lulling the rulers into complacency, the old servant also crushes any hopes Electra might still have had that Orestes would return. Her isolation and powerlessness are clear as soon as the Pedagogue delivers his message. He has pleasant news for the rulers, he says, having been given a serious charge by the king of the Phocians:

CLYTEMNESTRA What sort of business, stranger? Tell me. I know well you come from
a friend, and will say friendly words.

PEDAGOGUE To put it briefly, Orestes is dead.

ELECTRA Oh, I am ruined! This is the day I die.

CLYTEMNESTRA What are you saying, sir? Don't listen to her.

PEDAGOGUE I have said and say again, Orestes is dead.

ELECTRA Oh misery, I am destroyed. I live no more.

CLYTEMNESTRA You, keep to yourself. Stranger, tell me the truth, How did he die? (ll. 671–9)

Neither the Pedagogue nor Clytemnestra have time for Electra's pain. Once his story is finished, they proceed cordially into the palace.

The dynamic here, with Electra expressing dire pain in reaction to events that we and the male avengers know to be false, is repeated when Orestes himself brings the urn that supposedly holds the ashes of his own dead body. Electra demands to hold the urn and launches into a long and passionate speech of mourning for her brother (ll. 1126–70).

Not only has Electra been kept from knowing the truth, but her grief and pain have been elicited twice in the service of the avengers' deceptions. The men go about their business, leaving her to suffer in ignorance. Even when she is finally allowed to know that Orestes lives and has returned, he himself repeatedly cautions her against expressing her joy openly. Finally, both are rebuked by the Pedagogue, who calls them "fools" (*moroi*) for not recognizing what danger their noisy dawdling puts them in (ll. 1326–30).

We must assume that Sophocles means for us to see Electra as the hero of the play – she is on stage for almost the entire drama, she has far more lines than any other character. Yet avenging Agamemnon's death – the central act of the myth – is entirely the province of Orestes and his companions. The play ends with Orestes taking Aegisthus into the palace to kill him, while Electra is left on stage, segregated from the myth's male agent and his work. Electra's role is to express strong emotion in response to the events – fictional and real, past and present – that form the backbone of the plot. And because she reacts with equal passion to both true and false situations and events, her emotion is

devalued, for the audience at least, as a part of the myth's central action. Neither of the other two versions of the character that we have presents these problems of interpretation. Aeschylus' *Electra* is important as a part of the family whose history is clouded by past events, but she is not a prominent character in his play; Euripides' character is the most powerful agent in the revenge plot and participates in the murder of her mother. Sophocles' displacement of his heroine from the central acts of the myth and his devaluing of her emotions is unprecedented. Some light can be shed on the perplexities raised by these features by viewing them in relation to what is probably Sophocles' next extant play, *Philoctetes*.

The protagonist of the *Philoctetes* – for which we have a firm date of 409 BCE – is no less challenging to fit into traditional paradigms. Physically disabled, with a wounded foot so repellent that he is abandoned by his shipmates on the deserted island of Lemnos, he languishes alone for nine years and survives by hunting animals for food with his formidable bow – a gift from Heracles. He can hardly win *kleos*, having no creatures other than birds to conquer, outwit, or otherwise control through the exercise of his will. When his wound periodically erupts, he is reduced to inarticulate howling, then loses consciousness. He looks, in fact, like an easy mark for Odysseus and his young protégé Neoptolemus, son of the now deceased Achilles, when they return from Troy to Lemnos to get the wounded hero's famous bow. Oracles have said that the Greeks will never take Troy without the bow – either alone or wielded by Philoctetes; the play is ambiguous on this point. Odysseus plans to use Neoptolemus to trick Philoctetes into giving him the weapon. He counts on the young man's earnest demeanor and glorious heritage to win over their victim who hates Odysseus himself too much to yield to any of his entreaties.

In some respects, it is hard to imagine a play more different from Sophocles' *Electra* than *Philoctetes*. *Electra* is set in the hothouse atmosphere of the royal palace; *Philoctetes* on a deserted island. *Electra* is dominated by a woman protagonist; *Philoctetes* features an all-male cast. But there are some intriguing parallels. Both *Electra* and *Philoctetes* are repellent to others, physically unattractive, dressed in rags, and virtual prisoners. Despite their obvious victimization and powerlessness, both are accused of creating their own misery: *Electra* is said to “breed” conflicts in her miserable soul (*El.* 218), *Philoctetes* to create his own doom by making the wrong choices (*Ph.* 1095–100). Both lack traditional heroic agency and are deceived by energetic male travelers who arrive committed to carrying out the actions central to the myth, upon which the play rests.

Though *Philoctetes* features no women, the protagonist is feminized in various ways that suggest further parallels with *Electra*. In contrast to the taciturn males, both are criticized for making too much noise – *Philoctetes* in response to the pain of his physical wound, *Electra* because of her emotional wound. *Electra*'s body must be kept under control by the rulers, so that she may not provide offspring to avenge Agamemnon's murder; *Philoctetes* must at first be kept away from the other Greeks because he is noisy and his wound oozes and smells bad. Similarly, women were thought to “leak,” thus bringing the danger of pollution; the other prominent story about Lemnos in Greek mythology has the island inhabited by women who smell bad. Eventually the oracle requires that *Philoctetes* be moved back to Troy, so that he may be cured of his wound and then wield his bow.

The concept of time is also gendered in the two plays. For the typical masculine hero, the passage of time – and its ultimate boundary, death – is often a force to be resisted. For them, *timing* is crucial as an instrument for the carrying out of their mission. Women, by contrast, must typically wait upon events and endure. So the male agents in both plays

are preoccupied with the right moment in time (*kairos*, *achme*) to act so as to complete their mission; Electra and Philoctetes must endure, like Oedipus in exile, the passage of long stretches of time (*macrochronos*).

In the figure of Philoctetes we can see Sophocles continuing the experiment that began with Electra. It is almost as if, at the end of his long and productive artistic life, the playwright has set himself a challenge: Can I create a play that features as its protagonist a powerless, repellent outcast, unable to act in the traditional heroic manner, detached from the action that carries the plot, and yet dramatically compelling enough to play the central role in the play? The parallels we have noted between the two characters are all in the service of this new paradigm. But in one crucial way the later figure marks a further departure. Electra, like all the major characters in the eponymous play, tries to claim support from the gods for her way of seeing the world. The gods' will remains, however, somewhat mysterious. In Sophocles' treatment of the myth divine will does not finally decide whether justice is on the side of Agamemnon, Orestes, Electra, or Clytemnestra. There is, on the other hand, no dispute about the fact that Philoctetes has been chosen by the gods to be an instrument of their will. When Heracles appears on the *machina* to convince Philoctetes that he must obey the dictates of fate, he only confirms what everyone on stage has accepted – that transcendent powers are to pass through this unlikely vessel. Returning to *Oedipus at Colonus*, we will see Sophocles extending this feature of his hero while he brings to fruition the paradigm that begins with Electra.

5 Farewell to Tragedy

As heir to Electra and Philoctetes, the aged Oedipus looks less anomalous. The focus on the location of his body rather than on the things he does with it, his repellent appearance and lack of traditional heroic agency, his role as conduit for, rather than denier of, divine will, all can be understood in the context of what seems to be Sophocles' new and evolving conception of the tragic hero in his last three extant plays. Because we assume that *Oedipus at Colonus* is his last play and that he himself was probably a very old man when he wrote it, it is hard not to see the play as a farewell to his art. After Creon's nefarious but unsuccessful attempt to force Oedipus back to Thebes so that city can gain control of his body (ll. 720–1139), the final two scenes of the drama have a strongly valedictory tone, as the hero – and perhaps his creator – finishes up his business with this world.

When Theseus returns from rescuing Oedipus' daughters, we feel the old man's relief and begin to look for the play's finale. Once again, Sophocles makes us wait. Theseus tells his guest that a visitor has arrived, has taken up the position of a suppliant at the altar of Poseidon, and is asking to speak to him. When Oedipus hears that the man is from Argos, he refuses to see him. Theseus is puzzled: Who is it that can provoke such a response? It is, says Oedipus, my son. Theseus tactfully suggests that refusing a suppliant may offend the gods, and Antigone begs him to see Polyneices. Oedipus relents and hears from his son both a handsome apology for his past acts and a request for his support against the usurper Eteocles. Whichever son Oedipus favors, it seems, will be victorious in the coming battle for the kingship of Thebes.

The response from Oedipus is a hair-raising string of curses directed at both sons. Their failure to show proper deference for their father when he was driven from Thebes will now cost them dearly. Oedipus condemns them to die at each other's hands. He is

no longer their father. They have forfeited that bond, and he spits on them! It is an ugly moment, echoing the curses that Oedipus rained down on Creon when the latter tried to bully him into going with him to Thebes. Nothing here suggests the serene detachment we might expect from one who has lived a long life and now sees a peaceful death close at hand. Polyneices, meanwhile, turns resignedly away but is stopped by Antigone, who begs him to take his army back to Argos and avoid the battle. He refuses. How can he go back to the army if he has shown cowardice? What is to be gained by ruining his country, his sister asks. I would feel shame, he replies. Though the mission is doomed, he will trudge forward nevertheless. If he must die, so be it. Better that than shame before his comrades (ll. 1414–46).

This little scene is, as has often been noted, a Greek tragedy in miniature. Faced with the irresistible forces of fate and divine will, the hero persists, even though this is certain to lead to his own death. To be seen as inadequate by his fellow warriors is a worse punishment than death. This way of seeing the world and one's place in it, the source of so much pain in his younger days, is what the old Oedipus casts off for good with his curses. The feeling is of some kind of disease that Oedipus passes on to his son, who takes the contagion back to Thebes where it has flourished so often. Once rid of it, Oedipus can turn toward his destined – and desired – end in the grove of the Eumenides.

Sophocles, by his characteristically deft manipulation of our expectations, has given this scene a peculiarly self-contained quality. Oedipus' rejection of Polyneices and the latter's response, driven by familiar heroic imperatives, create something of a play within a play. And as Oedipus turns away from his past, there is a sense of Sophocles himself moving beyond the perspective that he has done so much to enrich in his earlier plays. Oedipus' farewell to his past is also the playwright's farewell to tragedy. But we are impatient now, and, when Polyneices exits, we want the story to move to the "final consummation" (*perasin [...] kai katastrophen*, l. 103) of his long life that Oedipus promised in the very first scene.

The gods send thunder as soon as Polyneices exits, and its power seems to energize Oedipus. As the skies continue to rumble and lightning crashes down, the old man asks for Theseus. Anger and frailty are all gone now. We imagine him turning toward the central doors of the *skene*, away from Thebes and all of its painful history. When the king enters, Oedipus gives him careful instructions: he is never to reveal the location of Oedipus' grave, not even to Oedipus' children, passing it on at his own death to his eldest and dearest son. As long as the secret is kept, the grave will protect Athens from Thebes. That said, the old hero walks calmly into the grove, leading his daughters and Theseus.

We hear the rest at second hand, from a Messenger, and then from Theseus, who has witnessed Oedipus' final disappearance in a mysterious flash of light. There is nothing quite like this ending elsewhere in Greek tragedy. The old man is gone, his exit apparently orchestrated by the gods. There is no ancient tradition of apotheosis for Oedipus; and what we have heard from the hero himself and others, that his grave is numinously powerful, suggests that he will exert his will in some way, like an angry *daemon* who must be propitiated by mortals. But the last two scenes of the play, the exchange with Polyneices and the walk into the grove, suggest that the anger we have seen on display in earlier scenes has been replaced by a new and mysterious serenity that does not fit well with the model of a vengeful spirit. Such a figure seems more consonant with the perspective that Polyneices carries away to Thebes than with the man we see entering the grove of the Eumenides.

6 The Hero's Gift

From the moment when he first steps onto the stage in Sophocles' last play, we see that Oedipus will not – cannot – be a traditional hero like Achilles, Ajax, or Heracles. We have nevertheless seen that there are antecedents, Homeric and Sophoclean, for some of the unusual qualities with which Sophocles has endowed his old hero. But, finally, Oedipus stands apart from all these familiar figures, realizing one further stage in the evolving paradigm for heroic action that Sophocles presents. The key to understanding the old Oedipus is in the idea that his body is a gift to Athens. As a suppliant, Oedipus depends on the mercy of Theseus and the Athenians. He can offer something in return for his safety, but the gift cannot be enjoyed until the old man's death. Thus, Oedipus himself cannot guarantee the efficacy of the gift. Rather it is the gods who will reward Athens, endowing the dead body of the hero with a mysterious power to protect his adopted city. The exchange is not to be reciprocal, but triangulated.

The relationship between a tragic hero and his community is always precarious. If the good of the community happens to be served by the expression of the hero's will, then much good can come from their connection. But the coincidence of heroic will and communal well-being is rarely stable, since in tragic stories at least the former always takes precedence. Homer's Achilles exemplifies this dynamic well. He is the best fighter the Greek army has and, as long as he can win *kleos* while killing Trojans, he is of great benefit to his community – in this case the army. But when Agamemnon thwarts the expression of Achilles' will, the latter's pride leads to the death of many Greek soldiers. Sophocles recreates this conflict in his *Ajax*, where the rage of that play's hero at being denied the arms of Achilles, a source of personal *kleos*, leads to his attempt to murder Agamemnon and Menelaus. A more nuanced version appears in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. There the young Oedipus is intent on serving his adopted community, defeating the Sphinx, and later tracking down the murderer of Laius. But his pride makes him unable to see how he has in fact already harmed Thebes, and it blinds him to the truth that Teiresias delivers. Likewise, when Oedipus veers into anger in *Oedipus at Colonus*, it is always in response to his Theban past, which Polyneices and Creon want to keep alive so as to use him, each for his own reasons. There lie the heroic pride and blindness to his true nature that cause him and others so much pain. Once he has shed that legacy by thrusting it on his sons, Oedipus can turn calmly back toward the will of the gods.

In the old Oedipus Sophocles finally avoids the familiar clash by expanding the relationship between the hero and his community so as to include the gods. Oedipus can serve Athens in a new way, because his will is not the source of the power he confers. Instead of a reciprocal relationship cemented by the exchange of gifts, Oedipus, Athens, and the gods form a gift circle, in which the Athenians bestow the gift of protection on Oedipus and then wait for the gift to circle out of sight, into the mysterious realm of the gods, before it comes back to them. The power of the gods flows through the old man, but it has nothing to do – at least not directly – with his own will. Now he resembles not Ajax but the Teiresias of *Oedipus Tyrannus*: by letting the divine power flow through him, this time he can save his adopted community.

Lewis Hyde has written about how the move from reciprocal giving to the kind of gift circle we have seen in Sophocles' last play changes the way we view the relationship of the individual to larger communities:

A circulation of gifts nourishes those parts of our spirit that are not entirely personal, parts that derive from nature, the group, the race, or the gods. Furthermore, although these wider spirits are a part of us, they are not “ours”; they are endowments bestowed upon us. (Hyde 1979: 38)

And when the circle is expanded to include the gods,

[t]he gift moves beyond all boundary and circles into mystery [...] The passage into mystery always refreshes [...] We are lightened when our gifts rise from pools we cannot fathom. We know they are not a solitary egotism and they are inexhaustible. (Hyde 1979: 20)

Oedipus at Colonus ends by envisioning a new world, one in which old men can become powerful not because they impose their will on others, but because they assent to being part of something larger than they are. By serving as the conduit through which divine gifts flow, they pass from a solitary egotism into the mysterious world of transcendent forces.

Old and feeling the nearness of his own death, Sophocles returned to his most famous creation, writing a play to see himself and his hero out of this world. Artists often see their work not as the product of their skill, but as a gift that comes to them from somewhere else. The gift works in them and, when it is finished, it can pass through them and back into the world. As Oedipus disappears from view, off the stage of the Theater of Dionysus and into the grove, it is hard not to see Sophocles walking beside him. *Oedipus at Colonus*, his last gift to Athens, has passed through him and into a future he will never see. But his gift, passing into mystery, keeps circling back to refresh us, inexhaustible.

Guide to Further Reading

Compared with other Sophoclean plays, *Oedipus at Colonus* has received relatively little attention from scholars. The landmark studies of Whitman (1951), Knox (1966), and Segal (1981) all have fine chapters on the play. Whitman focuses on human experience in the plays and tends to downplay the influence of the gods. Knox develops a typology of the “Sophoclean hero,” which he finds in all the plays. Applied to *Oedipus at Colonus*, his perspective tends to valorize a view of the aged Oedipus as a precursor of the angry *daemon*, whose power will work from beyond the grave. Segal’s structuralist approach tends to shift the focus away from the individual hero, finding the play to be articulated through a series of polarities: nature/culture, young/old, human/divine, and so forth. Beer (2004) also has an excellent commentary on the play, with a good bibliography comprising more recent work. Bernidaki-Aldous (1990) is an in-depth study of issues of blindness and sight, especially as they apply to Oedipus. On *Oedipus at Colonus* as a suppliant play, see Burian (1974) and Wilson (1997). The place of the old Oedipus in the tradition of Greek tragic heroes is central to the approaches of Whitman and Knox. Van Nortwick (1998) also focuses on this aspect of the play, analyzing *Oedipus at Colonus* as a continuation and development of ideas first encountered in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. On Oedipus as an aged hero, see Falkner (1995: 211–63), and Van Nortwick (1989). For the parallels between *Oedipus at Colonus* and earlier Sophoclean plays, see Whitman (1951), Segal (1981), and Beer (2004). For Electra’s marginalization, see Kitzinger (1991). Ormand (1999) also has insightful comments on this topic, in the context of

Electra's role as unmarried woman. On the metatheatrical elements in *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*, see Ringer (1998).

Note

1 All translations of Greek are mine.

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Sophocles' *Ichneutae* or How to Write a Satyr Play

Willeon Slenders

1 Introduction

A section dedicated to Sophocles' output as a satyr playwright should not be omitted from a comprehensive book on the tragedian and his works. At the outset, however, one is faced with the materially poor state of affairs regarding the genre of satyr play as a whole. Only one satyr play has survived as a complete work: Euripides' *Cyclops*, not even a Sophoclean satyr play. Why, then, dedicate a chapter to the satyr plays of Sophocles? For the obvious reason that the *Ichneutae* is highly important for the perception of satyr play as a genre and of Sophoclean satyr play in particular.

Apart from Euripides' *Cyclops*, the *Ichneutae* is the most complete satyr play that we have: approximately 450 (mostly fragmentary) lines, by far the largest number of lines in any of the surviving fragments of the 18 securely identified Sophoclean satyr plays. In other words, the discovery and publication of this play meant a substantial expansion of the satyr play corpus, which at the moment consists of no more than approximately 2,000 lines. Second, the publication of fragment 314 was the first in a series of publications of major fragments of satyr plays in the twentieth century (Aeschylus' *Diktyoulkoi* and *Theoroi* among others), providing the genre with more body in the literal and figurative sense of the word, as well as with a substantial example from a second playwright. This resulted in a growing interest in the genre and in an increasing number of publications in the second half of the twentieth century. What is most striking in this interest is the positioning of satyr play between tragedy and comedy.

Satyr plays were written by the same author as the tragedies with which they appeared, in the classical period at any rate. Furthermore, satyr plays were staged together with three tragedies during the Great Dionysia, whether or not within the framework of a tetralogy. Third, both genres have mythological subjects. That is why they share actors, costumes and props as well. Language and meter are often said to be common property between the two genres too.

Satyr play, being a τραγωδία παίζουσα (“jesting tragedy”), as Demetrius of Phaleron puts it (*On Style* 169), has in common with comedy particularly its atmosphere and tone, in which γέλως (“laughter”) plays an important role. Yet what constitutes the γελοῖον (“funny”) is not identical in satyr play and comedy. In the first place, though the γελοῖον in both genres relates to the materialistic aspects of human life, in satyr play it is *mythisch distanzierte* (“mythologically distanced”), as Seidensticker (1999: 33) puts it. Whereas comedy deals with these aspects mostly in a recognizable human tableau, satyr play presents them in a mythical world, far away from daily life. In the second place, both genres promote laughter about aesthetic mistakes and moral flaws but, because of the mythical distance mentioned above, laughter in satyr play is more cheerful, and less bitter or malicious than in comedy. In the third place, satyr play does not attack contemporary figures through satire or caricature, an essential element in Old Comedy. Some satyr plays have the same titles as comedies, as well as sharing a number of common motifs and personages; but the mythical environment always makes the difference.

The most vital characteristic of satyr play, however, is the presence of satyrs. In fact, satyr play owes its name to the satyrs, who without exception constitute the chorus and are led by Silenus, who also is their father. They are, therefore, a fixed and constantly recurring fact; they mark each satyr play and, as such, the genre as a whole. Satyrs and Silenus have fixed, stereotypical characteristics concerning their looks, character, behavior and actions. Voelke (2001: 53) argues that satyrs have a hybrid nature in three respects: they are not only half-human/half-animal, but also half-child/half-adult, and even half-man/half-woman creatures.

What is particularly striking about satyrs and Silenus is their appearance as half-human/half-animal beings. As to their animal component, they share a number of external features with horses or some horse-like creatures (asses). In addition, satyrs have a flat nose; narrow and pointed (horse) ears; and a high bald head. They are usually naked (except for a tight, flesh-colored jumper), and they wear a small loincloth (which is functional, since a horsetail and a mostly erect penis are attached to it). Silenus’ appearance deviates only little from the satyrs’. His white hair (around the red bald head) and the pelt for clothing are stereotypical.

Satyrs are hybrids not only in their biological nature, but also in their human aspect. The fact is that they have a double nature regarding their stage in life: they are grown-up children or childlike adults. This clearly shows in their relationship with Silenus, their father, and apart from that in their frolicsome behavior. According to Pollux (4.142), three masks are to be distinguished, in addition to that of Silenus, namely for gray-haired, for bearded, and for beardless satyrs – the beard being presumably a reference to the goat-like aspect of these characters. Possibly these masks were meant for satyrs of different ages. In spite of their tremendous phallus, satyrs have feminine features as well. They rock their hips and play female parts; and their passive homosexual behavior, particularly well known from pottery, might also be looked upon as an expression of femininity.

What other characteristics satyrs may have, they tell us themselves, in a way, in another Sophoclean satyr play, *Oineus* (F 1130, 6–18). In this play the contest of the lovers of Oeneus’ daughter Deianeira occupies centerstage. The major rivals in the contest are Heracles and the river god Achelous, but apparently the satyrs also stand up. Oineus asks who they are and inquires about their descent; and in this interview the satyrs give a description of their qualities and activities:

ἄπαντα πεύση<ι> γύμφοι μὲν ἤ[κομε]ν,
 παῖδες δὲ νυμφῶν, Βακχίου δ’ ὑπηρέται,
 θεῶν δ’ ὄμαυλοι· πάσα δ’ ἤρμοσται τέχνη

πρέπουσ' ἐν ἡμῖν· ἔστι μὲν τὰ πρὸς μάχην
 δορός, πάλης ἀγῶνες, ἵππικῆς, δρόμου,
 πυγμῆς, ὀδόντων, ὄρχεων ἀποστροφαί,
 ἔνεισι δ' ὦδαί μουσικῆς, ἔνεστι δὲ
 μαντεῖα παντάγγωτα κοῦκ ἐψευσμένα,
 ἰαμάτων τ' ἔλεγχος, ἔστιν οὐρανοῦ
 μέτρησις, ἔστ' ὄρχησις, ἔστι τῶν κάτω
 λάλησις· ἄρ' ἄκαρπος ἡ θεωρία;
 ὧν σοι λαβεῖν ἔξεστι τοῦθ' ὅποιον ἂν
 χρήζης, εἰάν τήν παῖδα [π]ροστιθῆς ἐμοί.

You will learn all: we come as grooms, sons of nymphs, servants of Bacchus and companions of the gods. We have been equipped with every suiting skill: these are requirements for fighting with the spear, for wrestling contests, horse-racing, running, boxing, biting and twisting testicles, and in us there are songs of art, there are completely unknown and not lying oracles and control of medicine, measuring of the sky, dancing, chat about the things below. Is our mission fruitless? You can take from these things whatever you desire if only you give me your daughter in marriage.

In this passage the satyrs start off with the purpose of their coming: they consider themselves *νύμφιοι* (“grooms”) already. Moreover, they boast about their divine status. For they are the sons of nymphs, servants of Dionysus, and companions of the gods. Naturally, such a noble birth goes with matching physical and intellectual qualities. Thus, the satyrs are – by their own account – fantastic fighters, terrific singers, fortune-tellers, physicians, astronomers, and dancers. Nevertheless, they are not able to conceal their true colors, since, in the course of enthusiastically summing up all their outstanding sporting qualities and expressing how they prefer to fight, they inadvertently let slip their favorite mode of engagement: with their teeth (*ὀδόντων*) and by twisting each other’s testicles (*ὄρχεων ἀποστροφαί*) – hardly the noblest and most sportmanslike ways to fight. So here their list of physical activities presents an *aprosdoketon* (something unexpected), bringing to light a well-known characteristic of the satyrs, namely their cowardice. In addition, the enumeration of their musical and intellectual qualities ends in a remarkable way. The fact is that the words *τῶν κάτω λάλησις* are ambiguous, since they can mean “talk about what is beneath the earth,” but also “talk about the lower parts (of the body),” or even “talk by the lower parts” – interpreted by Lloyd-Jones (2003: 421) as “they are boasting of their farting power.” Whether here a reference is made to their flatulence or to their lewdness, through its comic ambiguity the expression shows the true colors of the satyrs once again.

In contrast to the satyrs’ quite favorable self-presentation, Silenus provides a more negative description of them. In Sophocles’ *Ichneutae* (fr. 314.145–60) he reprimands the satyrs who, in search of the stolen cattle of Apollo, have been frightened by the sound of the lyre made by Hermes and have fallen to the ground. As Silenus has not heard this sound himself, he thinks that the satyrs, for the umpteenth time, are scared and refuse to do what they are told:

τί μοι ψ[ό]φον φοβ[...] κα[.] δειμαίνετε
 μάλθης ἀναγνα σῶ[μα]τ' ἐκμεγαγμένα
 κάκιστα θηρῶν ὄνθ[...]ν [π]ᾶση σκιᾷ
 φόβον βλέποντες, πάν[τα] δειματούμενοι,
 ἄνευρα κάκόμισα κάγε[λε]ύθερα

διακονοῦντες, σώματ' εἰ[σ]ιδ[ε]ῖν μόνον
 κα[ἰ] γλῶσσα κα[ἰ] φάλητες. εἰ δέ που δέη,
 πιστοὶ λόγοισιν ὄντες ἔργα φεύγετε,
 τοιοῦ[δ]ε πατρός, ὧ κάκιστα θηρίων,
 οὐ πόλλ' ἐφ' ἥβης μνήματ' ἀνδρείας ὑπο
 κ[ε]ῖται παρ' οἴκοις νυμφικοῖς ἡσκημένα,
 οὐκ εἰς φυγὴν κλίνοντος, οὐ δειλ[ο]υμένου,
 οὐδὲ ψόφοισι τῶν ὀρειτρόφων βοτῶν
 [π]τήσσοντος, ἀλλ' ἀ[ἰ]χμᾶσιν ἐξει[ρ]γασμένου
 [ἄ] νῦν ὑφ' ὑμῶν λάμ[πρ] ἄπορρουπάζεται
 [ψ]όφω νέωρει κόλακ[ι] ποιμένων π[ο]θέν.

Why are you (afraid) and scared of a mere noise, you damned waxwork dummies, most evil of animals, seeing terror in every shadow, frightened of everything, nerveless, slovenly and treacherous servants, bodies only to look at, and tongue and phalluses. In the event of a crisis you profess loyalty but fly from deeds, while you have such a father here, you most evil of animals, of whom there are many trophies, won by his manliness, at the nymphs' abodes. He never gave way to flight, was never afraid or crouched at noises made by cattle grazing on the hills, but with his spear accomplished splendid things that now are being tarnished by you at some shepherd's latest flattering call from some place or another.

Here Silenus does not have a good word to say about the satyrs. In a nutshell, they are no more than empty bodies, and he does not just simply call them animals, but “most evil of animals” (κάκιστα θηρῶν and κάκιστα θηρίων). In his eyes, fear governs their lives. They may be servants (διακονοῦντες), but even in this capacity they do not amount to anything: “nerveless” (ἄνευρα), “slovenly” (ἀκόμιστα), and “treacherous” (ἀνελεύθερα) are the depictions of their ways of serving. To put it briefly, everything they are is no more than outward show: bodies (σώματα), words (γλῶσσα, “tongue, language”), and lewdness (φάλητες, “penises”). After this rundown Silenus makes it clear that the satyrs' qualities are not in the same class as his own. As if unable to understand, he adds: τοιοῦ[δ]ε πατρός (“while you have such a father here”). So he considers himself a shining example. It only remains to be seen whether he really is a good example, since his words admit several interpretations. The fact is that the words ἥβη, ἀνδρεία, νυμφικός, and αἰχμή can also have a sexual connotation, namely “pubes,” “penis,” “of the clitoris,” and “penis,” respectively, which gives a comic effect to the reprimand. From this passage as well as from other satyr plays, we can see that Silenus is no better than the satyrs. For him, too, manliness is reduced to activities that involve a minimum of danger or effort and a maximum of pleasure.

Both Sophoclean fragments offer a subjective description of some qualities of satyrs. In the *Oineus* fragment the satyrs try to put their best foot forward, whereas in the *Ichmeutae* passage Silenus wants to run the satyrs into the ground. Nevertheless, these two descriptions can be seen to be complementary because, when one looks at a satyr play in its entirety, satyrs actually attend to the activities they mention. Whatever the task set to them, however, their attempts generally founder on the qualities mentioned by Silenus.

In the course of the history of satyr play, Silenus has undergone a certain development that can be regarded as typical of the genre. After having appeared as chorus leader in early plays, he increasingly extricates himself from the chorus, ending up as a solo actor, fully independent of it. The father–son relationship with the satyrs still stands, but otherwise Silenus closely resembles the satyrs in his character and behavior. Like sons, like father!

The two fragments cited above are also illustrative of another aspect of the satyrs' performance. Satyrs always constitute the chorus, it is true, but they also contribute to the plot without playing a leading part, which normally is reserved for a (tragic) hero or a deity. Their contribution can be essential, so much so that some satyr plays have titles that indicate the activity of the satyrs, thus giving a highly brief summary of the play in question. The examples speak for themselves: Δικτυολκοί (*Net-Haulers*), Θεωροὶ ἢ Ἰσθμιασταὶ (*Spectators or Competitors of the Isthmian Games*), and Ἰχνευταὶ (*Searchers*).

Although some names of individual satyrs are known from pottery, there are definitely no individual characters. Fixed characteristics shared by all satyrs can be discerned – perhaps even a collective character and communal behavior corresponding to their looks: in many respects they behave like animals. Moreover, their character and behavior come with the fact that they are followers of Dionysus, with whom they have a master–slave relationship. They are also pleasure-lovers: they like nothing more than partying, they love to sing, dance, and drink, and their natural lewdness is only enhanced by their addiction to drink. Otherwise they are unreliable, clumsy, inquisitive, cowardly, thievish good-for-nothings who sometimes have something childlike about them.

It is self-evident that these fixed, constantly recurring characteristics of the satyrs are greatly appropriate for equally fixed and recurring motifs and themes. The frequency and combinations of these motifs and themes are determined by the central subject matter, by the plot, and by the setting of each individual satyr play. Fischer (1959) distinguishes five major motifs: slavery, sex, Silenus' education, riddle, and (suddenly) appearing shapes or persons. Next to these major motifs, a number of minor ones can be recognized, such as music and dance, feasting and drinking, curiosity, sports, metamorphosis, and theft. Krumeich, Pechstein, and Seidensticker (1999: 666–7) offer a highly extensive list of possible motifs. After the treatment of the different versions of the myth and a summary of the story, the motifs occurring in the *Ichneutae* will be discussed in detail.

Turning now to the *Ichneutae*, the present chapter will investigate what this satyr play has contributed to the image of Sophocles' work and to the satyr play as a genre. Since the myth on which the *Ichneutae* has been based is well known, we will consider Sophocles' "making of the *Ichneutae*" – that is, transforming the myth into a satyr play. Of course, there is absolutely no intention of presenting a report of all the tragedian's exact activities. The aim is simply to explain what makes a satyr play – in this case the *Ichneutae* – a satyr play.

2 Text, Text Edition, and State of the Question

After having been discovered in 1907, the text of the *Ichneutae* was first published in 1912 by Hunt (P.Oxy. 1174); and a second part of it was published in 1927 (P.Oxy. 2081a). Hunt's publication laid the foundation for the text editions by Diehl (1913), and Terzaghi (1913), and Pearson (1917). Von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1912), who had been involved in Hunt's editions, published the first commentary on the play. During the following years of the first half of the twentieth century, various monographs saw the light, the most important of which are Bucherer (1912), Robert (1912), Tudeer (1916), Walker (1919), and Siegmann (1941). Despite the research contained in these and other publications, the dating and possible information regarding the staging the satyr play and the tetralogy that this piece belonged to remain unknown.

During the second half of the twentieth century satyr plays gained interest as a genre through the publications of fragments from other satyr plays, in particular of Aeschylus' *Diktyoulkoi* and *Theoroi e Isthmiastai*, which resulted in a series of commentaries on individual plays. In this respect, the work by Ferrante (1958), Lange (1965), Ussher (1974), Maltese (1982), and Seaford (1984) cannot go unmentioned. Important work on the genre was published by Guggisberg (1947), Sutton (1980), and Chourmouziadis (1984); but the standard work, which has really become indispensable both for the study of the genre and for the individual plays, is *Das griechische Satyrspiel* by Krumeich, Pechstein, and Seidensticker (1999). Parallel to these publications ran the almost equally important publication of the various volumes of *Tragicorum graecorum fragmenta* by Snell (1971), Radt (1985 and 1998), and Kannicht (2004).

3 The Myth

The myth that the play is based on has been handed down most extensively in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, but also in Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women* and in the works of Alcaeus. The story is told by Apollodorus (3.10.2) as well, in a slightly different version – as mentioned by Allen, Halliday, and Sikes (1936) and by Richardson (2010). The Homeric hymn, which is the most comprehensive story, begins with Hermes' generation by Zeus and Maia. After birth Hermes undergoes an incredibly fast development: born in the morning, he invents the lyre and plays it in the afternoon, and he steals Apollo's cattle in the evening. The last mentioned action he carries out quite cunningly: he reverses the footprints of the oxen by having them walk backwards, and he himself walks backwards, in big reed sandals, thus concealing the fact that a child is driving the cattle. During this journey he is watched by an old man of Onchestos who is tilling his vineyard. Hermes addresses him and wishes him a rich harvest, on condition that the man pretends not to have seen or heard anything.

Hermes drives the oxen to a steading near the river Alpheios, where the cattle can lavishly feed on opulent grass. Subsequently, he slaughters two cows, in the meantime discovering how to make fire by means of a stick and a block of wood, and then he roasts the meat. He stretches the hides. Then he takes the roast meat and divides it up into 12 shares, one for each of the 12 Olympian gods. Although he yearns for the food, he manages to resist the temptation and he hides everything in the steading. He burns the remainder of the two cows, throws his giant sandals into the river, and goes up Mount Cyllene, his home.

Searching for his cattle, Apollo comes upon the old man, who tells him that he has seen a boy drive the cows backwards. Apollo continues his search; but when he sees a bird with spread wings, he understands that it concerns Zeus' son. Extremely outraged, he pays Hermes and Maia a visit. While Hermes is playing the little innocent baby with his lyre under his arm, Apollo combs the whole house for the cows but cannot find any of them yet. He gives Hermes a good talking-to and threatens to send him to Hades, but Hermes looks as if butter would not melt in his mouth. How could a child, who does not even know what cows are, commit such a crime? Still, Hermes does not succeed in convincing Apollo. Hermes persists in his denial and proposes to bring the case before Zeus. After both parties have made their pleas before Zeus, the latter sees what his son has been up to and he orders both of them to be reconciled and to look for the cattle together. Eventually they arrive at the cattle together. Apollo discovers the truth about

Hermes' game and demands satisfaction. Thereupon Hermes grasps his lyre, which he kept wrapped in a cloth under his arm, and hands it over to Apollo. The latter responds cheerfully and is satisfied. All is well that ends well.

Although Apollodorus' passage is merely a short summary of the myth, some differences in relation to the Homeric hymn catch the eye, as observed among others by Maltese (1982: 18ff.) and Richardson (2010: 26). Richardson lists some of these variations as follows:

Hermes eats some of the flesh of the two oxen which he kills. He invents the lyre *after* stealing the cattle rather than before, and uses their entrails to make its strings, whereas he uses sheep-gut in the hymn. He also invents the plectrum. Apollo comes to Pylos and questions its inhabitants, rather than interrogating the old man of Onchestos. In the trial on Olympus, Hermes is ordered by Zeus to restore the cattle, but denies possession of them. He is disbelieved, and then he gives them back. After Hermes has invented the syrinx, he plays it and Apollo, wishing to have it, offers him "the golden wand [ῥάβδον] which he had acquired when tending cattle." Hermes then gives him the pipes, and, wishing to acquire the art of divination, is given the skill of divining by pebbles.

4 Sophocles' Choice

Sophocles' choice to use this myth for a satyr play is at least interesting. Just like tragedy, satyr play takes its subject from mythology, and often there is a relationship with the preceding tragedies. Since we do not know what plays preceded the *Ichneutae* in the tetralogy where it belonged, we cannot say for certain if this play provided a burlesque of tragic material or not. In any case, satyr drama never parodies tragic heroes and gods.

With respect to content, the myth could easily occasion a comedy: the subject matter and the tone are highly funny, and there is a happy ending. In a way Sophocles did not have to think of any tricks in order to make the myth generally comic. The base for fun was already present in the story of baby Hermes. Sophocles only had to adapt the myth to the requirements of satyr play – which, especially because of the presence of the satyrs, gave him room to write a rather original story around the myth.

5 Sophocles' Treatment of the Myth

Before the fragments were found, it was generally known that Sophocles had written a satyr play with this title; but classicists were in the dark about the contents of the piece. The discovery of the fragments not only solved this problem, but also offered a glimpse from behind the scenes of tragedian Sophocles, who created a satyr play about a well-known myth – a feat that, until then, had been known of Euripides only, in relation to his *Cyclops*. On the one hand, the story of the satyr play is, unmistakably, an account of the myth handed down in the form it takes in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, but, on the other hand, it also constitutes an adaptation that clearly shows deviations from this hymn. Therefore, it is interesting to have a closer look at the content of the satyr play, map the deviations and adaptations made by Sophocles, and find an explanation for them. This analysis will also shed light on the genre in general.

Story and structure

In its present form, the play starts off with a prologue in which Apollo explains what has happened before: his cattle (cows or oxen) have been stolen. He has been looking for them himself, to no avail, and therefore he calls for help, offering the prospect of a reward. At this point Silenus appears and declares himself and his children, the satyrs, willing to be of service to Apollo. However, as a reward, he also asks him, in addition to the gold offered, to liberate them from slavery. Then the satyrs' chorus enters and sings the first choral song, happily assenting to the plan of Silenus, the satyrs' father. In the following scene Silenus first prays for success and subsequently tries to obtain more information from the people who live in the country. Since his attempt does not yield any results, he now urges the satyrs to go and look for the cattle in earnest (probably in three groups). Suddenly, the satyrs cry out that they have found the footprints of the cows and that the herd must have been driven by a god. They also find out that the footprints are pointed backwards. Then the satyrs are startled by the still unknown sound of a lyre and they fall to the ground. Silenus, who was not in the area and did not hear the loud sound, finds the satyrs lying on the ground and blows up at them; at the same time he sings his own praise. When the lyre sounds once more, Silenus is not impressed in the least. The satyrs tell him that their fear is not an expression of cowardice. They start to sing about performing a hunt, putting forward questions in an agitated manner and instructing each other. Then the lyre sounds again, and this time Silenus runs off, whereas the satyrs go in search of the source of the sound. Their stomping the ground calls up the nymph Cyllene, who emerges, utterly outraged, out of the ground. In the following scene the satyrs calm her down, and subsequently she tells them how Hermes was born and how he grew up in a very short time and invented the lyre by using a dead animal. She makes them guess how the instrument came about. Eventually, Cyllene herself tells the satyrs that Hermes used a tortoise to build the lyre. A little later the satyrs come to the conclusion that Hermes must have stolen Apollo's cows. Cyllene defends Hermes, and a fierce argument arises during which Cyllene lectures the satyrs. Finally, Apollo gets involved as well. Here the text ends, but the outcome goes without saying: the satyrs retrieve the cattle, and Apollo, as promised, will reward them.

The Ichneutae and other sources

Comparison between the story of the Homeric hymn and the *Ichneutae* brings forward a number of striking differences. In the hymn the invention of the lyre precedes the theft of the oxen (ll. 17–18), whereas in the *Ichneutae* these activities are presented in reverse order (ll. 314, 345, 374) – as is also the case in Apollodorus (2–7). In addition, Hermes uses the skin of an ox to fabricate the lyre. In the hymn, the invention of the lyre and the theft of the oxen happen in the afternoon of the very day of Hermes' birth (ll. 17f.); in the *Ichneutae* it occurs six days later (l. 279).

In the *Ichneutae* the connection between the lyre and the cattle is essential for the exposure of Hermes by the satyrs. During their search the satyrs are startled by the sound of the lyre, which has been fabricated from a tortoise and a piece of cowhide. For the satyrs and for Silenus, this turns out to be the key to their solution of the mystery. This construal has two important implications for Sophocles' treatment of the myth: first, on account of the use of a piece of cowhide, the theft of the oxen must precede the invention of the lyre; and, second, the satyrs' discovery of the lyre renders the appearance of

the informant redundant. In the hymn (ll. 187 ff., 213), the old man from Onchestos supplies the necessary information about the theft of the oxen, whereas in the *Ichneutae* the satyrs solve this riddle by themselves.

In the hymn, Hermes stays with his mother Maia (ll. 154 ff.), but in the satyr play Cyllene nurtures the baby god (ll. 270 ff.). Further, according to the hymn, the cattle are hidden in a cave near Pylos, on the river Alpheios (ll. 139, 398), whereas Hermes hides on Mount Cyllene in Arcadia (ll. 142, 228). Only the latter happens in the *Ichneutae* (l. 37), where the oxen, too, are hidden on Mount Cyllene (397–400).

The fact that both Hermes and the cattle are moved to Mount Cyllene places the drama in a rural setting that matches the requirements of satyr plays. Moreover, since Hermes does not stay near Maia, this move leaves Maia's dignity unimpeached: now she does not have to humiliate herself by dealing with the satyrs and, more importantly, she does not have to lie, as Cyllene does. By introducing this nymph, Sophocles kills two birds with one stone.

After consideration of the *differences* between the Homeric hymn and the *Ichneutae*, the *similarities* between Apollodorus' passage and the satyr play deserve attention. Both texts deal with the invention of the lyre and the theft of the oxen in the same order, and in both texts the old man of Onchestos is missing. This could lead to the opinion that Apollodorus used the *Ichneutae* as (sole) source. This conclusion is far too simple, as Maltese (1982: 19) points out: there are also similarities between the Homeric hymn and Apollodorus' passage that are not found in the *Ichneutae*. Although it is not clear how much Sophocles has taken from Hesiod, Alcaeus, and other sources, it is highly probable that the differences between the *Ichneutae* and the hymn are explained as adaptations to the genre of satyr play, as pointed out by Walker (1919: 2–3) and Pearson (1917: 226), or at least as choices that match the genre better. Maltese thinks of a fusion of the different versions, or of the use of other sources that refer exclusively to each of these individual versions.

From myth to satyr play

The myth is pre-eminently appropriate for a satyr play, since it already holds a number of elements typical of such plays. In addition to this, Sophocles had to make several minor and major adaptations in order to construct it as a real satyr play. First, the myth is suitable for a satyr play because of the γέλως (“laughter”) that the myth already contains. The adventures of precocious baby Hermes are priceless just as they are; and the smart tricks he uses harmonize with satyr play's preference for magic and riddles. Like tragedy, furthermore, satyr play takes its subject matter from mythology, and gods and heroes are fixed *dramatis personae* in it.

Another attractive element in the myth is its rural environment. Satyr plays are not, like tragedies, set in a palace or, like comedies, in a city, but in the mountains, woods, or at the seaside, as Vitruvius (*De arch.* 5.6.9) already “prescribed.” Thus, in the *Cyclops* Odysseus has his adventures on Mount Etna near the sea, and in Aeschylus' *Diktyoulokoï* the satyrs haul in the chest with Danae and little Perseus on the beach of Seriphus. So Mount Cyllene is a perfect setting for a satyr play.

The most important adaptation that a tragedian has to carry out while writing a satyr play is dramatization. The myth, well known from stories, has to be transformed into a dramatic play in which the text is spoken by characters in the absence of a separate, general narrator. Of course, drama is also made up of the activities of its characters; but

the text used is spoken (or sung). Furthermore, the play has to meet Aristotle's unities of time, place, and action, and its meter and language have to satisfy the requirements of the chosen dramatic form.

It is beyond dispute that the satyrs and Silenus have important roles in this satyr play, as the genre requires. In the first place, the role of the satyrs is that of a chorus, but it is clear that they also participate in the plot in their capacity of trackers. Silenus, who always commands the satyrs, has a much more independent role in the *Ichneutae* – most probably the leading role, since he appears in the major part of the (remains of) the play. Furthermore, of course, the deities Apollo, Cyllene, and certainly Hermes are important *dramatis personae*.

In his *Ichneutae* Sophocles has used several of the motifs mentioned above. Their choice is defined in the first place by the contents of the myth and by its characters. Hermes' appearance as a baby who grows up very fast fits easily into a number of satyr play motifs of the gods' (early) youth, theft, deceit and shrewdness, all of which are characteristics of Hermes. This god is also responsible for the riddle motif, which can be perfectly combined with the inbred curiosity of the satyrs – who give the play its name in their capacity of *ἰχνευταί* ("searchers" or "trackers").

In the *Ichneutae*, however, sex plays a strikingly modest role. Whereas in other satyr plays there are many references to sex, mostly in the form of *double entendres*, in this play such references can hardly be found. In the passage quoted above, Silenus explicitly calls the satyrs *φάλητες* ("penises") and refers to his own sexual activities. Another passage is 366–8, where Cyllene says to a satyr: *παύου τὸ λεῖον φαλακρὸν ἡδονῆι πιννάς* – translated by Henderson (1991) as, "stop merrily fluttering your smooth bald thing," and by Lloyd-Jones (2003: 173), quite explicitly, as, "cease to expand your smooth phallus with delight." But these passages appear to be relatively isolated. Further absence of sex in the *Ichneutae* can partly be explained by the absence of (earthly) women and feasting, which often occasion sexual activities and thus sexual language.

The same *Ichneutae* passage quoted above also illustrates Silenus' education of the satyrs, another important motif. There Silenus even holds himself up as a shining example of a father: *τοιοῦ[δ]ε πατρός* ("this father here"). The riddle motif is represented as well in this play. The reversed footprints of the cows (*παλινστραφή...τὰ βήματα*, l. 118), the sound of the lyre (*ροῖβδημα*, l. 113, *φθ[έγ]ματος*, l. 114) and Cyllene's remarks about little Hermes constitute riddles that have to be solved by the satyrs, and eventually they do so. Fischer's fifth motif, the sudden appearance of shapes or persons, is also found in the *Ichneutae*: at line 221 Cyllene emerges blowing up at the satyrs' tramping and shouting.

The motif of slavery is present too, since Apollo offers the satyrs and Silenus the prospect of liberation as a reward for their recovering his cows. Yet this motif is less strongly present in the *Ichneutae* than it is in Euripides' *Cyclops*, where the satyrs and Silenus suffer seriously under Polyphemus' yoke. On the other hand, this motif raises an important question: whom are the satyrs to be released from? Several scholars have tried to find an answer to this question. Some (Pearson 1917: 232–3; Chourmouziadis 1984: 81–3) consider Apollo to be the master of the satyrs and of Silenus. If that is the case, it is at least strange that Apollo does not simply order the satyrs to look for the cattle. Another possibility is Dionysus (Robert 1912: 550ff.; Terzaghi 1913: 87; Steffen 1949: 107–11; Page 1970: 29; Lloyd-Jones 2003: 141f.). This suggestion, too, raises further questions: How could Apollo promise to set free the satyrs if they are not his own slaves? And why would they want to be released from their master Dionysus? The possibility is

not completely inconceivable, since in Aeschylus' *Theoroi e Isthmiastai* the satyrs also seem to have gone to the Isthmian games trying to flee from Dionysus' yoke. A last option (Sutton 1980: 46f.) is that the satyrs' slavery has become a self-evident characteristic that does not need further explanation. In the text as we have it no satisfactory solution to this matter can be found.

Apart from the motifs and themes treated here, a number of comic patterns can be distinguished, as discussed by Zagagi (1999) in her thorough article. On comparison of several scenes of the *Ichneutae* with scenes of Greek Old and New Comedy and of Roman comedies, some clear resemblances catch the eye: for instance, an old man (Silenus) offering his services, followed by a negotiation scene (Silenus and Apollo). Furthermore, Silenus can be characterized as "the comic type of the braggart slave," well known from the New Comedy and from Plautus. The pursuit or hunt of the satyrs (ll. 93–123) is a "mimetic event par excellence," clearly deviating from tragic pursuits, since it has "no ideological dimension and no ethical–religious reflection is attached to its action" (Zagagi 1999: 192). The mimetic action of the satyrs gets the audience involved (83f.) and their acting as tracker dogs following the scent of the lost cattle (93ff.) has parallels in Plautus (among others). Another pattern that Zagagi (1999) mentions is the "running commentary, by one character on the stage, on the mimetic activities of another" (ll. 124–30), exemplified, as we have seen, by Silenus giving the satyrs a dressing down.

6 Language and Style

Another adaptation Sophocles was to carry out regarding the performance of the myth was of a linguistic and stylistic order. The question that arises here is whether the language of the genre of satyr plays is different from that used in tragedy and comedy. I have tried to answer this question in my dissertation (Slenders 2007). The conclusion of that research is that, from a linguistic point of view, satyr play follows tragedy but also shows a slight deviation towards comedy whenever motifs require. In addition, satyr play presents more elements of spoken language, but the deviation from tragedy is rather of a quantitative than of a qualitative nature.

Satyr play shares with tragedy its Ionic–Attic base. For example, just like tragedy, it uses the *alpha impurum* in choral parts (γάς, "ground," l. 249) and it makes use of -σσ- instead of -ττ- forms (γλ[ῶ]σσ', "language"). It certainly does not use other dialects for characterization, as comedy does. On the other hand, satyr play presents more *first occurrences* of words (neologisms and ἀπαξ εἰρημένα) than tragedy (for example, αἰόλισμα, "varied tunes," l. 327; κοκρημός, "mixture," l. 123; ἀπόψηκτος, "wiped," l. 372), and it makes limited use of diminutives, which are completely lacking in tragedy but are abundant in comedy. Deictic -ι, frequently found in comedy and completely absent in tragedy, occasionally occurs in satyr play (τουτί, "this one here," l. 120). In general, satyr play has a "tragic" vocabulary and only borrows from the "comic" vocabulary when motifs or themes foreign to tragedy require it to do so. The largest degree of liberty compared to tragedy is found in the stylistic field: the use of a looser syntax, of more colloquial expressions (κλαίοντες αὐτῆ δειλῆ ψοφῆ[σ]ετε, "you'll pay for this and come to a bad end due to pure cowardice," l. 168) and interjections (ὀπποποι· ἄ μαρέ γε[, "oh, oh! Ah you rogue," l. 197) catches the eye.

7 The Missing Part

What can be said about the missing part of the play? The text on the papyrus stops a little over halfway through, assuming that the shortness of Euripides' *Cyclops* is representative of the genre. The story of the text handed down is perfectly comprehensible and allows some predictions regarding the forthcoming section, but nothing can be said for sure concerning the specific completion and possible activities – in particular of the satyrs and Silenus – or concerning any other details.

Since satyr play always has a happy ending, one can safely guess what the outcome of the *Ichneutae* was. First, there must have been a struggle between Hermes and Apollo ending in the reconciliation of the two brothers. It is highly conceivable that there was an extra section, concerning the lyre, which played such an important role for the discovery of the cattle (Krumeich, Pechstein, and Seidensticker 1999: 311, n. 82). And what about the rewarding of the satyrs and Silenus? Surely they will get a reward of some kind, but it still remains to be guessed whether they will be set free. Perhaps the reconciliation of the divine brothers sets a good example and prompts the satyrs to become reconciled with their master (Dionysus?) as well.

8 The Final Product

In the preceding sections an effort has been made to bring into vision the freedom of movement of a tragedian, in this case Sophocles, during his creation of a satyr play – the *Ichneutae*. It has come forward that there certainly are elements that unmistakably show a difference from tragedy: the presence of satyrs and of Silenus, and the motifs, themes, and patterns coming with them. In addition to this, the language turns out to be more free, but it never descends into the vulgar and sometimes obscene level of comedy. With that, the final product of the *Ichneutae*, of which we can taste only a little bit, stimulates a palate different from that of the tragic main dishes, but surely worthwhile in a (light) dessert.

Guide to Further Reading

Krumeich, Pechstein, and Seidensticker (1999), which offers the texts (and translations) of the fragments as well as an enormously extensive bibliography, is absolutely vital for the study of satyr plays.

Guggisberg (1947), Rossi (1972), Ussher (1978), Seidensticker (1979), Sutton (1980), Seaford (1984), Voelke (2001), and Lloyd-Jones (2003) provide useful information on the genre. More specific information on the satyrs and Silenus and their appearance is found in Brommer (1941), Lissarrague (1988), Lissarrague (1992), Hedreen (1994), Krumeich, Pechstein, and Seidensticker (1999), and especially Conrad (1997) and Voelke (2001).

For my dissertation on the language and style of satyr play (Slenders 2007) the works by Willi (2002 and 2003) on the language of comedy have been indispensable. The language of sex is discussed by me (Slenders 1992, 2005, and 2006). Redondo (1993)

provides a concise discussion of the language of Sophoclean satyr plays, as do Ussher (1978) and Seaford (1984) for Euripides' *Cyclops*.

From an archaeological point of view, besides the clear synopsis and many references provided by Krumeich, Pechstein, and Seidensticker (1999), the works of Brommer (1941) and Lissarrague (1988) deserve special mention.

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Sophoclean Fragments

Carolin Habnemann

1 Introduction

Over the course of his long and sensationally productive career, Sophocles composed roughly 120 plays. Seeing that only seven of these have come down to us complete, we possess less than 6 percent of the poet's dramatic works in their entirety. In addition, however, some bits and pieces from the "lost" plays have also survived, and there is hope that more may be forthcoming: as recently as 2007 the publication of POxy. LXXI 4807 brought to light the remains of a dozen verses from Sophocles' *Epigoni*. Many of these fragments are tiny indeed, consisting of a single word or less. Still, the larger ones – the ones amounting to at least one entire verse or two connected half-verses – add up to more than 1,000 lines of poetry. Fortunately, in most cases we know the title of the play to which the fragment belongs; thus we have about 900 verses of attributed material, as compared to about 270 verses of *incerta*. This chapter, then, is intended as an invitation to rethink the conventional view of what is typically Sophoclean in light of this substantial body of fragments.

As Sophocles' fragments occupy a marginal position in the scholarship of this poet, some preliminary remarks are in order. Sophoclean fragments come down to us by two distinct routes. On the one hand, there are the so-called book fragments, which consist of quotations from the playwright preserved by later authors; on the other hand, there are the papyri. (For a succinct explanation of the two categories, see Collard, Cropp, and Lee 1995: 1–4; for a detailed account of the transmission of Sophocles' works through antiquity, see Pearson 1917, vol. 1: xxxii–xcj; for discussions of individual papyrus fragments, see Carden 1974). Each type of evidence poses special problems. For example, in the case of a book fragment, the quoting author may not remember the exact wording, or the border between quotation and context may be blurred; in the case of the papyrus fragments, frayed fabric causes many gaps, and what letters we can

make out cannot be checked against a different manuscript. Thus, it is not surprising that most publications devoted to the fragments of Sophocles to date focus on matters of textual criticism.

Recently, however, a new era has dawned. In 1977 Radt produced his monumental and meticulous edition of the material as the fourth volume of *Tragicorum graecorum fragmenta*. (A revised version appeared in 1999; the fragment numbers and quotations of Greek text in this chapter follow the 1999 edition.) Like his predecessors, Radt presents the evidence play by play, ordered by title according to the Greek alphabet, but with an important innovation: an asterisk before the fragment number shows at first glance if the fragment's attribution rests on conjecture. Admittedly, the title of a play accompanying a quotation is especially vulnerable to textual corruption, thus rendering the distinction between a restored title (cited without asterisk) and a conjectured title (cited with asterisk) problematic in some cases. Still, this difficulty hardly diminishes the value of the system as a whole: a dangerous road marked with warning signs, even though a few of them may seem oddly placed, is safer than a dangerous road with no signage at all.

Radt opens his treatment of each play with an introduction containing all ancient references to the drama quoted in full, followed by copious references to modern discussions, depictions in ancient art and a list of potentially related fragments among the *incerta* and *adespota* (that is, verses not attributable to a specific Sophoclean play or to a specific tragic poet, respectively). Finally, the fragments themselves are accompanied by generous excerpt(s) from the source(s) in which each one occurs, as well as by an extensive critical apparatus recording variant readings and emendations. This is a highly scientific work, as Radt permits the evidence to speak for itself as much as possible. A reader who is not comfortable with the resulting polyphony of ancient and modern languages, or is looking for more continuous commentary, can find some help in Pearson's edition of 1917.

In 1996 Lloyd-Jones made the fragments of Sophocles accessible to a wider audience through his bilingual edition for the Loeb Classical Library. Now the non-specialist can find her way through the bewildering expanse of ruins under the guidance of a great expert who judiciously focuses on the larger fragments (as defined above), bridges gaps with supplements, and provides helpful background information in the form of concise introductions and explanatory notes. Limitations of space, however, have necessitated such brevity as to leave the reader at times wishing for more commentary and discussion, especially in the case of the better preserved plays. Sommerstein and his team are currently in the process of filling this need: they had already produced one volume containing the remains of six fragmentary plays (in the original and in translation), along with detailed commentary and tentative reconstructions in 2006, and another volume was published in 2011.

As this short survey shows, the fragments of Sophocles have lately become a field beckoning to be explored – not only by trained classicists, but also by readers with little or no Greek. Consequently, the time seems right for an introduction to this body of texts. Obviously it is impossible to cover all – or even most – Sophoclean fragments in a single chapter. In order to give the reader a taste of the great variety of possible approaches, I focus on three very different aspects of the playwright's art: satyr plays, metamorphosis stories, and similes. Due to the scattered and elusive nature of the material, I include at every turn bits of methodological information regarding the sources of our knowledge and its inherent limitations, at the risk of boring the specialist.

2 Satyr Play

Probably the most fundamental contribution of the fragments to our understanding of Sophocles' dramatic art is that they give us a glimpse of the author, whom we had known only as a tragic poet, crafting satyr plays. Originally about a quarter of Sophocles' works would have belonged to this genre, since in the fifth century tragedians typically competed with a set of three tragedies followed by a satyr play. Of all these plays, however, only one has survived complete, Euripides' *Cyclops*, and so our knowledge of satyric drama comes in large part from the spectacular discovery of a papyrus (F 314, 314a, 314b) containing more than 400 (partially broken) verses of Sophocles' *Searchers* (*Ichmentae*). Since satyr plays tend to be markedly shorter than tragedies, this probably amounts to about a half of the original piece. The following summary of the plot in the preserved portion offers a basic idea of how a satyric drama differs in spirit and composition from tragedy.

Apollo promises a reward to anyone who will retrieve his missing cattle, and the satyrs, led by their father Silenus, are quick to accept the task. They manage to track the hoofprints to the entrance of a cave where an unusual sound so frightens them that they do not dare to proceed with their search. In spite of his bragging about past exploits, Silenus fares no better than his sons, and the ensuing altercation between them causes the nymph Cyllene to emerge from the cave. She has been tending baby Hermes inside and thus is able to explain that the mysterious sound comes from a new instrument that the young god has just invented: the lyre. As soon as she mentions that cowhides were used in its fabrication, the satyrs conclude that they have found the thief of Apollo's missing cattle. Here the papyrus breaks off, so we do not know for sure what happened in the other half of the play. Scholars have conjectured, by analogy with the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, that the little rascal goes on to pilfer his older half-brother's quiver as well, but that the two gods are reconciled when Hermes presents the lyre to Apollo as a gift.

Our ignorance about the latter part of *The Searchers*, disappointing though it is, must not make us forget that this is by far the best attested of Sophocles' fragmentary plays; in no other instance do we know as much about the dramatic action, down to the very words and scenes that the playwright used to fashion it. Awareness of this fact is vital, because one important way in which the fragments enrich our understanding of Sophocles' art is by adding to our knowledge of the myths he chose to dramatize: in the case of about thirty fragmentary plays, the identification of their subject can be regarded as certain or very probable (Radt 1983: 223f.). *The Searchers* stands at the head of this group; for balance, let us now consider another satyr play from this set of thirty dramas, *The Infant Dionysus* (*Dionysiskos*), whose scanty remains allow but a glimpse of the central event in its plot.

The Infant Dionysus shares two dramatic elements with *The Searchers*: first, it focuses on an event from the childhood of a god, as we know from the diminutive noun in the title; and, second, it involves a discovery, namely that of wine, as is clear from F 172. Otherwise our evidence consists merely of two additional fragments that also mention wine but provide no clue to the dramatic action surrounding its discovery. The realization that, in the case of more than eighty fragmentary plays, we have even less information about their subject matter than we do for *The Infant Dionysus* should suffice to demonstrate that we need to find other ways to approach this material than by trying

to figure out the mythical event underlying a particular drama and to reconstruct its plot. Fortunately, there are many such ways.

In dealing with the scattered remains of satyr drama, the search for recurrent features has proven especially productive. *The Infant Dionysus*, for example, adds to the catalogue of such features as it shows that infant gods and heroes, inventions and discoveries, and, of course, wine are typical of this genre. Other fragments contain other stock elements: in his *Amycus*, for instance, Sophocles seems to have employed the story pattern of the ogre who must be overcome. Here we have another instance of a play whose subject can be identified on the basis of its title and of just one fragment. The assumption that this drama treats the boxing match in which the Argonaut Polydeuces (also known as Pollux) defeats the uncouth King Amycus is a result of reasoning *ex negativo*: we know of no other mythical exploit associated with somebody by that name. It receives some support, however, from the statement in F 112 that somebody “makes the jaws soft,” which fits the postulated scenario of a boxing match.

Finally, I would like to conclude this partial survey of typical elements among the Sophoclean satyr plays with my personal favorite: the irreverent depiction of deities in *The Judgment* (*Krisis*). Writing in the second century CE, Athenaeus notes in Book 15 of his *Learned Banqueters* (*Deipnosophistai*) – a work that contains hundreds of quotations from tragic and comic poets, including no fewer than sixty fragments of Sophocles – that in this play Aphrodite dabs on perfume and preens in front of a mirror while Athena rubs herself down with oil and performs athletic exercises (687 C). The play’s title suggests that, in their different ways, both goddesses are seeking to impress Paris, in hopes of winning the beauty contest that eventually was to cause the Trojan War. Since the speaker at Athenaeus’ fictitious banquet who brings up the play subscribes to the philosophical doctrine of the Cynics, it is not surprising that he interprets the two goddesses allegorically, as personifications of virtue and pleasure. Such moralism, however, is clearly out of place; the Hellenistic poet Callimachus, who seems to have drawn on Sophocles’ *Judgment* in his *Fifth Hymn*, does much better justice to the humorous spirit of the scene.

Naturally, the surviving tragedies rarely provide a glimpse of Sophocles’ lighter side (as happens, for example, in the depiction of the guard in *Antigone*), and so it is especially intriguing that we may possess a tragic and a satyric treatment of the same event. There is a good chance, though unfortunately no certainty, that F **1130 preserves verses from a Sophoclean satyr play about the courtship of Deianeira, which also figures in his extant *Women of Trachis*. But, while in the tragedy the heroine recalls with terror how the river god Achelous, manifesting himself in a stunning mix of human, animal, and elemental attributes, was ousted by Heracles (who would later display monstrous characteristics himself), in this fragment the half-beastly satyrs collectively apply for the princess’ hand in a manner that is plainly ridiculous. Moreover, in the midst of an amusingly rhetorical speech cataloging their alleged accomplishments in various fields, they let their true nature slip out by claiming athletic prowess in “contests of wrestling, riding, running, boxing, biting, twisting testicles.” What a contrast to the (also unconventional) battle between Achelous and Heracles, with its “crash of fists and bow and a bull’s horns, all mixed together, [...] wrestling locks and head-buttings and low moans from both contestants,” at *Women of Trachis* 517–522–530!

Putting together a catalog of typical motifs from the fragments marked by the ancient sources as coming from satyr plays also yields criteria for ascribing other dramas to this genre that are not so identified by the quoting authors. This is helpful because the list of Sophoclean titles that has come down to us contains only half as many entries that are explicitly labeled satyr plays as our knowledge of fifth-century performance practices would lead us to expect: obviously, more must lurk unidentified. In the case of several fragmentary plays, however, we cannot establish to what genre they belong, and this uncertainty poses a severe hindrance to our understanding and conjectures. The question of genre is especially difficult in the case of *The Shepherds* (*Poimenes*): on the one hand, the crude tone and homely idiom of several fragments seem indicative of satyr drama; on the other hand, such events as Hector's slaying of Protesilaus (the first hero to set foot on Trojan soil during the landfall of the Greek army) and Achilles' defeat of Cycnus (whose skin was impervious to bronze or iron) seem like the stuff of tragedy. Consequently, some scholars have argued for the former, others for the latter, and yet a third group would like to assign the play a pro-satyr status, after the model of Euripides' *Alceste*.

Although the idiom of satyr drama admits colloquial and vulgar expressions foreign to tragedy, it would be a mistake to conclude that the genre has no place for verses of deep meaning and great beauty. Take, for example, the magnificent allegory of Eros in *The Lovers of Achilles* (*Achilleos erastai*), which seems to have been, or become, proverbial (F 149, trans. Lloyd-Jones, with modifications):

τὸ γὰρ νόσημα τοῦτ' ἐφίμερον κακόν·
 ἔχοιμ' ἂν αὐτὸ μὴ κακῶς ἀπεικάσαι.
 ὅταν πάγου φανέντος αἰθρίου χεροῖν
 κρύσταλλον ἀρπάσωσι παῖδες εὐπαγῆ,
 τὰ πρῶτ' ἔχουσιν ἡδονὰς ποταινίου·
 τέλος δ' ὁ θυμὸς οὐθ' ὅπως ἀφῆ θέλει
 οὔτ' ἐν χεροῖν τὸ κτῆμα σύμφορον μένειν.
 οὔτω δὲ τοὺς ἐρῶντας αὐτὸς ἴμερος
 δρᾶν καὶ τὸ μὴ δρᾶν πολλάκις προίεται

For this disease is an attractive evil; I could make quite a good comparison. When frost appears outdoors, and boys seize up the solid ice with their hands, at first they experience new pleasures. But in the end they can neither bring themselves to let it go, nor is their acquisition good for them if it stays in their hands. In the same way, an identical desire often drives lovers to act and not to act.

We know neither the speaker nor the context of this passage – apart from the plausible inference from the title that the satyrs seem to have courted Achilles in this play – but this hardly diminishes its poetic power. On the contrary, in my opinion the verses are so remarkable as to deserve to be collected, translated, and read for their own sake as a piece of poetry; treatment currently reserved for the fragments of the lyric poets. Gibbons, who has recently pioneered this novel approach to the fragments of Sophocles, memorably sums up his goal: “not to try to reconstruct from fragments something that is lost, but to [...] seek the poetic and imaginative energy that still remains” (2008: 9f.).

3 Metamorphoses

Another productive use of the body of fragments is to search for typically Sophoclean traits that happen not to be represented in the intact plays. For example, the fragments indicate that stories of metamorphosis occupy a more prominent place in Sophocles' art than the few references in the surviving plays suggest. In fact, his fragmentary *Inachus* contains the first detailed description of a metamorphosis in extant Greek literature (Pfeiffer 1958: 32). Thanks to numerous book fragments and two substantial papyri, we have some idea of the dramatic action leading up to this event. Evidently, King Inachus has entertained a mysterious stranger as his guest at the palace in Argos. At first this "black barbarian" (F **269a, 54) used his magical powers to do a great good: the fragments contain references to wealth and full storehouses. Now, however, he has vanished, after turning Inachus' daughter Io into a cow. In six partially surviving verses an astonished speaker traces the change of what used to be a beautiful princess, from her muzzle and head to the hoofs on her feet (F **269a, 36–41). It is probably no coincidence that all the bovine traits mentioned here could be accommodated by an actor's costume.

If *Inachus* is satyric, as internal evidence suggests, it seems likely that Io's re-transformation into a human being and her glorious line of offspring must have been anticipated within the play. The spectators would surely have known that Io's degradation into a clumsy animal was only temporary; still, the tenor of the drama would be surprisingly grim unless the victim and her relatives were somehow made aware of her future release as well. Admittedly, in another satyr play, *The Dumb Ones* (*Kophoi*), Sophocles tells of a metamorphosis without reprieve: Celmis, one of the enigmatic company of magical smiths called "the Idaean Dactyls," gets changed into a particularly tough kind of iron for his insolent behavior toward the mother of the gods, Rhea (F 365). Still, in contrast to Io's plight, Celmis' fate is not likely to have struck an unsuitably serious note for a satyr play, since it could be viewed as just punishment. In the genre of tragedy, by contrast, it is not only the innocent who win our sympathy.

In his seven complete plays Sophocles makes mention several times of two stories of metamorphosis: that of Niobe (*Ant.* 823–32, *El.* 150ff.) and that of the nightingale (*Aj.* 628, *El.* 107, 147ff., 1076f., *Tr.* 963, perhaps also *Tr.* 105). In each case the allusion serves as a mythical reference point for the lamentation of a woman or women in the play, but the playwright also devoted an entire drama to each of the myths: his now fragmentary *Niobe* and *Tereus*, respectively. As it happens, we possess a dramatic *hypothesis* complete for each tragedy. These ancient plot summaries are preserved on papyrus; as a result, they are themselves fragmentary and the identification of the author whose drama they summarize rests on conjecture. Still, combined with the evidence of the other available *testimonia* and of the fragments, they give us some idea at least of the outline of the plot.

Tantalus' daughter Niobe has boasted that she has 14 children, while the goddess Leto has only two; Artemis and Apollo are quick to avenge this insult against their mother. First, they destroy Niobe's sons while they are out hunting. The slaughter must have been reported in detail since we know from Plutarch that one of the young men calls upon his lover for help (F 448). In response to the terrible news, Niobe's husband Amphion madly takes up arms against the gods and gets killed as well. And still the divine wrath has not run its course: a papyrus preserves a spectacular scene in which

Artemis and Apollo, probably standing on top of the stage building, are shooting arrows down inside, where Niobe's daughters are vainly trying to hide among the storage vessels (F **441a). Next, Amphion's brother Zethus appears on the scene, and at this point the *hypothesis* breaks off. Since the tragedy must have provided a sense of closure regarding Niobe's fate, it is natural to supply this dramatic need from an ancient commentator's note on the *Iliad*, according to which Sophocles had Niobe go home to Lydia after the death of her children. The departure of the mourning mother, in turn, makes the most sense if we assume that it was motivated by a prophecy of the miraculous event that the playwright elsewhere describes so hauntingly: she will be turned to stone on Mt. Sipylus, "rock growing over her like clinging ivy," with her tears forever running down the face of the cliff (*Ant.* 823–32).

In the case of Sophocles' *Tereus* there is no need to resort to inferences from circumstantial evidence, as the metamorphosis is attested directly in the *testimonia*, and it is threefold. Once again, the *hypothesis* provides us with an outline of the plot. The Athenian King Pandion has given his daughter Procne in marriage to the Thracian King Tereus; after some time she asks her husband if he would travel to Athens to fetch her sister Philomela for a visit. Tereus accedes to her wish, but on the way back to Thrace he rapes Philomela and then cuts out her tongue, lest she betray his crime. The mute girl, however, succeeds in communicating her maltreatment nonetheless, by means of a piece of weaving. Having learned the truth, Procne slays Itys, her little son by Tereus, and serves him up to his father as a meal. Finally, all three are transformed into birds: Tereus into a hoopoe, Procne into a nightingale, and Philomela into a swallow.

Since the metamorphosis could not be shown on stage, it must have been related at the end of the play, perhaps by a *deus ex machina*. As a result, many scholars believe that the ten iambic trimeters reporting that somebody, no doubt a god, "has adorned with varied colors this hoopoe (*epopa*) who looked upon (*epopten*) his own evils" (F **581) come from this play. The second asterisk before the fragment number, however, signals a problem with its ascription: our source for these verses, no less an authority than Aristotle (*HA* 633^a), attributes them to Aeschylus. Although a mix-up of the two famous tragedians cannot be ruled out, the quotation may well come from the lesser known Philocles, who also composed a *Tereus*, and Aeschylus' name may have crept into the text because Philocles was his nephew.

Tereus' transformation into a hoopoe rather than a hawk was probably an innovation introduced by Sophocles; in his comedy *The Birds*, Aristophanes has the hoopoe blame his ridiculous beak on this poet (99ff.). Thanks to another comic parody in *Lysistrata* (ll. 563f.), we know that at some point in the play Tereus makes a ferocious appearance, brandishing a shield and spear. Could the spear somehow have foreshadowed the transformed king's long beak? One ingenious scholar has taken this line of thought even further, suggesting that the bird's crest might have been anticipated visually by Tereus' wearing the "hair-on-the-top-of-the-head" coiffure, which had served as an identifying epithet for Thracians since Homer (Borthwick in Kiso 1984: 144f. n. 74). Thus, it seems possible that the playwright used the costumes and props of his human characters to hint at their later incarnation as birds while, inversely, the birds retain behaviors from their previous existence as humans: the hoopoe is fierce and shuns human dwellings, the swallow chatters unintelligibly, as if her tongue had been cut off, and the nightingale never tires of singing "Itys, Itys," in grief for her son.

According to a remark by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* (37.40), Sophocles also tells of a metamorphosis that stands halfway between that of Niobe and Procne, in that it combines the motifs of bird and stone: the guinea-fowl (*meleagris* in Greek) in the lands beyond India weeps tears of amber for the hero Meleager (F 830a).

Lacking the context for all three stories, we are in no position to decide if these metamorphoses constitute an act of divine punishment or of divine pity. In each case, however, the miraculous event brings about the emergence of something beautiful – the striking plumage of the hoopoe, the swallow, and the guinea-fowl; the melodious song of the nightingale; the shimmering glow of amber; a rock formation capped with perennial snow – and so our horror is mixed with awe. Perhaps this observation can also help to explain the surprising fact that in both references to the transformation of Niobe in the extant tragedies she is counted among the gods: through her petrification she transcends the world of time and change. In this respect Sophocles' stories of metamorphosis invite comparison with another kind of supernatural transition, which we see foreshadowed, for example, in *Oedipus at Colonus*: a mortal man acquiring superhuman status as a cult hero after his death.

Obviously, these three tragic tales of transformation – of Niobe, of Procne along with her sister and her husband, and of the sisters of Meleager – show important similarities. But this is no reason to believe that all of Sophocles' metamorphoses must have followed the same pattern or held the same significance. While the allusions to the myths of Niobe and the nightingale function primarily as mythical parallels for the plight of a tragic heroine, the mention, at the opening of *Electra* (l. 5), of the place where Io was driven from her home, as a cow, serves, paradoxically, as the first landmark in the home-coming of Orestes. Therefore, it is likely that we would discover additional types and meanings of metamorphoses if our body of texts increased. In the meantime, though, it is not safe to postulate that a tragedy must have contained a metamorphosis on the grounds that it revolves around a mythical figure who, according to other sources, gets changed into a different shape. For example, in referring to Perdix as “the namesake of a bird” (F 323) – *perdix* is the Greek for “partridge” – Sophocles seems intent on steering his audience away from thinking that Perdix was turned into a bird, as happens in Ovid.

The situation is less clear regarding the mention of the playwright's name by the ancient collectors of star myths in association with Cassiopeia and the sea-monster who, according to these accounts, were placed as constellations on the night sky. Cassiopeia had offended the gods with a blasphemous boast that her own beauty was superior to that of the Nereids, thus causing her husband's realm to be devastated by a sea-monster. In atonement, the unhappy parents must expose their daughter Andromeda on the shore to be devoured by the beast, where she is rescued in the nick of time by Perseus. Sophocles certainly dramatized this myth in his *Andromeda*, but whether or not his treatment included the catasterism of queen and monster is not certain. If it did, the metamorphosis of Cassiopeia recalls that of Niobe and Procne in that it affects yet another transgressive mother, though in kind it is quite different: she retains human shape. Cassiopeia becomes an image of herself that gives no sign of continued mourning for the calamity that befell her as a mortal woman. Although we do not know for certain whether Sophocles had Cassiopeia turn into a constellation, we still have more than enough evidence to warrant the conclusion that in his works stories of transformation “play, in comparison with Homer, an important role in the plots of the surviving plays, and a much greater role in some of the lost ones” (Forbes Irving 1990: 16).

4 Homeric Simile

At the end of the last section Homer was introduced as a reference point for Sophocles' use of transformation stories. Since antiquity, scholars have been intrigued by the playwright's special connection to the epic poet: most memorably Polemon, the head of the Platonic Academy around the turn of the third century BCE, dubbed Sophocles a tragic Homer and Homer an epic Sophocles. Cross-references abound in the *scholia* on both authors, and the Byzantine archbishop Eustathius (whose commentaries on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are also an important source of Sophoclean fragments) points to an array of allegedly Homeric features. Along with many other claims, he states that Sophocles emulates Homer by using the middle voice in cases where the active would seem more normal (*Commentary on Homer's Iliad* 2.512.3–10), that he is borrowing Homer's phrase "Artemis of the golden rein" when speaking of the "gilded rein" of Helios (2.293.3ff.), and that he models Jocasta's doubts regarding the mantic arts on Hector's rejection of bird signs (3.382.20ff.; *Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* 1.91.6f.).

These examples raise some of the problems besetting also such influence studies today. First, how can we distinguish between conscious borrowing by the later poet from the earlier one and coincidental similarities in the works of two authors who stand in the same poetic tradition and share many themes? Consideration of how very many texts have been lost – the epic cycle, lyric poetry, earlier dramas, and so on – should make us cautious about taking our cue from rare words or phrases. Second, once a point of contact has been demonstrated to be the result of intentional imitation, the question arises whether the echo is meant to help set the tone of (this portion of) the play or to trigger a specific recollection of the imitated passage and its context, thereby opening up new layers of meaning. Third, how much perceptiveness and associative power can we reasonably impute to the spectators in the Theater of Dionysus, however attentive and well-versed they may have been in the poetry of the past? Notwithstanding all these difficulties, scholars have succeeded in gathering a repertoire of individual instances that, cumulatively, prove that Sophocles' use of Homer was significant, varied, and complex. Drawing on the evidence of the fragments, I would like to add to this body of investigations, first by showing that Sophocles takes over Homer's most striking stylistic device, the extended simile, and then by exploring the possibility that in one particular instance he may have been inspired by the epic poet not only in form but also in content.

The 2008 *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines simile as "[a]n explicit comparison between two things, actions, or feelings, using the words 'as' or 'like,'" and epic or Homeric simile as "[a]n extended simile elaborated in such detail or at such length as to eclipse temporarily the main action of the narrative work, forming a decorative digression." Sophocles' complete plays contain fifty or so explicit comparisons, distributed very unevenly throughout the seven tragedies – slightly more than half of them in the dialogue and slightly less than half in the choral odes. Among the latter group, *Women of Trachis* 112–19 and *Antigone* 586–92 (likening the fortunes of Heracles and the House of Oedipus, respectively, to waves on a stormy sea) certainly qualify as extended similes in terms of length and detail. (*Aj.* 168–71, *OT* 174–7, and *OC* 1240f. would be the next best candidates.) All of these passages, however, differ from the Homeric similes in that they do not themselves form a decorative and, one hastens to add, meaningful digression from the dramatic action but are part of a larger formal element of a digressive nature: the choral odes. The fact that these extended comparisons

in Sophocles were sung, while the Homeric similes were recited in the same meter as the rest of the epic highlights the difference. For a closer counterpart to epic usage we must therefore look for similes occurring in the dramatic dialogue, but all the representatives of this group preserved in the seven complete plays are less than three verses long. By contrast, the body of fragments affords us at least three extended similes in iambic trimeters: F 149 (quoted above), F 659, and F 871.

Admittedly, the so-called Homeric simile may well have been a part of the epic tradition more generally, at least from the time of the composition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* onward. Thus, Sophocles, who so often dramatized events taken from the epic cycle, may have found stylistic inspiration in these works as well. The simile in F 659, however, appears to be Homeric in spirit as well as in length. Despite textual problems that leave the syntax strained even after emendation, the sense of these verses is clear. We know that they are spoken by Tyro in a play named after her (trans. Lloyd-Jones, with modifications):

κόμης δὲ πένθος λαγχάνω πάλου δίκη,
 ἥτις συναρπασθεῖσα βουκόλων ὕπο
 μάνδραις ἐν ἰπτεῖαισιν ἀγρία χερὶ
 θέρος θερισθῆ ξανθὸν αὐχένων ἄπο,
 πλαθεῖσα δ' ἐν λειμῶνι ποταμίων ποτῶν
 ἴδη σκιάς εἶδωλον ἠάγασθεῖσ' ὑπὸ†
 κουραῖς ἀτίμως διατετιλμένης φόβην.
 φεῦ, κἄν ἀνοικτίρμων τις οἰκτίρειέ νιν
 πτήσσουσαν αἰσχύνησιν οἶα μαίνεται
 πενθοῦσα καὶ κλαίουσα τὴν πάρος χλιδὴν

And it is my lot to mourn my hair, like a foal, whom herdsmen have seized in the horses' stables with rough grip, and who has had the yellow mane reaped off her neck; and when she is brought to the meadow to drink from the river, *reflected in the water* she sees her image, with her hair shamefully hacked off. Ah, even a pitiless person might pity her, cowering beneath the outrage, as she madly laments and bewails the luxuriant hair she had before.

In Euripides' *Alcestis* (ll. 428f.), Admetus promises that he will have the Thessalians cut not only their own hair, but also their horses' manes in mourning for his wife's death. But our source for the fragment reveals that this refers to a more sinister practice: mule-breeders would cut off a mare's mane in order to break the animal's spirit and thus make her submit to being mounted by a donkey. As Clark (2003: 88f.) points out, the disgrace may have been especially painful for Tyro, who is described by Hesiod as "having beautiful locks" (F 30.25, Merkelbach and West: *euplokamos*, a standard epithet for heroines and goddesses in epic) and by Pindar in one of his Pythian odes as "having locks that arouse desire" (4.136: *erasiplokamos*). Considering the tremendous symbolic importance that the Greeks attached both to human hair and to horses' manes (Griffith 2006c: 308–22) – short hair typically marks a female as a slave in Greek art! – it is not surprising that Tyro uses for her shorn reflection the same word as do both Philoctetes and Oedipus when contrasting their present existence, crippled and outcast, with their former heroic selves (*Ph.* 947, *OC* 110: *eidolon*). Moreover, Tyro's social humiliation is accompanied by physical abuse: according to a note by the rhetorician Pollux (4.141), who was writing on stage antiquities in the second century CE, Sophocles employed a special black-and-blue mask for her character, to indicate that she had been beaten by her step-mother

Sidero (Pollux 4.141). This mask emphasized the princess' loss of identity by visually contradicting her very name: "Tyro" is derived from the Greek word for "cheese," in an allusion to her formerly milk-white complexion (cf. F *648).

Sophocles wrote two plays entitled *Tyro*, in which he may have either dramatized the same mythical event twice or treated two separate incidents from this heroine's life, and we do not know in which one the simile occurred. Since it is not likely, however, that the playwright drastically varied the antecedents of the story from one treatment to the other, this ignorance is not debilitating. Two ancient witnesses, a commentator on Euripides' *Orestes* and another on Aristotle's *Poetics*, report that (one of) the play(s) ended with a happy recognition effected by means of a cradle. This object suggests that, according to Sophocles' play(s), as in later accounts of the myth, Tyro had been raped by Poseidon and had given birth to two sons, Pelias and Neleus, whom she exposed. The children are raised by shepherds and, when they have grown to manhood, they learn – we do not know how – who their mother is and come to her rescue. Even if our simile did not occur in the same *Tyro* where this recognition did, Tyro's maltreatment, like her eventual delivery, must have resulted from her sexual encounter with the god. Sadly, we know nothing about the circumstances of this fateful event. In the *Odyssey* Tyro is frequenting the banks of the river Enipeus, with whom she has fallen in love, when Poseidon appears to her in the shape of the lesser deity. Such sexual forwardness on a young woman's part would fit with her choice of a horse as point of comparison in the simile, since the sex drive of mares (for copulation with members of their own species rather than with donkeys) was proverbial. Such innuendo, however, ill suits the deep pathos of the passage, and Sophocles may well have departed from tradition regarding Tyro's prehistory – as he did in his depiction of Deianeira and Ismene, both of whom are possessed by a ravenous sexuality according to earlier poets (Archilochus fr. 286 West, Mimnermus fr. 21 West).

The image of the filly with her mane shorn off is certainly searing by itself, and yet in my view it derives still greater power from a contrast with the stallion simile describing Paris' return to battle after his erotic intermezzo with Helen in the *Iliad* (6. 506–11, trans. Merrill; the simile recurs when Hector rejoins the fighting after having been knocked out by Ajax at 15. 262–7):

ὡς δ' ὅτε τις στατὸς ἵππος ἀκοστήσας ἐπὶ φάτνῃ
 δεσμὸν ἀπορρήξας θείῃ πεδίῳ κροαίων
 εἰωθὼς λούεσθαι ἔυρρείος ποταμοῖο
 κυδιῶν· ὕψοῦ δὲ κάρη ἔχει, ἀμφὶ δὲ χαῖται
 ὤμοις αἴσσονται· ὃ δ' ἀγλαΐῃφι πεποιθὼς
 ῥίμφά ἐ γούνα φέρει μετὰ τ' ἤθεα καὶ νομὸν ἵππων

Just as a horse in a stall that is fed at the manger of barley,
 breaking his rope, runs over the plain with thundering hoofbeat –
 he is accustomed to bathe in the stream of a fair-running river –
 proud in his strength, with his head held high, while over his shoulders
 streaming his mane floats back; he exults in his glorious splendor;
 nimbly his limbs bear him on to the pastures and haunts of the horses.

There are no verbal echoes signaling a link between the two passages, which also differ formally, in that Tyro is describing herself, while the epic simile is told in the third person by the narrator. Still, Sophocles' filly constitutes a striking counterpart to Homer's stallion in the details of the descriptions as well as in the sequence of images that make up the simile. The opposition begins with the sexes of the two horses; the manger,

suggesting the luxury of grain-feeding, is matched by the corral, indicating confinement; the stallion's torn halter corresponds inversely to the rough grip with which the filly is being handled; while the stallion likes to plunge exuberantly into the river, the filly merely approaches its edge to drink; the one gallops with his head held high, the other cowers and raves; finally the contrast is summed up by the flowing mane of the stallion, which symbolizes his freedom and splendor (*aglaïephi*), in contrast to the hacked-off mane of the filly, which marks her subjugation and shame (*aischunesin*).

Of course, perception of this kind of resemblance is to a large degree subjective and therefore can neither be proved nor disproved. In this particular case the possibility of an intentional echo gains some support from the fact that the Homeric passage occurs right after a scene that much influenced later writers: the final meeting of Hector and Andromache. Sophocles himself evokes this encounter extensively in his *Ajax* (ll. 485–595). It may be that, for some of the ancient spectators as for this modern reader, the memory of Homer's glorious stallion at the back of their minds made them even more susceptible to the plight of Sophocles' filly. It should go without saying, however, that the assumption of an epic model for Tyro's simile in no way diminishes the playwright's originality. What is true of Tecmessa, who is not a simple remake of Homer's Andromache, is true also of the filly in the simile: in her Sophocles created something new and very much his own.

5 Conclusion

I have chosen to gather information from the Sophoclean fragments regarding three different categories: a literary genre, a plot element, and a stylistic device. There are many others. I could have focused on matters of stagecraft, such as the appearance of gods on stage and the use of special masks, for instance; or I might have explored the poet's many variations on the figure of the scheming step-mother. In some cases the remains of a "lost" play furnish deeper insight into a story that is merely alluded to in an extant tragedy; in others, they shed light on the way the playwright dramatized the mythical consequences or antecedents of the plot at hand. Thus, the evidence of the fragments allows us to discover more links within Sophocles' oeuvre, but it also provides new perspectives on his relationship to other authors – his fellow tragedians, of course, but also exponents of different genres. In short, I hope to have shown that, despite the many frustrations inevitable in working with a body of material that has so many holes, the Sophoclean fragments constitute a multi-dimensional web of fascinating connections. If at any point in this chapter the reader felt moved to pick up a copy of the fragments, be it in the original or in translation, and to follow one of the threads on his or her own, this chapter will have fulfilled its mission.

Guide to Further Reading

This chapter is intended to serve as a bridge between two excellent studies published in Gregory's *Companion to Greek Tragedy* (2005): Scodel's discussion of Sophoclean tragedy and Cropp's survey of Greek tragic fragments. It is deeply indebted to Radt's seminal article of 1983, which should be the first port of call for anybody who is interested in Sophoclean fragments and can read German. By contrast, Sutton (1984) and Kiso (1984) make for fascinating reading but must be consulted with caution.

Papers from an international conference on the tragic fragments, including Harvey's helpful survey of relevant publications since the middle of the nineteenth century, can be found in McHardy, Robson, and Harvey (2005). Another conference, focused specifically on the fragments of Sophocles, is reflected in the 20 papers collected in Sommerstein (2003), though some of them are extremely speculative.

Gibert (2002) furnishes a great starting-point for anyone interested in current problems and trends in studies of satyr play; it is complemented by Griffith (2006a). Forbes Irving (1990) offers an illuminating and systematic investigation of the phenomenon of metamorphosis throughout Greek literature. Easterling (1984) and Davidson (2006), among others, provide complementary illustrations of the complexity of Sophocles' use of Homer by focusing on an individual instance; by contrast, Garner (1990) seeks to diagnose patterns of imitation and allusion with less convincing results.

The recent inclusion of some Sophoclean fragments in a sourcebook on early Greek political thought (Gagarin and Woodruff 1995) and in another one on ancient myth (Trzaskoma, Smith, Brunet, and Palaima 2004) shows that this material can enrich the study of diverse subjects. Ewans (2000) features Sophoclean fragments measuring seven or more consecutive lines as a sort of bonus feature, while Gibbons (2008) pioneers a promising new approach by including selected fragments in his anthology of Sophoclean poems. Wutrich (1995–6) suggests ways of exploring dramatic fragments theatrically, and in fact the play "Fragment" by Kelly Copper of the Nature Theater of Oklahoma (2006) consists entirely of quotations from "lost" plays by Sophocles and Euripides.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank all the people at the Burnam Classics Library at the University of Cincinnati; I could not have written this chapter without access to this magnificent resource.

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PART III

Sophoclean Techniques

Sophocles *Didaskalos*

C. W. Marshall

Sophocles' plays were written for performance and were meant to be interpreted, in the first instance, by an audience watching them acted upon a stage. A truism such as this comes easily, but the implications for the modern reader of the plays are not obvious. Sophocles' manipulation of resources available in performance creates additional layers of meaning that supplement or augment the interpretation of the whole work. Further, Sophocles expected his plays to be understood from this perspective. By the time of Aristotle's *Poetics*, a tragedy could be considered as a single play, independent of its initial tetralogy (the set of four plays produced as a single dramatic entry at the competition for tragedies at the City Dionysia), and interpreted by a reader divorced from the Athenian civic context; but this was not yet true in the fifth century (though Aristophanes *Frogs* 52–4, which has the god Dionysus reading Euripides' *Andromeda* aboard ship, reflects the beginnings of this tendency by 405 BCE). During his productive life, Sophocles was writing for spectators and not for readers, and his use of the stage was more aggressively innovative than what is seen in the plays of Aeschylus or Euripides.

The study of Athenian stagecraft has advanced considerably over the past 40 years (taking the 1968 revision of Pickard-Cambridge (reprint 1988) as a landmark in the reconception of ancient performance), and it is now possible to assume some familiarity with the workings of the Greek stage among most students of ancient drama. This does not mean there is agreement about how stagecraft creates meaning, or about how that meaning relates to the text of the work as we have it; indeed, there are intelligent, articulate differences of opinion on almost every major issue. This leads to a crucial hermeneutic problem for students of ancient performance: stagecraft necessarily governs how a play communicates with its audience, but specific stagecraft decisions, concerning blocking or gestures, for example, cannot (in most cases) be recovered, and how they affect a play's interpretation must remain uncertain as well.

My purpose here is to show that the plays are constructed with a view to being interpreted in performance. Sophocles writes as a διδάσκαλος (*didaskalos*, “director”),

fully conscious that any play, when performed, does not prescribe meaning but invites heterogeneous interpretation. Although it is not possible to examine here the likely or possible dimensions of the performance space of the Theater of Dionysus in Athens, the performance dynamic as exhibited in the structure of the plays demonstrates that Sophocles wrote with a directorial eye. Choregic victory monuments privilege the director over the poet (as one can see from *IG I³ 969* = *SEG 23* (1968: 102), where Euripides is celebrated as *didaskalos* in what was likely his first victory in 442/1 BCE; cf. *Marmor Parium* 60 and Wilson 2000: 130–6).

While it is likely that Sophocles directed his own plays (some comic playwrights used other *didaskaloi*, but there is no comparable evidence for tragedians), the present argument does not depend on this always being true. Similarly, while we know that Sophocles competed at the Lenaia and at Eleusis (Pickard-Cambridge 1988: 41 n. 3 and 47–8), we cannot identify any plays where non-Dionysia performance seems probable. The extant plays demonstrate continuity in terms of their representation of performance conditions, even though the theater for which Sophocles wrote evolved over the six decades in which he was directing. If one considers only Sophocles, there is insufficient evidence to account for changes in physical space and for variations between festivals and from one year to another, and so there is some flattening of the evidence as a coherent composite emerges. Generalizations about Sophoclean practice are limited by the small sample size available to us. It remains possible to identify conventional practices within broad categories, knowledge of which can inform an interpretation of dramatic action. Ancient plays were not written with stage directions, and there are indications that an actor would only receive his part, from which he could learn his own lines, and not the whole play; the chorus and sung portions of the play might be taught with a call-and-response technique deployed by the *didaskalos* that had no written component (Marshall 2004). The unified actor's script, with character notations and stage directions, is an artifact of a later age. Understanding the intentions for performance in this way is foundational. It provides the basis for further literary analysis, and it can offer new avenues of interpretation that would not be evident from reading alone.

1 Doubling

One of the most straightforward ways in which Sophocles shapes theatrical meaning is the use of role doubling. As part of the dramatic competition, playwrights were assigned nominally equal resources, in order to create a level playing field for competition. To be selected for competition meant that the playwright was “granted a chorus” by the state, the funding for which was assigned to a χορηγός (*choregos*, “producer”), and the latter was responsible for most financial aspects; funding for the arts was central to the Athenian taxation system. It seems that the state provided the venue (which was the same for all three competitors at the Dionysia) and the maintenance and salaries of three actors, who between them played all the speaking roles in the play other than those of the chorus and of the κορυφαῖος (*koruphaios*, the chorus leader or “head-speaker,” who delivered non-musical choral lines). One ancient tradition associates the increase from two to three speaking actors to Sophocles, which means that it was probably introduced in the 460s BCE (Arist. *Poet.* 1449^a15; D.L. 3.56, *Life* 4). A rival tradition, recorded at *Vita Aeschylī* 15, ascribes the innovation to Aeschylus (this passage also ascribes the Sophoclean origin to Dicaearchus of Messana: fr. 79 Wehrli).

In some plays the assignment of roles to actors is unproblematic: in *Philoctetes* one actor plays the title character, a second plays Neoptolemus, and the third plays Odysseus, the False Merchant, and Heracles. In other plays the assignment is less certain, but some doublings can be identified with confidence: in *Antigone*, the Guard leaves Antigone with Creon at line 445, so that the same actor can return as Ismene at line 526. Doubling imposed limits, and the effective manipulation of this dynamic was a virtue. In *Trachiniae*, the actor who plays Deianeira (ll. 1–812) either plays Heracles or the Old Man (both of whom enter at l. 971). In the competitive production, one of these allocations of the roles was employed – it is a decision that can be seen as directorially determined. In the former case, Deianeira and Heracles, wife and husband, one passionately sympathetic and the other abhorrent, are played by the same actor; this would represent one of the most aggressive doublings in extant tragedy, but it would resonate with a central image of the play, which presents Deianeira awaiting her husband’s return. Doubling the two makes their reunion impossible, something that could only become apparent to an audience when Heracles was brought on stage. The play inscribes their fatal relationship into its theatrical architecture and offers the potential to reinforce the tension between the characters’ gender roles through performance (see Ormand 2003: 17–19). The alternative is less resonant: Heracles is played by the actor who had earlier played the Nurse and either Lichas or the Messenger. This possibility allows a range of characters to serve as a showcase of dramatic registers, but it does not embody the same intrinsic narrative conflict. While we cannot prove the Deianeira/Heracles doubling, one directorial choice offers an extra dimension to the couple’s broken relationship for those in the audience who are alert to casting.

It is not essential for an individual spectator to perceive the actor’s identity beneath one costume-and-mask combination and another. For those who make the association, an additional layer of information becomes available. Not enough is known about the acting process or vocal delivery to affirm that such identifications were obvious (see Pavlovskis 1977 and Damen 1989), but the competitive context guarantees that, for the extant plays of Sophocles and Euripides at least, such identifications were possible, since a prize was awarded for “best actor” beginning *c.* 449 BCE. In *Ajax*, the actor who plays Ajax either plays Teucer or Menelaus. One directorial choice creates a fraternal similarity: if Ajax and Teucer are doubled, then so are Agamemnon and Menelaus; resonance between kin manifests itself through the respective actor’s voice, stance, gestures, gait, and the like. Rejecting this doubling necessarily creates difference between brothers: siblings are individuated through the differences in the actor’s physicalizations. Again, one of these allocations of roles was employed, and teasing out the implications of the directorial decision necessarily informs our understanding of the play’s presentation of kinship. Regardless of whether the Ajax actor played Teucer or Menelaus, Odysseus was doubled with Tecmessa. The contrast between these roles is eventually resolved, as Odysseus becomes the strongest voice in favor of burying the dead Ajax, which echoes the earlier sympathetic portrayal of Tecmessa.

As part of a dramatic structure in *Electra* designed to postpone the recognition scene between Electra and Orestes, Sophocles prevents Orestes from meeting his mother Clytemnestra on stage before he kills her (contrast Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers* and Euripides’ *Electra*). Further, both characters are played by the same actor, which accomplishes three things. First, it marks Electra’s isolation from her family: her mother and brother (and probably her sister Chrysothemis as well; see Marshall 1994) are played by one actor, which, consciously or unconsciously, unifies them in the minds of

the audience. Nowhere is this clearer than at the point of murder. The actor leaves the stage entering the palace at line 1375, screams off stage in the voice of Clytemnestra at lines 1404–16, and returns as the matricide Orestes at line 1422. This weird blurring of roles aggressively obscures the distinction between mother and son. Second, the doubling undermines Orestes' sense of autonomy: he continues the cycle of family violence that Clytemnestra had begun when she killed Agamemnon. Orestes sees himself avenging his father's murder, but the doubling pattern, which is not natural to the plot structure and seems consciously imposed by Sophocles, associates him more closely with his mother. Third, this may serve in turn as a commentary on the trial of Orestes as Aeschylus had presented it in *Eumenides*. There Athena had denied the mother a positive function in the generation of children (she is only a receptacle, according to Apollo at *Eu.* 657–66). As if in answer to his predecessor, Sophocles asserts the biological link between mother and child at the very moment when the child violates that bond with the point of a sword.

These examples could be labeled “metatheatrical” (a problematic and overused term), in that they expect from the audience a dual awareness of the dramatic world and of the theatrical realities of actors in costumes. Theater inevitably creates this dual awareness, but calling attention to it divides the spectators, eliciting a heterogeneous response, as some perceive connections that others do not. The interpretive danger is in equating this necessary dual awareness with a sense that dramatic illusion has somehow been violated or broken. Athenian tragedy was not naturalistic: it was greatly stylized and created its mood through a variety of effects, including music and choral dancing (which themselves invite varying degrees of appreciation).

Sometimes it is harder to see the precise effect that is being accomplished. Uniquely among the extant Greek tragedies, the parts in *Oedipus at Colonus* are not capable of being divided among three actors without additionally splitting one part, Theseus, among all three actors. This seems to undermine the dramatic integrity of the tragic characters, which otherwise is consistently maintained in the fifth century. One can imagine a theatrical aesthetic by which such part-splitting showcased the ability of different actors to exhibit different aspects of a single character. Possibly this part-splitting reflects the lateness of the play (which was produced posthumously and perhaps was not constrained by a larger competitive framework); or perhaps Sophocles is anticipating a practice that (as some believe) will become standard by the time of Menander; Müller (1996) suggests that the entire speaking role of Ismene was interpolated for the posthumous presentation of a Sophoclean Theban trilogy in 401 BCE; this suggestion, though radical, would solve the problem (for other approaches, see Ceadel 1941 and Jouanna 2007: 235–7).

2 Masks, Costumes, and Acting

Athenian actors were male and wore masks that were full headpieces, with hair and usually a serene idealized face. The open mouth and eyes of the tragic mask mark the fact that any character is always about to speak and must confront the horrors depicted in the dramatic action. For the extant plays of Sophocles and Euripides, masks provided basic visual cues to a character's age and sex. By manipulating a few basic iconographic markers such as hair and skin color (Marshall 1999), the mask-maker was able give the audience clear cues for identifying a character in the outdoors performance space; and

variations between masks with similar features (such as the five mature, bearded males in *Ajax*) are individuated by smaller differences of hairstyle, costume, voice, mannerisms, bearing, and the like: “The mask, manipulated by the expert actor, can become a blank canvas for the expression of each individual audience member’s own imagination, prompted by text and gesture” (Meineck 2006: 458). Sophocles may have employed specialized masks for specific plays, to represent the blinded Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* or Phineus and his children in the two fragmentary *Phineus* plays, or to feminize the dying Heracles visually in *Trachiniae*. To what extent masks of divinities were visibly distinct from those of mortals is unknown. The association of one mask to one character is not challenged in Sophocles, except perhaps that a new mask was introduced to represent the blinded Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* (though Seeberg 2002–3: 60–3 questions this idea). It seems that the hair on masks could be cut during a performance (*Aj.* 1171–9). A more striking effect is suggested for the title character in *Tyro*, whose hair is cut (fr. 659) and whose face is bruised (Pollux 4.141): this suggests that a completely different mask was used for this character, producing change from an initial pale complexion (fr. 648). This kind of effect will be exploited later, in Euripides’ *Helen*. A mask may have represented the decapitated head of Phineus’ second wife (fr. 707a), providing a precedent for what happens in Euripides’ *Bacchae*. Pollux (4.141) suggests that the title character’s mask in *Thamyras* may have been bisected, showing one black eye and one gray–blue eye, which would allow an on-stage blinding to occur (Calder 1959: 351 n. 2); but this is less certain.

Acting involved putting on external features – mask and costume – to create a character. Over the fifth century acting gained an increased sense of naturalism, which was accompanied by a freer musical structure – though this element remained heavily stylized, since clear vocal projection and strong musical ability were required of all performers. An anecdote about the actor Polus, set at the end of the fourth century BCE and recorded in the second century CE (Gell. *NA* 6.5), claims that he used the ashes of his own son when he acted the scene of Electra mourning her supposedly dead brother (*El.* 1113–70). This suggests that genuine human passions are being represented as part of the re-mounting of a classic play, an effect enhanced by audience recognition of the actor; Polus’ portrayal of Oedipus was also remembered (Epict. *Diss.* fr. 11). Tragedy could stir the spectators’ emotions (as Aristotle observes in *Poetics*) and create psychological engagement, but this was accomplished through stylized, non-natural delivery. Physical contact between performers is uncommon, and often points to meaningful transitions in the dramatic narrative (as with the transfers of the bow in *Philoctetes*).

The depiction of pain provides a touchstone, as the degree of stylization must simultaneously be such as to make it affective and consistent with the rest of the dramatic world presented. Both Heracles in *Trachiniae* and Philoctetes are wracked in agony and present their pain in lyric song, singing to the accompaniment of the double-reeded pipe played in pairs, the αὐλός (*aulos*). Sophocles gives Electra an original vocabulary for extra-metrical cries, as she struggles to articulate her emotions (Carson 1996); compare similar innovations in the representation of sounds in *Ichneutae* (fr. 314, ll. 131 and 176). Cicero condemns the depiction of Odysseus’ pain in *Odysseus Acanthoplex*, preferring Pacuvius’ more restrained Roman adaptation (Cic. *Tusc.* 2.50). Sophocles works as playwright and director to craft an emotionally charged moment of theater, and the use of gesture to represent emotions seems certain (Shisler 1945).

Characterization was consistent within a play, and scripts provide clues to specific costuming decisions. The costume of Philoctetes reflected his ten years spent marooned,

and it would not surprise us if he limped (Robinson 1969: 35–6). Though Aristophanes speaks of Euripides as the playwright who presented heroes in rags, Sophocles and Euripides were rivals for much of their careers, and *Philoctetes* might be thought to reflect Euripidean influence at line 409 (indeed, the *Vatican Gnomology* (Epicur. *Sent. Vat.*) 517 has Sophocles call Euripides “the whetstone [ἀκόνη] of my poems”). The costume of tragedy, inasmuch as generalizations can be made, reflected contemporary fashions: though the plays themselves were set in the time of myth, they were staged, as Shakespeare often is, in “modern dress.” Some iconography suggests that the default χιτών (*chiton*) could also have sleeves (unlike non-theatrical dress). Various overgarments could be worn, including the πέπλος (*peplos*), which could suggest femininity and luxury. Costumes are physical symbols that contribute to the information available to an audience: the poverty of Electra’s clothes, and the sense of foreignness in the traveling clothes that Orestes, Pylades, and the Pedagogue wear, clarify these characters’ respective relationship to the setting. Anecdotes suggest that Sophocles took particular care designing costumes (the anonymous *Life of Sophocles* 6, cites Satyrus (*FGrH* 3.161) for the design of a walking stick, and Ister (*FGrH* 334 F 36) for distinctive boots; see also Servius’ commentary on Virgil’s *Eclogue* 8, line 10). Sometimes specific details are offered by the text: after *Oedipus at Colonus* 313–14, it would be anticlimactic if Ismene were not wearing a broad-brimmed Thessalian sun hat when she appears, riding a horse (ll. 311–13) and being led by an attendant (ll. 333–4). Except in such circumstances, anything beyond generalizations about tragic costume is seldom possible, and the problem remains intractable (Green 2008: 169). Something marked the appearance of Achilles as a ghost in *Polyxena* (fr. 523), but what it was remains unknown.

A cluster of representations of Andromeda on Athenian vases in the 440s and 430s BCE, employing a similar nexus of iconography but not representing the exact same moments, suggests the depiction of a theatrical scene. The timing suggests that this scene might be from Sophocles’ *Andromeda* (Schauenburg 1967; Green 1991: 42–4, 1994: 19–23; there have been challenges to this identification, though). Andromeda is given pale skin (in contrast to her Ethiopian slaves), wears barbarian trousers, and is affixed to poles, arms outstretched. If this does represent Sophocles’ staging, it is a shocking scene, publicly exposing a female body in a revealing posture, to be consumed by the male gaze of on-stage characters and of the Athenian audience. Yet the wrongness of exposing a woman this way alerts the Athenian spectator to the artificiality of the moment, since the body is covered and the performer (if not the character) is male. In creating this spectacle, Sophocles’ direction combines costume, mask, metatheater, and assumptions about gender and ethnicity to stunning effect in an early play. A similar cluster of vases postdating 412 BCE and depicting different costumes points to different decisions in Euripides’ *Andromeda*.

The choices associated with costumes and masks reduce variables and can eliminate possibilities. Some readers have perceived significance in the doubling of Odysseus, the False Merchant, and Heracles in *Philoctetes*, suggesting that the audience is intended to see the False Merchant and Heracles as Odysseus in disguise (see Erradonea 1956). These possibilities are not mutually dependent, and, although each one is conceivable, neither is likely; while the matter may remain ambiguous for readers (permitting the associated postmodern polysemic interpretations that follow), no ambiguity would exist in the original performance. There are no parallels to a situation where this sort of role-playing exists within a dramatic world but remains implicit in the script. The mask of the False Merchant either is or is not identical with the mask of Odysseus: if it is, then,

despite the lack of explicit markers (*Ph.* 123–31 is insufficiently clear), this would be Odysseus returned in disguise. But the mask would confirm it, and the character's continuity of identity would be confirmed when Odysseus later returns (*pace* OKell 1999, and see Falkner 1998: 35–6 and Roisman 2001). The same is true of Heracles: if Odysseus is visible to the audience (but hiding from Philoctetes and Neoptolemus) and wearing the same mask, then and only then will the audience imagine that Heracles has not appeared. However, if the mask is changed (and there are further markers of Heracles, such as a lionskin and club), then a stealthy Odysseus remains unavailable to an audience interpreting the *mise-en-scène*. This is true regardless of where Heracles appears – although, if the actor appears on the theatrical crane, he must represent Heracles, since Odysseus, whatever his disguise, is unable to fly. Regardless of the exact staging decision made, in performance there would be no ambiguity from the directorial choice.

3 Properties, Extras, and Silences

The plays of Sophocles invest significant meaning into physical objects manipulated by characters. While it is customary for some degree of symbolism to attract to certain stage properties, Sophocles appears to have focalized attention on specific objects, which come to embody a play's major themes (Segal 1981: 113–36). The bow of Philoctetes offers the most integrated example: the audience is led to think that the bow is the object of Odysseus' quest (regardless of the precise wording of the oracle; see Robinson 1969: 45–51) – almost a sacred object (*Ph.* 654–61) – and it remains in almost constant view while Philoctetes is on stage. The visual instantiation is crucial: at least one modern production has used a rough-hewn object capable of supporting Philoctetes' weight to assist him as he moves; this visually reinforces his dependence on the bow for his livelihood. Blocking accords the bow a prominence supported by the script. One may imagine a similar prominence being given to Telegonus' spear in *Odysseus Acanthoplex*.

In *Electra*, the urn that supposedly holds the ashes of Orestes is cradled lovingly by Electra as she mourns (*El.* 1113–70). The use of this empty shell as a locus for the play's deception, which is intended to deceive Clytemnestra but also fools Electra as an innocent victim, places Electra's grief in a precarious state: the audience knows that Orestes is alive, and so the actor's emotional display is never perceived to be fully real. This paradox, reflecting the process of acting itself, invites associations with the characters, who themselves are empty in different ways (see Batchelder 1995 and Ringer 1998: 185–99). The anecdote about the actor Polus multiplies the curiosity, suggesting that acting came to value credible (naturalistic) representations of the extremes of grief despite masks and the vastness of the performance space, and it coordinates the (male) actor's emotions with those of the female character: “[t]he paradox of the anecdote is that Electra's grief is true (sincere) but false (groundless), while Polus' grief is false (performed) but true (sincere)” (Duncan 2005: 67 and see 66).

A variety of effects are possible. Ismene rides a horse (*OC* 311–13), and a horse-drawn chariot seems to be required in *Oenomaus* (fr. 475; see Dem. 18. 180; for animals on stage, see Arnott 1959 and Dingel 1971: 354). Sometimes too many properties diffuse the intended effect. In *Ajax*, the sword of Hector is surely primary (see ll. 654–65, 815–34, 905–7), but the audience is invited to make associations also with Tecmessa's veil (ll. 915–19; see Finglass 2009), with Ajax's whip (l. 110), and perhaps with his shield (ll. 574–6).

Segal's discussion of the robe (*peplos*) of Deianeira elaborates on many themes of the *Trachiniae*, stressing that the robe is "the physical link between their two worlds, the enclosed realm of the house and the wild places," with "the supposed love charms she has kept hidden all these years in the depths of the house": "the robe connects the interior darkness of the house and the destructive beast world..." (Segal 1981: 119). As this robe is a physical embodiment of enclosure, something hidden in depths and in the darkness of the interior, it is surely relevant to note (as Segal does not) that the audience is never shown the robe itself, but only the box that contains it. When given to Lichas, the robe remains a hidden, unseen object, which is not what its exterior presents. The property is never a potential item of costume, but it remains a shell that conceals an unimagined danger that exists within – like Iole perhaps, or even like Deianeira herself.

The use of full-size dummy bodies to represent corpses is crucial in Sophoclean dramaturgy and demonstrates an aggressive substitution, as an actor is replaced by a stage property. In both *Ajax* and *Electra*, the actor is replaced with a dummy, presumably with the character's mask affixed. We do not know when the substitution occurs in *Ajax*: following the character's suicide, the substitution must take place between lines 866 and 974, when the actor re-appears as Teucer. Perhaps the elaborate veiling of the body at lines 915–24 covers an on-stage substitution (Mills 1980), but other solutions are possible. The appearance of the shrouded corpse of Clytemnestra at *Electra* 1466 perpetuates a sense of indeterminacy. Aegisthus believes this is the corpse of Orestes; only when he pulls back the shroud at lines 1474–5 and sees the Clytemnestra mask does he re-perceive those around him and recognize the danger he now faces. Orestes' menacing questions (l. 1475) point to the instability of character identity within this play, and some in the audience will recall the doubled roles, as the Orestes actor asks about the identity of the substitute body wearing the Clytemnestra mask, which that actor has previously worn.

A different polyvalence is established through silent characters. Adult mute characters are costumed and masked so as to be indistinguishable from the characters of the speaking actors: only in this way can Cassandra and Pylades convey dramatic surprise when they speak in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (cf. Hippocrates, *Lex* I, where it is said that extras in tragedy "have the shape, and dress, and personal appearance of an actor, but are not actors"; see also Stanley-Porter 1983). When Iole appears at *Trachiniae* 225, there is no indication that she will not speak. Though Lichas quickly establishes a three-actor scene at line 229, his repeated entries into the stage building (in at l. 334; out at l. 393; in at l. 496; out at l. 598; and leaving along an εἴσοδος (*eisodos*, or side entrance) at l. 632) help create the feel of a shell game. The audience has no indication that the silent presence of Pylades throughout the long exchange between Orestes and Electra at *Electra* 1098–1325 might not be interrupted. Only the Pedagogue's arrival at line 1326 dispels this possibility. Both Pylades and Iole are a crucial part of the stage configuration (for which see Pfister 1988: 171–6), and their physical presence marks them as being as real as any other character within the dramatic world, even though in our texts they fade like ghosts into the background. Similarly, Ismene remains silent throughout *Oedipus at Colonos* 1099–555, even though "speech is expected" (Pickard-Cambridge 1988: 143; see also Edmunds 1996: 69–70 n. 85, with the resulting confusion of singular, dual, and plural verbs).

A powerful theatrical surprise is accomplished with Tecmessa in *Ajax*, when she returns with her (silent) child Eurysaces at 1168 (Ormand 1996). Both characters have been seen before, and an audience alert to doubling will be aware that Tecmessa was played earlier by the Odysseus actor. When they reappear, Teucer is alone with the chorus, and

Tecmessa's appearance (same mask and costume) is familiar. Immediately after the ἀγών ("structured debate") with Agamemnon (ll. 1226–315), there is a sudden and hurried entrance of Odysseus. Tecmessa has not spoken yet in this scene (though she has previously), and the appearance of a third actor is going to surprise some spectators, who saw Tecmessa as a role played by one of the speaking actors. Odysseus' sudden appearance forces the audience to re-configure its awareness of the actor/character duality (however detailed it was, and this likely varied). When Odysseus speaks at line 1318, it becomes clear that Tecmessa's silence is enforced by the theatrical design of the scene, and that she has been substituted. This uneasiness continues until the play's conclusion at line 1420.

Non-speaking extras can establish an initial tableau (Burian 1977), as perhaps happens in *Oedipus Tyrannus* in the scene introducing the citizens of Thebes, where extras blur into the larger crowd that comes to comprise the extra-dramatic Athenian audience. Nobles typically enter with a retinue, and this contributes to the stage picture, providing indications of status within the dramatic world (when Polyneices enters at *OC* 1249–51, the fact that he is alone deserves special comment). Emotional effects are created not just through speech: the audience receives cues to the appropriate emotional response to a given scene from the response to other characters by chorus, actors, and extras. During the Pedagogue's false messenger speech (unique in tragedy, where the structural form of the anonymous messenger's uninterrupted narrative is appropriated to convey false information to Clytemnestra: *El.* 680–763), on-stage audiences provide conflicting responses to the news. The chorus believes the news, commenting on the loss to the family (ll. 764–5). Clytemnestra's response begins ambiguously, and she surprises herself at the compassion she feels for the (reported) loss of her son (ll. 766–83). The sight of the final silent spectator, Electra, who has not said anything since her cries at lines 674 and 677, hardens Clytemnestra's resolve, as Electra plunges deeper into despair (ll. 783–98). The cumulative, conflicting emotional effect of the Pedagogue's incredible speech – which in turn will trigger multiple and conflicting audience responses since the spectators are aware that all the responses to the news are based upon a lie – depends on Sophocles' directorial manipulation of the complete resources of the *mise-en-scène*, and not solely upon the actor's delivery.

4 Chorus and Music

Music was crucial to the experience of Athenian tragedy, and central to this experience was the chorus. At any point where the play departed from the iambic trimeter (the predominant meter in tragedy, corresponding to ordinary speech), some musical accompaniment was expected. Lyric passages were sung in accompaniment to the *aulos*, a double-reeded double pipe played by an elaborately costumed professional musician who stood in the performance area (Wilson 1999). As with other aspects of dramatic performance, tradition credits Sophocles with innovations in this area, suggesting that he was responsible for increasing the number of chorus members from 12 to 15 (*Life* 4). This change occurred after the performance of *Oresteia* in 458 BCE and likely before c. 440 BCE (when *IG I³ 969* lists 14 choristers; the professional *koruphaïos*, who may also have been the *choregos*, is presumably to be added to this number). We know nothing of Sophocles' lost work *On the Chorus* (indeed, the name probably refers to theater generally), but its suggestive title demands that the directorial choices made concerning music and the chorus be considered.

This dovetails with three anecdotes concerning Sophocles as a performer in his own plays. Structural prominence is given to moments when actors sing extended lyrics. These could be solo songs, part of a larger musical passage, or exchanges with the chorus or another speaking character, in the form of a lyric duet. In *Thamyras* Sophocles apparently played the title role and accompanied himself on the lyre, singing epic hexameters (*Life* 5, Ath. 1, 20e, and fr. 242; Wilson 2002: 43). The cithara was not a standard tragic instrument, and its introduction to the stage was potentially novel: its invention is made the subject of Sophocles' satyr drama *Ichnentaë*. A second anecdote has Sophocles elegantly playing with a ball in the role of Nausicaa in *Nausicaa, or The Washing Women*: this story suggests there was a danced number in which the ball was used as a prop and passed between an actor and the chorus (*Life* 5, Ath. 1, 20e, etc.). A third anecdote suggests that Sophocles retired from the stage (presumably around the time of the institution of the actor's contest at the Dionysia, c. 449 BCE) on account of his small voice (*Life* 4). We are also told that Sophocles first introduced Phrygian melodies and dithyrambic style to his music (*Life* 23, citing Aristoxenus fr. 79 Wehrli) – a feature that most would associate with late Euripides. In all of these anecdotes, attention is given specifically to Sophocles' contributions in the area of music and choreography. He wrote with a directorial eye, conscious of his actors' specific talents (*Life* 6, citing Istros, *FGrH* 334 F 36). The importance of such stories resides not in whether or not they actually happened, but in the image of Sophocles (as playwright, actor, and director) that persisted throughout antiquity.

The central experience of Sophoclean theater was choral song. Throughout the fifth century there is a tendency for the role of the chorus to diminish when measured as a percentage of the total length of the play, but this quantitative criterion is not decisive, as it says nothing about the complexity of arrangement and style (Esposito 1996: 96–104 documents many innovations in Sophocles' late plays). While acting was becoming increasingly professional, the chorus at the Dionysia remained the preserve of citizen amateurs, and there were penalties for rule violation (as seen in Plutarch, *Phocion* 20; metics, too, could perform in Lenaia choruses according to a *scholion* to Aristophanes' *Plutus* 954). The chorus, singing and dancing in multiple roles over the course of a tetralogy, would end the day in the guise of satyrs, the hyper-masculine demi-humans that could embody male fantasies of appetitive excess (Hall 2006: 142–69). This final incarnation was almost defined by the *σικίννις* (*sikinnis*), an energetic leaping dance that characterized satyr drama (Ath. 14, 630b–c): the physical demands of acting as a chorister were significant.

The chorus presents a collective character, possessing a distinct identity within the dramatic world but responding to it alternately as an individual speaking on behalf of a group (the *koruphaïos*) and as a corporate unit. A song contributes to the audience's overall impression about the chorus' character (Gardiner 1987), but it also resonates backwards and forwards, integrating the song into its larger dramatic context (Burton 1980). Choral modes of expression combine words, music, and dance, adhering to rigorous metrical patterns that are unique for each song. Unique metrical form means unique melody and choreography, and all elements were under control of the *didaskalos*. Dance creates ritual associations for the audience with non-theatrical dancing, and the citizen chorus often embodying the role of an outsider (such as the maidens in *Electra* or *Trachiniae*) creates a tension that different spectators will respond to differently. Sophocles apparently presses this last aspect less than other playwrights: *Antigone*, *Oedipus*, and *Oedipus at Colonus* all grant the chorus the authority of old male citizens, *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* that of sympathetic soldiers.

The chorus also serves as a collective witness to events on stage. Choral language is often highly wrought, imagistic, and impressionistic, offering reflections on the past (as at *Tr.* 497–530), an enriched understanding of a play’s mythological or geographical texture (as at *OC* 668–719), passionate reflections on central themes of the play (as at *Ant.* 332–75 and *OT* 863–910), or something else again. Through song, the chorus provides crucial non-naturalistic emotional coloring, though Sophocles regularly uses musical passages to provide misleading emotional responses, which are countered by the events that follow: this technique regularly produces rich irony – as at *Tr.* 205–24, where the joyous celebration of the returning bridegroom Heracles is followed by the arrival of the silent Iole, whose marital state motivates much of the ensuing action. The nature of dance is poorly understood (Fitton 1973), but specific poses or gestures were likely employed, creating tableaux rather than continuous movement (Golder 1996; and see Wiles 1997: 63–132). At times, the chorus is broken into smaller units (like the two semichoruses at *Ajax* 866–90). The chorus was also masked, and the effect of 15 open faces pointed at the other performers provides the audience with crucial clues about where the director wants attention to be focused in the vast theater, replicating some of the functions of modern stage lighting.

5 Space and Scenery

All theater takes place on a stage, which for the Dionysia was the Theater of Dionysus, at the foot of the Athenian acropolis. Space defines the theatrical event: without the physical instantiation offered by bodies in movement before an audience, and without the mental frame that is somehow created through labeling this as a performance, the theatrical event is not possible. The tragic stage depicts an exterior location, often in front of a palace (of Mycenae in *Electra*; of Thebes in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*). This is by no means required, however, and the extant plays use the physical σκηνή (*skene*, the wooden one-storey stage building with one door built for the tragic competition) also to represent less stately buildings, including a guest-house in Trachis (*Trachiniae*), the tent of Ajax at Troy (*Ajax*), and a remote cave (*Philoctetes* and *Ichneutae*). In *Oedipus at Colonus* the *skene* represents an unusually specific location, which would be personally familiar to some spectators: the grove of the Eumenides in Sophocles’ home deme of Colonus. Unusually, no one apparently uses the *skene* during the play.

It is not clear to what extent these different locations are depicted to an audience. While some believe that painted panels were placed against the *skene* to stimulate audience imagination, this requires stagehands coming on stage during a play to change the panels when the location changes (as in *Ajax*, *Nauplius*, or in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*), in addition to effecting transitions between plays in a tetralogy. The absence of a choral song at *Ajax* 814/15 points instead to an instantaneous transition, making Wiles’ suggestion preferable: “the purpose of scene-painting was to create out of transient materials the illusion of a stone monument” (1997: 161; see also Green 1990: 283–4; Rehm 2002: 18 and 306 n. 104). Representation of a specific location is primarily accomplished through verbal description, often in the prologue (e.g. *Aj.* 3–4, *El.* 2–14, *OC* 14–25), with all plays performed against a common background. Simple mimetic effects remain possible (such as keeping the door open when the *skene* represents a cave or grove; some suggest the use of prop shrubs as stage dressing), but nothing requires more than a bare performance space. The tradition that Sophocles invented scene-painting

(Arist. *Po.* 1449^a15) points, then, to the first use of a painted *skene*, probably at the beginning of the poet's career in the 460s BCE: possibly Sophocles won first prize that year (and so was recorded in the διδασκαλία (*didaskalia*, "production records"), or he suggested the change to the archon in advance of the performance.

The performance space further relates both to the spectators, most of whom look down on the orchestra, and to its surroundings in the city of Athens. During the open-air daytime performances, spectators would always be aware of the geographical environment surrounding the theater, and this could provide a clear sense of continuity between the stage world and the world of the larger *polis*, when references are made, for example, to Asclepius (*Ph.* 1437–8) or Athena (*Aj.* 14–17) because of their nearby temples (Jouanna 2007: 206). *Oedipus at Colonus*, set within Attica, begins to blur this distinction between mimetic space (when the area represented is clearly "other") and environmental space. Natural phenomena, too, would necessarily impact the reception of a play; we do not know what happened to performances on days it rained.

The positioning of the audience around the orchestra concentrates the spectator's visual field on the θυμέλη (the center point of the orchestra), where a low altar to Dionysus may have existed (Poe 1989). For an actor, this center is the strongest place to stand, and we might imagine that at or near this location is where Heracles is placed when he is brought on stage at *Trachiniae* 964. Almost as powerful is the mouth of the *skene* door, to which audience attention is regularly directed in anticipation of character entries, and close to which Electra stands (*El.* 328–9, 516–18), creating a visual echo with Clytemnestra's command of the door in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Greek theater was not static, however, and actors used the entire performance area, including the whole orchestra (Ley and Evans 1985).

In addition to this mimetic space occupied by the actors, tragedy also evokes many off-stage spaces through narration (Issacharoff 1981 calls these spaces "diegetic"; see also Jouanna 2007: 255–69). This technique, too, is crucial to the experience of a performance, as the world gains richness through detail from the play's characters. Diegetic spaces can be exterior (imagined to be along either of the two *eisodoi*) or interior (imagined to be within whatever space the *skene* represents). Characters arrive from specific locations, creating the impression of geographical continuity between mimetic and diegetic space. Voices can be heard when characters remain unseen, either in anticipation of the subsequent entry (as at *Aj.* 333–43, 891–3, and *Tr.* 862) or at the moment of traumatic action (as at *El.* 1404–15).

As with scene-painting, it is words that reify diegetic space. Nowhere is this more palpable than with the so-called messenger speech, a showcase opportunity for an Athenian actor to describe terrible events, mediated through an eyewitness account, so there is always an emotional valence as characters react to the horrors described. These speeches can come from characters known to the audience (such as Hyllus at *Tr.* 749–812), or from new speakers, often designated in the manuscripts simply as ἄγγελος (*angelos*, "messenger"), as at *OC* 1586–1666. Events described may occur in an outdoor location (as in the previous examples, *Ant.* 249–77, 407–40, 1192–243, and *Tr.* 248–90), or in a location within the stage building (as at *Tr.* 899–946 and *OT* 1237–85). Sophocles manipulates audience expectations through this technique: in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, it seems likely that Oedipus' departing words at 1182–5 suggest he is about to kill himself; when the Messenger appears, he first relates Jocasta's death (the role is played by the Jocasta actor, who had left the stage at line 1072) before proceeding to the blinding of Oedipus.

Of all the speeches in Greek tragedy, none compares to the aggressive theatrical gesture found in Deianeira's speech at *Trachiniae* 672–722. This, too, is a messenger speech, describing the events when she cleaned up the house after anointing the *peplos* that has been sent to her husband with what she believed was a love potion (ll. 672–92). She had in fact applied a corrosive poison, and, as she describes the effects on the tuft of wool she had used to apply the ointment (ll. 693–704), the audience is required to perform an imaginative task unparalleled in ancient theater. Deianeira describes to the chorus an off-stage event in an imagined interior space, and this is followed by her coming to terms with the implications of these actions, as she recognizes that the act of trying to win her husband's love by magic will in fact kill him (ll. 705–22). As she reconstructs the errors that led to her choice, she anticipates with horror her direct agency in an event that is, paradoxically, still to come. No messenger in tragedy is so intimately connected to the events described. But the audience's emotional connection is not with the tuft of wool that smokes, blackens, and melts away: it is with Deianeira and the as yet unseen Heracles. As it hears Deianeira's words, the audience simultaneously thinks both of the room inside the building and of the off-stage location where Heracles presently is. Both diegetic spaces co-exist in the audience's imagination, and the displacement is intuitive and automatic. Sophocles further requires that the audience perceive the transferred location as primary, imagining what is irrevocably happening to Heracles, solely on the basis of the description of Deianeira's clean up. The tuft becomes a metaphor for Heracles' body, though the displacement is never explicit. As a palimpsestic speech act, Deianeira's speech expects an audience to subordinate the events described to a second event, which becomes horrifyingly and increasingly real as the scene progresses.

Finally, the director of a tragedy had available two devices for bringing on stage other locations. The ἐκκύκλημα (*ekukklema*) was a wheeled platform that could extend from the *skene* door to reveal an interior scene: as it was available from at least 458 BCE, Sophocles used it to present Ajax as he returns to sanity at *Ajax* 346, and possibly to present Eurycle's corpse at *Antigone* 1293 and Clytemnestra's at *Electra* 1466. The *ekukklema* warps space, turning the *skene* inside out, so that what it depicts is simultaneously hidden from view and in plain sight. It is a puzzling effect, which is introduced to the otherwise rigid representation of space in tragedy (possibly the *ekukklema* was also used to assist in the representation of Ajax's suicide at *Aj.* 815 and 891–3). The μηχανή (*mechane*) was a crane, available from the mid-420s BCE at the latest, which Sophocles could use to depict divinities – as in the lost *Nauplius* and, I believe, in *Philoctetes*. Possibly it was used for Athena in the opening scene of *Ajax*, though the roof of the *skene* is more likely.

As a man of the theater, Sophocles understood the theatrical importance of good performances, and as director he worked to craft them. When he won theatrical victories (which he often did), he was celebrated as *didaskalos*. Most directorial decisions cannot be recovered, and some theatrical moments despair of a practicable solution. Are Apollo and Artemis really standing on the *skene* roof, shooting actual arrows at Niobe's children in *Niobe* (fr. 441a)? Though they apparently shoot into the house (and so behind the *skene* building), some victims were apparently visible to the audience. This may suggest that the *ekukklema* revealed the interior scene. How was Ajax's suicide managed? The scholiast on *Ajax* 846, at least, was clear: we must assume that the actor falls on the sword, and he must be strong so as to represent Ajax adequately; specializing in this role later earned the actor Timotheus of Zacynthus the nickname "Slayer" (*Sphageus*). The suicide provides a startling moment of theater, and in the years after its initial presentation it may have admitted of various theatrical solutions. In the initial performance, though,

Sophocles *didaskalos* made a decision. Whatever happened, it was something that the poet controlled, tapping into the Athenian audience's imagination. Thinking about Sophocles in this way is crucial to understand the full measure of his artistic and creative accomplishment, which was characterized in antiquity as embodying the theatrical virtues of "good timing, sweetness, daring, and variety" (*Life* 20).

Guide to Further Reading

Pickard-Cambridge (1988) is the best starting point for most matters of Athenian stage production (the second edition dates to 1968; 1988 adds a short supplement). Davidson (2005) offers an overview with different emphases than are found here. Other important general statements include Dingel (1971), Taplin (1978), Rehm (1994), and Wiles (1997). Seeberg (2002–3) assesses the relationship of visual representations to the understanding of the plays. Foley (2003) provides a marvelous introduction to the tragic chorus. Several chapters of Easterling and Hall (2002) explore the experience of the classical actor. Seale (1982) provides a detailed play-by-play examination of "the visual theme" in Sophocles. Ringer (1998) examines metatheater in Sophocles generally, though Falkner (1993, 1995, and 1998) offers a richer foundation. Edmunds (1996: 1–83) integrates theoretical approaches from theater studies usefully in a detailed examination of *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Moretti (1999–2000) offers a solid grounding in the archaeological issues of the Theater of Dionysus in Athens, though Csapo (2007) and Goette (2007) argue that the audience for any single performance was much smaller than has been traditionally thought (c. 6,000–7,000 spectators). Hourmouziades (2004) asks a similar question to the one addressed here, reaching different conclusions; these matters have been studied since the 1840s at least (e.g. Hermann (1840)). Tyrrell (2006) provides a detailed examination about the ancient biographical tradition, which reveals much of what was thought to be true about Sophocles. My own understanding of the practical dimensions and of the amazing potential of Sophoclean stagecraft has been shaped by Taplin (1971 and 1977), Zeitlin (1980), Segal (1981: 113–36), Damen (1989), Green (1991), and Ormand (1996), among others. Little work has been done on how the texture of the verse impacts delivery and performance: an initial attempt to examine this is Marshall (2006). Green (1989, 1995, and 2008) offers foundational bibliographies for anyone working on ancient theater production.

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Poetic Speakers in Sophocles

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1 Introduction

Is the phrase “poetic speaker” meaningful in a chapter on drama? The expression is generally reserved for discussions of lyric poems, when authors attempt to distinguish the characters who are narrating the poems from the historical poets who wrote them. When discussing a work like T. S. Eliot’s *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, we say that Prufrock is the “poetic speaker” and we mean that he is not the same speaker as Eliot and probably does not know that he is dropping allusions to Ovid and Dante. He is fictive, while the poet is real. The poetic speaker, in his fictive role, is also less aware and authorial than the poet. The phrase “poetic speaker” thus demotes the speaker from an authoritative role. Sophocles’ tragedies do not have first-person voices that are privileged with the appearance of authorial identity; not even the choruses narrate the tales. When I use the phrase “poetic speaker” in this chapter, I do so not to indicate a separation between playwright and character (this distinction is obvious), but to draw attention to a different – non-authorial – authority that certain characters bear. This is the authority of a poet in fifth-century BCE Athens.¹

2 Poetic Identity

In Greek tragedy, a character’s lyricism implicitly evoked both suffering and authority – a fact that specifically derived from the classical Greek ideal of an archaic poet. Sophocles inflected his heroes’ voices with highly lyrical elements in order to grant them hints of this ideal, which I am calling “poetic identity.” A similar set of characteristics has also been labeled “lyric authority” (see von Hallberg 2008) or “vatic personality” (Johnson 1982: 59). There were cultural associations and expectations attached to the role of the archaic poet in Greece. Some of these were socially constructed and based in historical

reality. Poets were expected to spread the glory of kings and heroes, bring forgetfulness from troubles, teach people to be good citizens, and offer enjoyable experiences through the medium of sound and the expansive quality of imagination. Yet they also were themselves objects of the imaginative process, themselves portrayed and mythologized, and perhaps increasingly so, as the old forms of lyric poetry were challenged by new poets and romanticized by critics. Thus, the cultural associations of poets derived from their actual social role, and also from myth and folklore.

Poetry in the archaic period was touted as being of divine origin, in the form of a voice, gift, or lesson from Apollo, the Muses, or Athena. Poets were presented as divinely connected and at times possessed, just as prophets were thought to be (see Sperduti 1950 and Detienne 1999). As early as the fifth century BCE, poets were worshipped also in cults (Clay 2004). Actual poets did not hesitate to promote this sort of mythology. Hesiod cites an intense, personal interaction with the Muses as the very origin of his poetic identity in the *Theogony*, and Sappho portrays herself (*PMG* 1) as someone often in communication with her patron goddess Aphrodite, although more in the persona of lover than poet. Hesiod, again, and Bacchylides both present themselves as servants of the Muses (*Hes. Th.* 100; *B.* 5.13–14), and Pindar, one of the most deft self-mythologizers among poets, asks Apollo and the Muses to accept him as a “spokesman of the Pierides [Muses]” (Πιερίδων προφάταν, *Paeon* 6.6), while actually suggesting that his human audience accepts him as such (cf. Sperduti 1950: 233–7).

Yet these poets, whose powers of song were revered, were also portrayed in ancient Greece as circumstantially helpless, harassed, or otherwise beleaguered. Hesiod regularly claims to be bullied and impoverished. Sappho configures herself as victim of unrequited desire, while Anacreon depicts himself as not only undesired but also mocked. The life of Arion, a foundational poetic figure, is portrayed by Herodotus as under threat as soon as he is separated from his protecting patron, though he is at least able to use song to save his skin. As one scholar has argued, in ancient Greek (and other Indo-European) traditions, poets were viewed as powerless and victimized in ways that counterbalanced their power and proximity to the divine. Indeed, widespread legends about poets envisioned them as *pharmakoi*:

Typical legendary *pharmakos* pattern [was] [...] characterized by the bestness, the royalty, of the hero, his simultaneous worstness and encapsulation of worstness, the voluntary expulsion, and hero cult. (Compton 2006: 18)

Certain poets were reported to have suffered violent deaths: Alcaeus was supposedly killed in war, Sappho by suicide, Ibycus by bandits, Hesiod by vengeance, and Aeschylus by a falling tortoise (Lefkowitz 1981). In the classical period, a quality of elevation and authority, if also of debilitation or instability, was embodied in the remembered and re-imagined figure of the archaic poet. These very qualities abound in Sophocles’ heroes when they take on the language and role of poetic speakers.

3 Language of Sophocles

The language of Sophocles has long been a topic of inquiry, and scholars have tried in various ways to approach Sophocles’ linguistic acumen. The resulting studies are collections of insights into the grammar, syntax, diction, and use of meter found in

Sophocles' plays (e.g. Earp 1944; Long 1968; Campbell 1969b). More recently, scholars have noticed ways in which character affects language or, more precisely, how different vehicles of language have been used to create different characters. Several studies have suggested that the speech of women in tragedy might sound different from that of men (see especially McClure 1999 and Griffith 2001), that a slave's speech might sound different from a prince's (Hall 1999 and 2002), and that a member of a powerful establishment might use different grammatical constructions from those that a person who opposes the establishment would use (Schein 1998). It has also been noted that Sophocles' divine characters employ a different diction from that of his mortals (see e.g. Segal 1981: 337–40 and Pucci 1994: 34–6, on the semi-divine Heracles' use of *muthoi* in *Philoctetes*). All of these studies imply that, rather than there being one homogenous Sophoclean language, a number of Sophoclean languages are in play.

There is more to come in the study of characterization through voice in Sophocles. Attention must be paid, in particular, to the voice of the heroes in his tragedies. In the coming pages I will show that certain marked features of these heroes' language are reminiscent of the lyric poetry of the archaic and classical periods; these features include elements of sound-play, such as alliteration, assonance, and anaphora, and more complex poetic configurations, like apostrophe and personification. These lyrical markers are not only aesthetically powerful, they also influence our perception of Sophocles' heroes: they confer on them a poetic identity. The heroes' poetic identity is connected to the traditional identity of Greek choruses, yet the heroes are largely alienated from the choruses and communities of their own plays. There is a tension, then, in the plays between the communal nature inherent in choral lyrics and the isolation underscored by the heroes' use of a similarly lyrical voice.

This notion of poetic characterization implies that, although all Sophoclean language is poetry, some parts of it are more poeticized or lyrical than others. The question of what makes language "poetic" can be meaningfully posed by viewing the dramas of Sophocles in the context of meter and of the tradition of classical and archaic lyric poetry. In this chapter I briefly explore the role that meter plays in the expression of a poetic voice in tragedy and then I examine aspects of the poetic in several examples of lyric poetry. Finally, I come to Sophocles' use of this poetic quality in the characterization of his heroes.

4 Meter and New Music

Meter, of course, matters in a discussion of poetry and lyricism. This chapter is largely focused on features of poetry other than meter, but it is important also to take into account the significant metrical patterns that Sophocles uses to characterize his heroes. All of the Sophoclean passages that will be quoted in the coming pages are metrical shape-shifters. Thus, Heracles' entire scene in *Trachiniae* is a series of prosodic movements: first, he expresses himself in anapests and then breaks into a full lyrical ode – strophe and antistrophe – punctuated by five-line blocks of hexameters. His interlocutors, an old man and his son, are not truly interlocutors. Speaking only to each other and only in hexameters, they are caught up in Heracles' metrical pattern, but they resist the sympathetic dynamic of singing to his lyrics. After this long overture, Heracles shifts into iambic trimeter, the meter that was thought to approximate speech best. We will discuss lines of Heracles taken from the middle of a speech (*rhexis*), which he delivers primarily

in iambs until he feels a spasm coming on. At this point he makes two sudden changes in meter: first he slips into dochmiacs and then, briefly, he departs from meter entirely (l. 1081); several lines later, he pronounces two anapestic cola (ll. 1085–6), when turning abruptly to the gods. Heracles' final lines in his one scene are in anapests again, as he chants to his soul to keep quiet. Though the body of the man is destroyed, his voice is incorrigibly animated by verse.

Similarly, Electra enters singing in anapests, resorts frequently to lyrics and, in the scene we will examine, interrupts an iambic speech to cry out in anapests. Ajax spends the better part of a mournful scene singing in emotional lyrics while his chorus answers him in iambs, emphasizing the distance between them, with the hero cloaked and alienated by his lyrical isolation. Philoctetes sings in lyrics too, but to the chorus' accompaniment. He also pushes the boundaries of meter emphatically when he cries out in pain. In the passage from Philoctetes that we will look at below, the first several lines are anapestic (ll. 1186–7) and are followed by several lines of glyconics (a lyric meter), when Philoctetes sings to his foot (ll. 1188–9). Only when he turns to address the chorus does his appeal shift into a "stichic" (spoken) meter (dactylic tetrameter, l. 1190). These sorts of sharp metrical spikes with dramatic effect are frequent in the lines of Sophocles' heroes. For, while the individual voice of every Sophoclean hero is internally consistent in characterization, each one is headily variable in meter.

Other characters also leave their iambic bounds at times: in *Philoctetes* Neoptolemus uses hexameters and trochaic tetrameter; in *Trachiniae* Hyllus chants in hexameters, and later in anapests. Still, the sheer consistency of inconsistent meter among Sophoclean heroes is unmatched, and one might wonder whether an ancient audience would know the hero – in part – by his proclivity for sliding from spoken lines into song. Outside of Sophoclean tragedy such metrical malleability is more often the mark of a non-heroic, non-Greek, non-male, peripheral character; but in Sophocles' dramatic world the ability both to speak and to sing is itself a constitutive part of the heroic persona. In this way Sophocles' heroes, especially his Greek male heroes, are differentiated from their counterparts in Aeschylean and Euripidean tragedy, who rarely sing in lyrics (see Hall 1999: 112). Sophocles was, of course, not the only tragedian to make use of the poetic devices outlined above. All Athenian tragedy grew from the archaic poetic tradition and grappled in different ways with this heritage (see Herington 1985). The elements of lyricism discussed here appear throughout the tragic genre and are constantly being refined for new contexts. Nonetheless, Aeschylus and even Euripides, ever innovative with verse, do not make these elements as prominent in heroic characterization as Sophocles does.

5 The Lyricism of Lyric Poetry

Can one piece of verse be more poetic or lyrical than another? As we have seen, different meters transmit varying levels of poetic intensity, but meter is not the whole story. Melic poetry offers fine if fragmentary specimens of what was heard as poetic by ancient audiences. The marked qualities of lyricism can be found even in brief utterances (*pace* Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who seeks to raise metrical prose to the level of poetic verse at *Comp.* 26 – on which see Campbell 1982: 389). This notion of lyricism speaks to the nature of poetry that is primarily performed rather than read and experienced in the present rather than considered later. For such experiences, even short fragments of lyric

poetry are illuminating. In a fragment of Sappho, a speaker calls upon the evening and characterizes it as that which restores a mother to her child:

Ἔσπερε πάντα φέρων ὅσα φαίνολις ἐσκέδασ' Αὔωσ,
†φέρεις ὄν, φέρεις αἶγα, φέρεις ἄπυ† μάτερι παῖδα.

Evening, bringing everything back that shining Dawn scattered,
you bring the sheep, you bring the goat, you bring the child back to its mother. (*PLF* 104a)

This utterance sounds poetic for several reasons, only one of which is meter. (Despite the corruption in the second line, the meter is evidently dactylic hexameter.) One reason is simply the repetition, or anaphora, of φέρ- words: φέρων [...]/φέρεις [...] φέρεις [...] φέρεις. The alliterative force of the repeated labial “f” is amplified by the “p”s and “f”s found at the start in Ἔσπερε πάντα... φαίνολις and picked up again with ἄπυ μάτερι παῖδα. “Evening” is apostrophized, and thus personified within an animated tension of diurnal activity: at all levels of nature, the dawn breaks families apart, but the evening restores them. It is hypothesized (in part because of Catullus’ Latin adaptation of this passage) that this pair of lines was originally part of a longer epithalamium, a poem that commemorated a wedding. By this reading, these two lines would probably precede a lament that the bride will not return to her natal home or to her mother – indeed it is likely that the bride in question is the poetic speaker of the lines. If this is true, then another aspect of lyricism here is the investment of a bride’s departure from home with pathos – a pathos derived in part through its alienation from the experiences of the natural world. This reading is, of course, speculative. In any case, lyricism arises from the musicality of meter, but also from these other elements that make speech strange (or, according to Segal 1998: 52, “ceremonial”). Repetition, alliteration, metaphor, apostrophe, and personification make certain utterances distinct and deprive them of their pedestrian, prosaic quality.

Ancient Greek poems, however, did not merely involve the formulating of strange speech. Many archaic poems act as, or mimic, prayers, as when Anacreon (*PMG* 12) begs Eros for help with his beloved. Others do not fulfill the expectation that poetry involves a separation of poet from speaker. Pindar, for one, makes these distinctions difficult. For example, in one ode, Pindar’s speaker digresses from his narrative to a story of Heracles’ troubles with the gods, and then turns aside from his digression to scold his own mouth:

ἀπό μοι λόγον
τοῦτον, στόμα, ῥῖνον
ἐπεὶ τό γε λοιδορῆσαι θεούς
ἐχθρὰ σοφία, καὶ τὸ καυχᾶσθαι παρὰ καιρὸν
μανίαισιν ὑποκρέκει.
μὴ νῦν λαλάγει τὰ τοι-
αῦτ’ ἔα πόλεμον μάχαν τε πᾶσαν
χωρὶς ἀθανάτων.

Hurl this story
away from me, mouth,
since abusing the gods
is a hateful skill, and boasting at the wrong moment
is in harmony with madness.

Do not babble such
things. Leave war and all battle
apart from immortals. (O. 9.35–41, Teubner 1971)

Like Sappho's speaker, Pindar's speaker apostrophizes. But his apostrophe is not to an abstraction (youth) that the speaker hopes to detain. Rather, it is addressed towards the speaker's own mouth, oddly distancing the speaker from the corporeal instrument of his voice. Whereas Sappho's speaker depicts her addressee in almost elegiac terms, Pindar's barrages his with a series of prohibitive commands: *end the story, stop your prattling, leave it be*. These three commands surround two gnomic statements that are characteristic of Pindar: *to speak of the wrong thing (the gods in war) is bad; to boast at the wrong time is also bad*. The gnomic statements contain a paradoxically juxtaposing phrase, "hateful skill" (ἔχθρὰ σοφία), as well as a subtle metaphor that equates bad language (untimely boasting) and madness, and thus – literally and metaphorically – harmonizes them. Even the metaphor of harmony demonstrates the speaker's poet-like awareness of the lyricism of the lines, and this awareness redoubles their lyrical aura.

Both of the fragments quoted here dramatize moments of angst (sadness perhaps in one case, contrived alarm in the other), yet the poems from which these fragments come are likely to have been composed for happy occasions: a wedding in the first case and the celebration of an athletic victory in the second. This is hardly a surprising incongruity. Recognition of suffering, despair, fear, and vulnerability is one of the most conspicuous features of poetry, even in ostensibly happy poems and circumstances. Moments of hope and expressions of joy in poetry, as in life, often include the awareness, memory or anticipation of pain or loss. Poetry's approach to such subjects is often accompanied by the speech acts of apparently anxious poetic speakers. These speakers' tendency to demand, question, apostrophize, and pronounce can be interpreted as an attempt at control over language (and audience) just when control over life seems hard to obtain. Theories along these lines have been offered by Jonathan Culler (1981), Elaine Scarry (1985), and Glenn Most (1993: 558), who states: "Control of the materiality of language on the one hand can provide the (illusory) satisfaction of suggesting the possibility of our mastering chance and dominating its empire over our bodies." The devices of poetry that reveal the desire for such control, that deliberately prevent language from being a clear window onto a narrative, are meant to be felt, if not consciously noticed, by audiences. They signal both the speaker's attempt to gain control over language and the poet's awareness of the emotional function of form.

In Pindar's poem, the poet and the speaker seem to share the same apprehension (the consequences of singing the wrong kind of song about the gods), yet the poet has other concerns. For one thing, he may not be at all worried about the gods' listening in on his song (he may not believe that gods listen or that they exist), but may want his listeners to believe that gods are present and mindful of poetry. Poetry, the poet is perhaps implying, has the ear of the gods and thus makes things happen – good and bad things. Alternatively, he may want his listeners to know that he is skilled in the *topoi* of his genre, whereby one must assume the gods are listening. One quality, then (aside, as always, from meter), that makes these verses sound like poetry is the self-conscious awareness they communicate of the poetic act that is being performed. Poets, from Homer on, make awareness of their lyrical qualities a trope, and no poet does this more than Pindar. His speaker is a character, but one who is aware that he exists as a singer of song.

Our lines from Sappho are too fragmented to show clearly the identity of their poetic speaker. If we imagine the speaker (but not, of course, the performer) of the fragment (*PLF* 104a) to be an actual bride leaving her mother, then some of its lyricism will arise from its dramatic quality, that is, from the mimetic distance between the author who composed the lines and the speaker who is leaving her mother behind. In the absence of the original poetic context, this mimetic distance is communicated to readers by the mannered, metrical quality of the lines. In other words, because the words are in metrical lines and are inflected with alliteration, apostrophe, and personification, even an audience of readers knows that they are poetry and that the speaker is not necessarily speaking from the same perspective as the poet. Inasmuch as the speaker is distinguished from the poet, the audience also knows the speaker to be, for all intents and purposes, fictive. Inasmuch as the speaker is understood to be fictive, the audience is further assured that the lines are *poetic* – that is, pragmatically intended to be heard within the structure of a poetic entity and not, say, as part of a spontaneous conversation. (See Most 1993: 555, for an exploration of the pragmatics of spontaneous versus non-spontaneous conversation.) The poet presumably composed the lines with considerations of sound and sense in mind; the speaker merely expresses her emotions and thoughts, unwittingly doing so according to the dictates of lyric poetry. Tragic poetry generally functions in much the same way: the audience recognizes that the playwright makes poetic choices (such as switches between lyric and stichic meters) of which the characters are not aware. Indeed, it is a commonplace outside of postmodern literature that characters in a play remain unaware that they exist within the confines of a dramatic or poetic entity.

Tragic poetry, of course, portrays great anxiety and many other extreme emotions, which we have seen sparingly represented in the two fragments from Sappho and Pindar quoted above. The emotions shown in tragedy are by no means only painful; misjudged joy is well represented, and there are also occasional moments of unadulterated happiness, as in the “romantic” tragedies of Euripides. Still, it is likely that ancient audiences, like modern ones, associated tragedy with the depiction of suffering and loss, especially when a tragic character began to sing. Edith Hall notes that “the ancients seem to have believed that most tragic songs were fundamentally threnodic” (Hall 1999: 113 n. 85). We will see that, at these moments of tragic song, as in the fragments of Sappho and Pindar, metrical lyrics are accompanied by other lyrical elements that align sound and sense.

6 The Lyricism of Sophocles’ Heroes

Sophocles’ heroes are constant sufferers and are constantly desperate for control over their surroundings. Like the speakers of the archaic poems quoted here, these heroes use resources of lyric poetry to express their suffering and to influence intractable situations. With regard to poetic awareness, Sophocles’ heroes are more like our idea of Sappho’s speaker than like Pindar’s singer. They do not knowingly draw upon poetic tropes or switch from iambs to anapests for dramatic effect. They use marked features of lyricism only to express the extreme nature of their emotions or frustration with their circumstances. At the same time, Sophocles uses these lyrical features in the language of his heroes to express a sense of their poetic identity, to show in essence that his heroes’ expressions of desperation also communicate authority, and sometimes power, through poetic language. This poetic authority elevates the heroes’ status on the vertical axis of gods and men and suggests the heroes’ potential ability to exert actual control over their

circumstances – control that, in fact, the majority of Sophocles’ heroes do eventually manage to exert. I will look at several pointed instances of the heroes’ poetic language in *Trachiniae* and *Electra* and then turn to *Ajax* and finally to *Philoctetes* to explore the development of these heroes as poetic speakers at greater length.

Trachiniae

Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* finds its hero agonizing in particularly poeticized terms. Heracles enters the stage for the first time in a state of physical torment, due to the Hydra-derived poison that his wife smeared on his cloak. Personification constitutes a large part of Heracles’ poeticizing. In lines that shift among anapests, hexameters, and iambic trimeters, he portrays the pestilence as yet another foe on the attack:

- ἦ δ’ αὖ μῖαρά βρύκει (“but the polluted [disease] devours [me] again,” 987)
- ἦπταί μου, τοτοτοῖ, ἦδ’ αὐθ’ ἔρπει (“it has grasped me, ah ah ah, it creeps on me again,” 1010)
- τόδε μ’ αὖ λωβᾶται (“it mutilates me again,” 1031)
- πλευραῖσι γὰρ προσμαχθὲν ἐκ μὲν ἐσχατας βέβρωκε σάρκας (“sticking to my sides it has eaten from my deepest flesh,” 1054–5)
- ἄλλων τε μόχθων μυρίων ἐγευσάμην (“I have tasted thousands of other labors,” 1101)

The disease, then, consumes, seizes, crawls, tortures, and devours, acting in general the part of a monstrous enemy, another *you* posed against Heracles’ *I*. (Philoctetes performs similar personifications of disease. See Biggs 1966: 227.) Heracles, for his part, “tasted” labors much as his enemy (the poison) “devours” him: they complement each other. In effect, Heracles uses personification (or demonization?) to stage a heroic drama between the two sides of the dialectic he has inherited from his encomiastic literary history, placing the poison/enemy in a genealogy of prior and better enemies.

In the midst of this scene, Heracles calls out to the gods, who provide no answer or relief, and apostrophizes his own body parts as they are possessed by a spasm of pain:

ὤναξ Αἴδη, δέξαι μ’,
ὦ Διὸς ἀκτίς, παῖσον.
ἔνσεισον, ὤναξ, ἐγκατάσκηψον βέλος,
πάτερ, κεραυνοῦ. δαίνυται γὰρ αὖ πάλιν,
ἦνθηκεν, ἐξώρηκεν. ὦ χέρες χέρες,
ὦ νῶτα καὶ στέρν’, ὦ φίλοι βραχίονες.

O lord Hades, receive me,
O beam of Zeus, strike.
Shake down, lord, hurl your shaft of thunder,
father. For it feasts again,
it blossoms, it begins the assault. O hands, hands,
O back and chest, O arms of mine... (*Tr.* 1085–90)

Simply invoking gods when in distress hardly seems worthy of the label “lyricism.” Heracles’ invocations, however, gather an extravagance of lyrical qualities as he sings. After a single, simple appeal to Hades, his more complex request of Zeus develops into a tricolon of imperatives that grow ever more polysyllabic and complex in form: no prefix (παῖσον), one prefix (ἔνσεισον), two prefixes (ἐγκατάσκηψον). He follows these appeals

with another tricolon, this time to describe the activities of the personified “disease” (l. 1084): *it eats him, flowers, begins its attack*. This description is then capped with another set of apostrophes, this time to his body parts. Though he names four parts of his anatomy (as opposed to three), he structures this series too as a tricolon, built around the anaphora of ὦ. In the lines that follow the excerpt above, Heracles catalogs the heroic deeds of the body parts that he addresses, performing his own encomium to himself, while also dismembering his disintegrating body. (See Wohl 1998: 6, on “the decomposition of both his integrity as a subject and of his masculinity.”)

Heracles transforms his own body parts, which are objectified by agony, from the status of third-person objects to that of second-person addressees, hailed members of his discourse and subjects in their own verbal right. His hands, arms, and torso become heroes of their own will, intentions, and narratives (see Seale 1982: 205). In this sense, Heracles’ self-dismembering is also an act of self-multiplying. In arming his arms and each of his other parts with their own heroic persona, he is proliferating his Heraclean identity in as literal a way as is linguistically possible. As he is destroyed, so does he propagate. Thus, through apostrophe, personification, metaphor, and structuring devices, such as tricolon and anaphora, Heracles assumes a voice empowered by poetic authority at a moment of desperate loss of control. Such authority is soon supported by his reportage of oracular pronouncements, by his assured laying of enigmatic commands upon his son, and by intimations throughout the play of his coming apotheosis (see Roberts 1988).

Electra

Electra too uses lyrically marked language at an instance of great despair. At the moment in question, she is wracked by grief over the (falsely reported) death of her brother Orestes. Through the power of her lamentation, she gains more than just authority as a speaker of poetry. The force of her poetic expression is such that she drives Orestes to reveal the truth – that he is alive and present. The following lines are from close to the end of her unusually efficacious lament:

ὦ δέμας οἰκτρόν. φεῦ φεῦ.
 ὦ δεινοτάτας, οἴμοι μοι,
 πεμφθεις κελεύθους, φίλταθ', ὡς μ' ἀπώλεσας
 ἀπώλεσας δῆτ', ὦ κασίγνητον κάρα.
 τοιγάρ σὺ δέξαι μ' ἐς τὸ σὸν τόδε στέγος,
 τὴν μηδὲν ἐς τὸ μηδέν, ὡς σὺν σοι κάτω
 ναίω τὸ λοιπόν.

O pitiable body. Alas, alas
 O sent on most fearful roads, ah ah,
 most beloved, how you have undone me.
 You have undone me indeed, o brother of mine.
 Therefore, take me to that house of yours,
 nothing to nothing, so that with you below
 I may live henceforth. (*El.* 1161–7)

Electra dips into anapests when she voices her most impassioned apostrophes. These apostrophes are not addressed directly to her dead brother, but to his body, which is supposedly represented by his ashes, as a metonymic substitute. Any apostrophe from Electra

directed toward her brother would express her pain over his apparent absence and death, but these apostrophes most forcefully instantiate the physical reality of distance between her brother and herself: first, he is just a body (much like the Homeric corpses that have been evacuated by souls), then he is separated from her by roads she cannot travel.

As if to repudiate the distance she has interjected, Electra next apostrophizes Orestes directly, twice, in deeply affectionate terms (φιλάθ', ὦ κασίγνητον κάρα). Rather than acknowledging her loss, as laments often do, she lends the supposedly dead Orestes subjecthood and agency by proclaiming that he has undone her and, further, that he had best receive her into his “house” beneath the earth, thus again closing up the distance between them. In this final twist of lament she configures herself as the object of Orestes’ actions, the victim of his deeds. In actuality, however, the reverse is true. Through the potent tropes of lamentation, Electra has inadvertently overwhelmed the living, on-stage Orestes (see the chapter of Dué in this volume). She has undone his composure and unraveled his elaborate plans. Ultimately, rather than being received by him into the house of the dead, she will dispatch him into their home and direct his blows against their mother.

Electra, then, uses devices of lament specifically and lyric poetry in general in a lamentation that is largely spoken (that is, in iambic trimeter): her lament is filled with alliteration (ὦ κασίγνητον κάρα, σὺ δέξαι μ’ ἐς τὸ σὸν τόδε στέγος,/[...] ὡς σὺν σοί) and repetitions that are aurally as well as emotionally potent (ὦ δ [...] / ὦ δ [...], φεῦ φεῦ, οἴμοι μοι, ἀπώλεσας-/ ἀπώλεσας, τὴν μηδὲν ἐς τὸ μηδέν). She apostrophizes in a skillful series that emphasizes and then eradicates distance, while also using simple metaphors of space – “roads,” “house,” “below” (with its implied “above”) – to connote, and then eliminate, the physical reality of remoteness. These features are more familiar from Sappho and Simonides than from tragic iambic lines, but they are in fact equally at home in the speech and song of Sophocles’ heroes.

Ajax

Ajax is an especially rich case. The hero Ajax has already been singing from off stage by the time he makes his second entrance. His song is elevated to a fever-pitch of dochmiacs (for the “definite emotional connotation” of dochmiacs, see Dale 1948: 102–8) and is unstoppably invocatory. Ajax addresses those present and absent starting with himself – twice – then his son, his half-brother Teucer, his choral sailors – twice – himself again, and then Odysseus (ll. 333–80). He then raises the register of his addresses further, with an apostrophe to Zeus, and, finally, at his highest pitch of angst, he appeals to darkness with impassioned addresses and imperatives:

ὦ,
 σκότος, ἐμὸν φάος,
 ἔρεβος ὦ φαεινότετον, ὡς ἐμοί,
 ἔλυσθ' ἔλυσθ' μ' οἰκήτορα,
 ἔλυσθέ μ'.

O
 darkness, my light,
 O nether darkness most bright (at least to me)
 take me, take me to dwell in you,
 take me. (*Aj.* 394–8)

Ajax' song of grief is both wildly emotive and poetically controlled, moving systematically from presence to absence, from concrete proximity to the amorphous and all-pervading, from a Jovian sense of justice to the despair of darkness. Here, in the visual terms that are rampant throughout the play, he sings the collapse of the elemental oppositions that have defined his life. Ajax' voice, in other words, reveals the workings of a fine and careful lyricist, though no one would imagine he notices his voice to have attained this level of lyricism, let alone that he strives to create such elevated language.

Ajax' cry to "darkness, my light" (cf. *OC* 1389–90) is made even more dramatically effective and skillfully allusive by the degree to which it both echoes and breaks from the linguistic identity of Homeric Ajax (see Stanford 1978: 192). That Ajax, in the midst of a misted-over battle, asks Zeus for the privilege to die "in the light":

Ζεῦ πάτερ, ἀλλὰ σὺ ῥῦσαι ὑπ' ἠέρος νίης Ἀχαιῶν,
ποίησαν δ' αἴθρη, δὸς δ' ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδέσθαι·
ἐν δὲ φάει καὶ ὄλεσσον, ἐπεὶ νύ τοι εὐαδεν οὕτως.

Father Zeus, at least deliver the sons of the Achaeans from the gloom,
and make clear the air, and give it to our eyes to see.
In the light destroy us, since to do thus pleases you. (*Il.* 17.645–7)

The Ajax of the *Iliad* feels a pointed and conventional preference for light at what he expects to be his final living moment. At another desperate instance of battle, Homer's Ajax urges on his troops with these inscrutable words: τῷ ἐν χερσὶ φῶς, οὐ μιλίχη πολέμοιο (*Il.* 15.741) – *the light is in [the work of] hands, not the gentleness of war*. Sophocles' Ajax takes from his Homeric predecessor a fondness for ironically grim juxtapositions, like "in the light destroy us" (ἐν δὲ φάει καὶ ὄλεσσον) and the "gentleness of war" (μιλίχη πολέμοιο), but he is otherwise cut from a different cloth. For Homer's Ajax begs for light in literal terms, seeing it as a positive and attainable goal. His prayer is directed to Zeus and granted immediately after by the god. Sophocles' Ajax seeks darkness, calling it light, but does not actually *request* it. He calls to it, not for it, and, although he is essentially asking for the darkness of oblivion or perhaps death, no one would expect this oblivion actually to grant him anything. His words, unlike the words of the Homeric Ajax, are strictly a poetic gesture – an apostrophe and lyrical marker, not a prayer. Calling darkness "my light" is yet one step closer to a lyric voice and one step further from epic prayer.

Ajax' assumption of a lyric voice lends his tone some authority, but whether it gives him control over his dramatic world is another question. By some readings, he fails at the discourses that are expected of him, just as he cannot maintain his position as Greek general in the political world of the Atreidae and Odysseus. The final word of the play, however, is not engaged with this sense of failure. Rather, the final lines enact his honored burial, which perhaps points to the cult worship that Ajax actually received (see Burian 1972; Easterling 1993; Henrichs 1993). This burial is an acknowledgment of Ajax' position and authority, already telegraphed to the audience by the elevated level of his poeticized discourse.

Philoctetes

Philoctetes frequently draws on the resources of lyricism without ever literally stepping into the role of "poet." His ability to sound like a poet is a source of strength in the face

of his own weakness, shame, and suffering. In great despair, he apostrophizes the “winged wild beasts” (ὦ πταναὶ θήραι, *Ph.* 1146) that were once his prey and then his infected foot, all in lyrics:

αἰαῖ αἰαῖ,
δαίμων δαίμων· ἀπόλωλ' ὁ τάλας·
ὦ πούς, πούς, τί σ' ἔτ' ἐν βίῳ
τεύξω τῷ μετόπιν, τάλας;
ὦ ξένοι, ἔλθετ' ἐπήλυδες αὖθις.

Aiai, aiai,
god, god. I am destroyed, wretched.
Foot, foot, in the life still left to live
what will I do with you, I wretched?
Friends, strangers, come back again. (*Ph.* 1186–90)

Philoctetes echoes the speakers of both Sappho's and Pindar's poems in calling on the elements of his world that are slipping from his scanty sphere of influence – his prey into predators, his foot into pain. He begins in inarticulate agony, with reverberating cries (αἰαῖ αἰαῖ), which are followed by exclamations to the gods that assonantly echo his cries (δαίμων δαίμων), as if, propelled by pain, he is progressing from pure sound into linguistic sense.

Philoctetes' third double cry is an apostrophe to his foot (ὦ πούς, πούς). Like Pindar's speaker, Philoctetes defamiliarizes and distances a part of his own body; but, in doing so, he expresses a more severe sense of alienation from his corporeality. The apostrophe of Pindar's speaker to his mouth is part of a playful suggestion of his loss of control. Philoctetes' loss of control is the result of terrible suffering that imposes a true emotional distance between himself and an errant part of his own body. His apostrophe to his foot is flanked by another use of repetition (τάλας [...] τάλας), which literally emphasizes his misery. He next asks a rhetorical question, building a relationship between himself and the object of his apostrophe. In this way, like Electra, he expresses both alienation and the desire that this alienation be eradicated. Philoctetes then draws back from the depths of lyricism. In turning to the people around him (ὦ ξένοι), he forces his utterance to perform a communicative function that, while still poetical in metrical terms, is not poeticized to the same degree as his repetitive, assonant, apostrophic, and rhetorically questioning lines. Philoctetes, like Sophocles' other heroes, employs elements of a lyric voice frequently, but not constantly. These heroes are not poets, but they are poetically endowed, particularly at desperate moments that remove them from the circle of their communities.

Philoctetes' capability as a poetic speaker is especially apparent and pertinent at the end of the play, and is due in part to Heracles' epiphany, which provokes a change in Philoctetes' apostrophizing mode: it removes Philoctetes from the mode of lamenter and establishes him in the stance of invoker. This new poetic stance is demonstrated in the ways in which Philoctetes' use of echo imagery in his farewell speech differs from the chorus' use of the same imagery earlier in the play. The idea of echoes, as the chorus has formulated it, serves to stress just how pervasive the lack of response in Philoctetes' life has been (see Segal 1995: 113). Their conjecture that “only an echo responded to his cries” is their way of saying “no one at all responded to his cries.” But at the end of the play Philoctetes uses the same imagery within a speech that reconfigures Lemnos and

everything on it as an island of protective spirits. (On the transformation of the island, see Schein 2005: 44 and Segal 1981: 323–4.) This Lemnos, newly understood, radiates responsiveness and even companionship. Thus, Philoctetes now sees, and makes the audience see, his cave more cozily, as a “house” (μέλαθρον, l. 1453), and one that “kept watch with me” (ξύμφρουρον ἔμοι, l. 1453). Beyond this, hitherto unmentioned Nymphs appear to have been Philoctetes’ close neighbors all along (l. 1454). Within this new context, Philoctetes evokes the notion of echoes not to deplore a lack of company, but to affirm a presence, one called into being (as per the nature of echoes) by his own voice:

πολλὰ δὲ φωνῆς τῆς ἡμετέρας
Ἑρμαῖον ὄρος παρέπεμψεν ἔμοι
στόνον ἀντίτυπον χειμαζομένῳ.

Often of our voice
the mountain of Hermes sent
an echoing sigh to me, tempest-tossed. (*Pb.* 1458–60)

Philoctetes mentions these sounds and echoes in a tone of sorrow at having to leave them behind and thus connotes the positive quality of their company. The apparent lyricism of the lines is magnified by actual aural echoes within them: χαῖρ’, ὦ μέλαθρον ξύμφρουρον ἔμοι/ [...] λείπομεν ὑμᾶς, λείπομεν ἤδη/ [...] χαῖρ’, ὦ Λήμνου πέδον ἀμφιάλον (ll. 1453, 1462, 1464): “Hail, house, which kept watch with me [...] we are leaving you, we are leaving now [...] hail sea-girt plain of Lemnos.” These echoes in the depiction of echoes lend a chant-like, religious reverberation to Philoctetes’ farewell and draw attention to the potential of poetic speech, particularly in a dramatic context, to (re)construct one’s surroundings. At such moments, the power of poetry recalls the supposed effects of magic: “[m]agical words might be taken to suggest the possibility of a perfect language in which phonic echoes would mirror metaphysical correspondences” (Greene 1993: 502; see also Wagener 1931: 91). Such is the authority conferred by Philoctetes’ incantatory voice. In causing the world to echo or answer him, Philoctetes animates his surroundings (see Vidal-Naquet 1988: 175).

Philoctetes’ voice is endowed with still another poetic mode, which is also signaled by his apostrophizing – hymnal closure. For Philoctetes’ closing anapests, which he begins with the announcement that he will “call” to the land (φέρε νυν στείχων χώραν καλέσω, l. 1452: “Come now, leaving I will call upon the land”), are organized by invocatory *chaire*, as quoted above (1453, 1464). Apostrophes as a form of farewell, used with the imperative *chaire/chairete*, are generic seals of the *Homeric Hymns*: they close 27 out of 33 of them. As Ann Bergren (1982: 87), writes, “the closing apostrophe makes the hymn the poet’s own speech.” Philoctetes’ poetic status, having been validated by the appearance of Heracles, is thus confirmed by the incantatory, transformative, and hymnal properties of his voice at the end of the play. Its final effect is to shift the audience’s perception of the world he has inhabited and to demonstrate his power to control this world.

I have argued here that Sophocles imports the poetical gestures of archaic poets into the speech of his heroes in order to signal to his audience that these protagonists communicate in a different register from that used by other characters. The heroes, despite their apparent weakness, manage some fairly miraculous successes: Philoctetes earns the attention of Heracles and will be rewarded with health and victory; Electra carries out

her murderous plan to her satisfaction, if not to that of her many critics; Ajax receives honor, which is what he holds in highest regard. Heracles and Oedipus both gain a privileged – indeed prophetic – understanding of gods and men, and the later Oedipus at Colonus undergoes some manner of apotheosis. The high lyricism of these protagonists' language seems to place them fittingly on elevated moral ground and, in some cases, into proximity with the divine. A reading that is sensitive to the nuance of meter and other lyrical qualities shows how the elements of poetry and song contribute to the paradoxically powerful identity of Sophocles' heroes.

Guide to Further Reading

Lewis Campbell (1969b) raises many key interpretative questions on Sophocles' language in his landmark essay. A. A. Long (1968) explores the particular significance of Sophocles' language as it relates to abstract thought, and Herington (1985) significantly links tragedy to the archaic poetic tradition. Budelmann (2000) shows how Sophocles' language and style work to engage audiences by withholding complete knowledge from them.

On specifically poetic registers in Sophocles, a recent essay by Richard Buxton (2006) develops the notion of “semantic landscapes” to discuss varying linguistic registers in Sophoclean tragedy; and, in the same volume, André Lardinois (2006) examines the gnomic language in Ajax' “deception” speech and comments on “not only its prophetic character but also its extraordinary lyric quality and the broad vistas it paints” (223), leaving room for further speculation in this area. On music in Sophocles, see Scott (1996) and Stehle (2004), both of whom focus on the chorus.

Note

- 1 Translations are mine. The text of Sophocles is taken from Pearson (1971), whose readings I tend to prefer to those of the more recent Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990b). Sources of other Greek texts are noted throughout.

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Sophocles' Choruses

Sheila Murnaghan

1 Sharing in the Action

Among the qualities for which Aristotle admired Sophocles above the other tragedians was his particular way of combining the chorus and the individual actors.

The chorus too must be regarded as one of the actors. It must be part of the whole and share in the action, not as in Euripides but as in Sophocles. In the others the choral odes have no more to do with the plot than with any other tragedy. (Arist. *Po.* 18, 1456^a25–9)

Aristotle's term for the proper coordination of these two types of player is *sunagonizesthai*, "share in the action." With its reference to the *agon* (tragic competition), the term suggests the equal contribution that the actors and the chorus might make to an impressive, possibly victorious, performance. But Aristotle's stress on the chorus' equivalence to an actor also implies a further shared responsibility within the fiction of the plot: that of facing together the challenges of tragic circumstances.

The innovation of giving the chorus an identity within the mythic plot was a defining feature of tragedy and contributed, along with the presence of actors impersonating individual characters, to tragedy's pioneering mode of story-telling. Deciding on the chorus' identity was one way in which a playwright exercised his freedom in re-telling a familiar myth. The fictionalized chorus introduced a collective character into every tragic plot; but the chorus also retained features of its non-fictional identity in the non-dramatic choral lyric that was one of tragedy's roots: its role as the narrator of traditional myths and as the voice of communal wisdom, its self-consciousness about its own status as a group of performers, and its vivid performance style combining song and dance. The chorus was thus a flexible, variable medium, offering a range of perspectives and degrees of involvement in the action, which each playwright deployed in different ways.

True to the outward moderation for which he has often been prized, Sophocles did not go so far as to make choruses protagonists in his plots, as Aeschylus did in such plays as *Suppliants* and *Eumenides*; nor did he give his choruses songs that were not closely connected to the action, as happened increasingly over the course of tragedy's evolution and as was evidently common by the time Aristotle was writing, in the late fourth century BCE. But, within these broad limits, Sophocles used the chorus with great versatility, assigning it multiple forms of connection to the main characters – as concerned observers, anxious dependants, sympathetic friends, or complicit allies – and taking advantage of the different types of choral participation built into tragic form: conversational exchanges in iambic trimeter, the usual meter of dialogue, probably spoken by the chorus leader (*koruphaïos*) on behalf of the group; discrete odes (*stasima*), in which the chorus detaches itself formally from the action to sing in lyric meters while also dancing; and lyric dialogues, in which the characters interact with choruses in the heightened register of song. Portraying various types of ordinary people, Sophocles' choruses provide the contexts in which the fierce distinction of his famously individualistic heroes can be understood and evaluated. They share in the action with the main characters to dramatize the symbioses of leaders and followers, mourners and consolers, decisive actors and concerned advisors, acute sufferers and troubled onlookers trying to comprehend human affliction.

Sophocles' seven extant plays indicate the spectrum of tragic choral identities, as well as Sophocles' particular preferences. He was evidently the only one of the three major tragedians to favor male over female choruses, and this can probably be correlated with his greater use of myths from the Trojan War cycle, in which military leaders operate in relation to troops of followers (Foley 2003). Sophocles' surviving Trojan War plays provide two of the three choruses of men of military age in extant tragedy: the Salaminian sailors of the *Ajax*, who must contend with their leader's disgrace and suicide; and Neoptolemus' crew in the *Philoctetes*, who accompany him to Lemnos and join in his efforts to bring Philoctetes and his bow back to Troy. The three Theban plays have choruses of citizen elders, interested confederates of the city's leader, who register the civic implications of the action: elders of Thebes led by Creon in the *Antigone* and by Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Athenian subjects of Theseus in *Oedipus at Colonus*. The two remaining plays have female choruses who are in close sympathy with female protagonists. In the *Trachiniae*, the young women of Trachis are Deianeira's confidantes as she waits anxiously for Heracles' return, grapples with the news that he has brought his new beloved home with him, and pursues her misbegotten plan of winning him back. In *Electra*, a group of Mycenaean women stand by Electra with loyal concern, urging her to move beyond perpetual mourning, but also supporting her craving for vengeance.

As this survey shows, Sophoclean choruses usually have a close connection to one of the protagonists; as participants in the plot, they are motivated by these connections rather than by independent agendas of their own. In some cases they are partisans, who urge the characters on to a particular course of action. This is most evident with the sailors of the *Philoctetes*, who join Neoptolemus in his designs on Philoctetes, urging him at one point to take the bow and run while Philoctetes is sleeping (ll. 834–8). In the *Ajax*, after Ajax has died, the chorus of his sailors directs his brother Teucer to deal quickly with his body as the hostile chief Menelaus approaches (ll. 1040–3). In scenes of political conflict, choruses sometimes try to make peace and save their superiors from rash actions. When Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* wants to kill Creon, whom he suspects

of plotting against him, the chorus joins Jocasta in pleading for him, asserting that Creon's death would only add to the city's troubles; Oedipus relents, but only for their sake (ll. 660–72). More subtly, when Creon in the *Antigone* declares that the arguments of his son Haemon will not save “those girls,” meaning Antigone and her sister Ismene, the chorus asks: “So you intend to kill both of them?” and Creon treats their question as a recommendation: “Not the one who didn't take part. You make a good point” (ll. 769–71). But Sophoclean choruses serve most tellingly as “a part of the whole” by being acted upon rather than acting, revealing the impact of self-willed individuals, especially military or political leaders, on the groups of people who surround them.

Sophocles uses the chorus to explore the effects of heroic action on ordinary people both in military settings, especially in the *Ajax*, and in civic settings, especially in the two Oedipus plays. In the *Ajax*, which looks back to the *Iliad*, he foregrounds an issue that is present but somewhat muted in the Homeric epics: the toll that heroic self-assertion takes on the vulnerable family members and ordinary followers whom the hero is supposed to protect. In relation to the family, this is achieved through an exchange between Ajax and Tecmessa, modeled on a similar exchange between Hector and Andromache in *Iliad* 6, in which Tecmessa vainly urges Ajax to put his responsibilities to her and to his child ahead of the suicide that will preserve his honor. In relation to the hero's loyal troops, this is accomplished through the chorus, which offers a collective voice that is rarely heard in the Homeric epics: there the large numbers of followers who are lost in the course of Achilles' pursuit of battlefield glory and of Odysseus' homecoming are not the focus of the narrative. The tragic chorus provides a formal means for including that collective voice, which carries a greater weight in the fifth-century democratic context – a context that is addressed obliquely through the play's fictional Mycenaean setting.

We hear the concerns of dependants when the chorus of the *Ajax* enters the scene, searching for their leader and alarmed by rumors of his madness.

Son of Telamon, lord of the rock-hard coast
of sea-swept Salamis,
when you do well I am happy.
But when a blow from Zeus or a powerful
slur from the Greeks hits you,
I am uneasy and full of fear
like the eye of a fluttering dove. (ll. 134–40)

As their song continues, the chorus members articulate, not just their own dependence, but a vision of interdependence between great figures like Ajax and ordinary men like themselves.

Small men without the great
make a shaky defense tower.
But with the great a humble man is best able
to stand tall – and a great man with the humble. (ll. 158–61)

The presence of the chorus makes it impossible to forget that Ajax's decision to kill himself, however courageous, however essential to his integrity, is also a betrayal of this mutual dependence. As his suicide looms, seems to recede, and becomes recognized fact, the chorus alerts us to what Ajax's action means for others. When they think Ajax has

reconsidered, they are overcome with joyful dancing. When Tecmessa calls out to them that she has found Ajax's bloody corpse, they cry:

There goes my homecoming!
Oh you have killed me,
your own shipmate, miserable lord [...]. (ll. 900–3)

Here tragedy's formal configuration of actor and chorus highlights the politics of heroic status, revealing the danger to the larger community of outsize greatness as well as its benefits. As the play continues past the hero's death, the chorus members' role and prospects shift along with the meaning of Ajax's heroism, and they prove, as all choruses do, to be survivors. But the collateral damage of the hero's grand gesture has been made clear – its devastating effect on the steadfast men whom he brought to Troy and has abandoned there.

In the peacetime setting of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the chorus tracks the meaning of Oedipus' self-discovery and self-confrontation for the city of Thebes. The revelation of Oedipus' identity in familial terms, the correct identification of his father and mother, brings a shift of his status in the community – from ascendant ruler, who has saved the city and taken power by solving the riddle of the Sphinx, to battered scapegoat, who will save the city again by being exposed and repudiated. The chorus represents the larger Theban community as it gradually recognizes and enacts this change of status, while Oedipus himself becomes more and more preoccupied with his own situation (Budelmann 2000: 206–31). The chorus members enter with an anxious prayer for Thebes (*OT* 151–215), foregrounding their paramount concern for the city, but they also maintain a stubborn loyalty to Oedipus, which they strain to reconcile with the mounting evidence that he is the murderer whose polluting presence damages the community.

After the scene in which Teiresias bluntly announces to Oedipus that he is the murderer, the chorus sings a song that echoes Oedipus' own refusal to believe it. They puzzle over the murderer's identity, envisioning him as an unknown wanderer who “roams through the wild/woods and caves/like a mountain bull,/fleeing the oracles of the earth's center/in lonely misery” (ll. 477–81); they struggle to think of some ancient grudge that could motivate a false accusation against Oedipus; and they outline the bonds of gratitude that underlie their loyalty to Oedipus even in the face of their respect for Teiresias:

I would never,
until I saw sure proof,
agree with those who fault him.
For once the winged maiden
appeared against him
and he showed his wits
in that test, and his worth to the city. (ll. 504–10)

Later, when the chorus has no choice but to acknowledge that sure proof, they articulate the transformation of their connection with Oedipus, from identification and unshakable support to a form of pity in which sympathy joins with revulsion. When Oedipus leaves the stage in full knowledge of his circumstances, the chorus remains behind, to make their own sense of him (ll. 1186–222). They classify Oedipus as a *paradeigma*, an example of the rule that human prosperity is fleeting and illusory, and they conclude by evoking both their new and their old relations with Oedipus.

Oh child of Laius,
 how, how I wish
 I had never seen you.
 I grieve as if giving
 voice to a song of lament.
 If the truth be told, I caught the breath of life from you
 and you have closed my eyes in death. (ll. 1216–22)

Comparing their association with Oedipus to an entire lifespan, the chorus defines a bond that is unbroken but sharply variable; their metaphor captures the political narrative that runs alongside the story of Oedipus' story of personal discovery, a trajectory in which Oedipus goes from serving the community of Thebes by rescuing and guiding it to serving the same community by disappointing and leaving it.

In *Oedipus at Colonus*, a citizen chorus again articulates Oedipus' complicated relationship with a larger community, here the city of Athens, which takes Oedipus in and becomes his place of death (Dhuga 2005). The play opens with Oedipus' arrival in Athens, but Athens' leader Theseus appears on the scene late, so the chorus takes the lead in responding on behalf of the city to Oedipus' presence; in this way they dramatize the cooperation between ruler and ruled that is one sign of Athens' civic health. Although Theseus ultimately makes the decision that Oedipus can stay, the chorus performs the arduous process of receiving and accepting him. They enter to investigate the foreigner who has trespassed on the sacred grove of the Eumenides, and they solicitously direct his move to an appropriate seat before they ask him who he is. Their first reaction to his identity is to insist that he leave, but they listen to his pleadings and agree to wait for Theseus' decision. In the meantime, they lead Oedipus step by step through a ritual propitiation of the Eumenides and then they enter into a lyric dialogue in which they slowly and sympathetically extract his painful story. And they hear, with attention if not with clear understanding, his claim to a sacred destiny that will benefit their city.

In its extended engagement with Oedipus, the chorus works through the act of comprehension that distinguishes the Athenians from the Thebans and on which the successful outcome of the action depends: the recognition that Oedipus can be at once a polluted criminal and a holy figure who is capable of bringing supernatural benefits to the community that holds his tomb. This paradox is at the heart of the religious institution of hero cult, which Oedipus' death in Athens instantiates; figures who do terrible things while alive take on sacred protective powers when they die, and their closeness to the gods is inextricable from their crimes. While Theseus' welcome confers the advantage of political protection, it is the chorus that initiates Oedipus into the religious life of the city. Again, the drama of Oedipus' shifting fortunes is connected, through the chorus, to the ordinary figures who are affected by his fate.

2 Acts of Witness

In their focus on the main characters and in their role of observing and responding to events rather than shaping them, the chorus members might, then, seem to resemble an audience rather than the actors to whom Aristotle equates them. And the tragic chorus has been interpreted as a possible stand-in for the theatrical audience ever since A. W. Schlegel identified it as the "ideal spectator" in a work published in 1809 – a label

that has been recurrently questioned and qualified, but never entirely dispensed with (Carlson 1993: 179). The notion that spectatorship is dramatized within the play captures a notable feature of Sophoclean dramaturgy: Sophocles' plays abound in on-stage audiences, both individual and collective, although those audiences are too variable in their degree of involvement in the action and in their conditions of knowledge and understanding to be flatly labeled "ideal" or treated as straightforwardly normative for the external audience in the theater (Goldhill 2009). In all tragedy, the most consequential actions take place off stage, and much of the on-stage action involves hearing and coming to terms with reports of events elsewhere. Sophocles in particular focuses on processes of cognition – learning, understanding, and misunderstanding what has happened – and on the experiences of watching and being watched as essential human experiences. Accordingly, he involves his choruses in many situations of witnessing, interpretation, and response with diverse moods, formal structures, and social resonances.

Tragic plots often hinge on the revelation of acts and desires that people would keep private if they could, hidden truths forced out into the open by the pressures of war and politics or by the workings of divine justice. In such situations, Sophocles sometimes uses the chorus as an especially privileged audience, whose discovery of the protagonists' secrets is made less intrusive by their close and sympathetic ties; the chorus serves as a buffer between the protagonists and the uninvolved spectators in the theater. The *Ajax* opens with a harrowing scene, in which Ajax is put on display as a shameful embodiment of the warrior's manic drive for revenge. Athena has frustrated his attack on the army's leaders by deluding him into slaughtering livestock instead; now she has him expose both his intentions and his failure before his arch-rival Odysseus.

But before Ajax returns to the stage in his right mind, there is a fuller, more sympathetic rehearsal of the same scenario between Tecmessa and the chorus. Arriving in response to rumors of Ajax's downfall, the chorus learns from Tecmessa the news of Ajax's madness and painful return to sanity. She recounts Ajax's behavior from a perspective that could not be staged in the earlier scene, the inside of their shelter, and through the horrified eyes of his closest companion. The chorus elicits her story by asking her to "tell this to us, who feel with you the pain of your fate," and she begins: "You will learn all he did, as one who has a share [*koinonos*]" (ll. 282–4).

In the *Trachiniae*, the chorus again represents a confidential audience for news that is normally confined within a house and within a woman's unvoiced thoughts. When Deianeira has been forced to recognize that among the war captives sent back to her by Heracles is a woman, Iole, who is her own replacement, Sophocles stages a reversal of public and private discourse. The captives who have recently been seen on stage have moved into the house, where they are being addressed by Heracles' envoy Lichas. Meanwhile, Deianeira slips out for a more private conversation with the chorus of young women, whom she has already identified as less experienced versions of herself.

My friends, as long as the visitor within the house
is giving a kind of farewell speech to the group of captives,
I have come outside so that to you, in secret,
I can tell what I have undertaken with my hands,
And claim your sympathy for what I suffer. (ll. 531–5)

What follows is an account of private griefs and furtive measures: Deianeira's dismay at being supplanted by Iole and her decision to recapture Heracles' love though a magic charm. The charm brings to light a dark story: Deianeira's near-rape by the Centaur

Nessus, as she traveled home with Heracles from her wedding, and Nessus' present to her of the supposed remedy, which joins Nessus' hidden designs with those of Deianeira. As Lichas emerges from the house and the scene becomes again a public one, Deianeira requests the chorus' complicity in her wishfully self-protective inwardness: "Just let me be well sheltered by you. What one does in the darkness/even if shameful, brings no shame" (ll. 596–7). The presence of the chorus as audience allows an interior scene of intimate revelation to be rehearsed on the open stage.

In these episodes involving Tecmessa and Deianeira, choruses are the auditors of spoken narratives in iambic trimeter, but choral engagement with the protagonists' affairs is often presented as a lyric dialogue, a form that Sophocles used with growing frequency over his career (Burton 1980: 249–50). With roots in the *kommos*, an antiphonal song of mourning, the lyric dialogue brings chorus and characters together in a shared expression of emotion, as the characters, in their extreme circumstances, venture into the chorus' characteristic mode of song and the chorus voices its responsiveness to the characters' difficulties. But, in adapting the *kommos* form to the tragic plot – in which the emotions of grief are called forth in extreme and irregular situations – Sophocles develops diverse emotional scenarios out of the confrontation of principal mourner and collective respondent, producing interchanges that move in unexpected directions and include elements of dissension as well as of harmony (Goldhill, forthcoming).

In *Oedipus at Colonus*, for example, a close exchange of lyrics turns a character's self-revelation into a dynamic process of redefinition (ll. 510–48). In a pause in the action, as Ismene completes the ritual propitiation of the Eumenides off stage and everyone waits for Theseus to arrive, the chorus insists that Oedipus tell the story of his notorious crimes. Oedipus protests, but they demand the "straight account of a story that is often told and does not fade away," as a return on their favor of allowing him to stay. Oedipus' reluctant acquiescence is at once the fulfillment of an obligation and an opportunity for him to shape his story, and so he begins:

I endured evils, strangers, I endured them
unwilling, god knows,
none of them chosen by me. (ll. 521–3)

As the chorus drags out the details, Oedipus casts his acts as ordeals imposed upon him. Once they have gotten him to say that he shared a bed with his mother and fathered daughters with her, there follows a rapid exchange of partial lines.

CHORUS You suffered ...
OEDIPUS I suffered things impossible to bear.
CHORUS You acted ...
OEDIPUS I did not act.
CHORUS How not?
OEDIPUS I accepted a gift which, in my long suffering, I wish I hadn't gotten for serving
 the city. (ll. 538–41)

The chorus presses on, bringing up his patricide.

CHORUS Unhappy one, what about this? You committed murder [...]
OEDIPUS What now? What do you want to know?
CHORUS of your father.
OEDIPUS Oh, Oh! You have hit me with a second wound on top of a first.

- CHORUS You killed [...]
 OEDIPUS I killed. But I have [...]
 CHORUS What?
 OEDIPUS A claim of justice.
 CHORUS Which is what?
 OEDIPUS I'll tell you. (ll. 542–6)

Oedipus then explains (in a line too corrupt to translate), concluding, “Unstained before the law, I came to this with no knowledge of what I did” (ll. 547–8).

In the close back-and-forth of chorus and actor, Oedipus' familiar story is both rehearsed and revised. In the echoing repetitions of shared lament, commonly accepted rumor confronts Oedipus' own sense of his life; he seizes the occasion to recast his experience in accord with his current understanding of himself as not the doer but the sufferer of his crimes. Oedipus articulates this assessment of his history elsewhere in speeches of self-defense, but here he works through it in relation to each painful detail, recalled with feeling, satisfying the chorus' need to know and understand rather than fending off a quasi-legal challenge.

This exchange in *Oedipus at Colonus* satisfies the aims of both chorus and character: the elders get the first-hand account that they need, and Oedipus has a chance to reiterate his innocence and passivity. In other such exchanges, the interplay of perspectives works out differently. In the *Electra*, the first appearance of the chorus takes the form of a *kommos* between the heroine and the group of warm-hearted women who have arrived to offer consolation for her troubles (ll. 121–250). In accord with their distinct traditional roles as lone mourner and communal comforters, Electra dwells on her limitless grief for her murdered father, while the chorus expresses sympathy but encourages her to leave that grief behind: “you will never raise your father up/from the all-swallowing lake of Hades/with laments or prayers” (ll. 137–9), they tell her, “you destroy yourself/by ceaseless moaning” (ll. 140–1). But, as the interchange unfolds, Electra refuses to play her part by being consoled. As she reiterates her grievances, the chorus adapts to her perspective, summoning up the crimes Electra cannot forget.

Pitiful cries at homecoming,
 Pitiful cries in your father's bed
 when the hostile stroke of the
 bronze blades hit home.
 Deceit planned it, lust carried out the killing [...]. (ll. 193–6)

The chorus shifts from urging Electra to give up her mourning to warning her that excessive displays will get her into trouble. Electra insists that her continued mourning is natural and right – “How can it be good to neglect the dead?/What human being is born to do that?” (ll. 237–8) – and the chorus, having failed to lead her to the other side of grief, responds in ordinary conversational iambs: “I am here, child, in your interest/as much as my own. If I misspoke,/have your way. We will follow you” (ll. 251–2). Electra's relentlessness derails the *kommos* as a conventional mourning ritual and propels the plot forward to revenge, with the chorus' express support.

In the *Antigone*, the combination of a strong-willed woman and a chorus, now of citizen men, yields a *kommos* that also departs from the underlying model of shared

mourning, but in a different way (ll. 781–882). The Theban elders come face to face with Antigone as she is about to be shut up to die for the defiant burial of her brother. They find the sight of her unnerving: it dislodges them from their automatic allegiance to the city’s rules and subjects them to unexpected streams of tears. But, when she solicits their sympathy, the ensuing dialogue does not result in shared acceptance – or even, as in *Electra*, in shared refusal of acceptance.

In her strange circumstances, Antigone is lamenting her own death. She has no future towards which her respondents can reorient her: the words that might console a survivor strike her as mockery. Her untimely execution makes her an extreme, singled-out victim, as she dies “still living” and “with no chance for wedding songs” (ll. 870–1). But the chorus finds something compensatory in the singularity and deliberateness of her crime and punishment:

But you are famous and win praise
as you go off to that cavern of corpses,
not struck down by wasting sickness,
not meeting the wages of warfare,
but following your own law [*autonomos*], you are the only mortal
to go alive to Hades. (ll. 817–22)

Antigone continues to insist on her isolation as a sign of her unparalleled suffering; the distraught chorus continues to insist on what, in their eyes, really sets her apart: her self-willed disobedience (“pressing on to the limit of boldness,/you have stumbled on the high throne/of justice, child,” ll. 853–5), her terrible patrimony (“you are paying some sort of penalty for your father,” l. 856). As the encounter ends, the participants are at odds with one another. Far from winning Antigone over to their far-sighted view, the chorus leaves her feeling abandoned: “I am being taken, miserable,/on a journey that cannot be put off,/with no mourners, no friends, no hope of a wedding” (ll. 876–8). They have communicated only the difficulty of coming to terms with Antigone, voicing the irreducible mixture of sympathy and condemnation that her behavior awakens in stalwart citizens of Thebes.

At other points, Sophoclean choruses, and in particular male choruses, enter into a different mode of engaged response, one that echoes the participation of citizen groups in judicial and deliberative contexts (Hawthorne 2009). At the end of the *Ajax*, Ajax’s half brother Teucer is confronted first by Menelaus and then by Agamemnon, who forbid him to bury Ajax’s body. These confrontations recall the aggressive verbal sparring of the Homeric battlefield, with its boasts, insults, and threats. But the presence of the chorus converts this nasty personal wrangling into something resembling a debate. Menelaus wades in with a speech in which he denounces Ajax’s insubordination, makes some comments on the general need for obedience, declares that now it is his own turn to assert himself, and threatens Teucer with death. The chorus responds with a pair of lines that may seem bland, but have the important effect of redefining Menelaus’ speech, recasting it as a lofty piece of general advice after which personally motivated violence would be inappropriate: “Menelaus, now that you have established wise principles,/don’t then yourself commit outrage against the dead” (ll. 1091–2). Teucer responds by addressing his speech initially to the chorus, confirming their role as audience to the debate and inviting them to accept his evaluation of Menelaus’ words:

Men, I will never again be amazed
 to see a man of humble birth go wrong
 when those who claim the noblest birth of all
 utter such wrongful speech as you've just heard. (ll. 1093–6)

The chorus members may be on Teucer's side, but they emphasize their allegiance to peaceful, civil discourse rather than verbal barbs. They rebuke Teucer for the harshness of his words, even if these are just (ll. 1118–19); they express the wish that Agamemnon and Teucer would both show good sense (l. 1264); and finally they welcome Odysseus as a possible mediator (ll. 1316–17). Assuming the role of judges responsible for weighing the evidence on both sides, they turn a private quarrel into a public event and create a context for Odysseus' resolution of the issue through persuasive speech.

Similarly, in the *Oedipus at Colonus* the presence of the chorus members as auditors of verbal wrangling is instrumental in defining a stand-off between individuals as a public matter (ll. 728–886). When Creon arrives to drag Oedipus back to Thebes (having already kidnapped Ismene off stage), he tries to neutralize them. He addresses them first and assures them they have nothing to fear from him: he is old and weak and only wants to persuade Oedipus to return to Thebes. Oedipus' response reinstates the chorus as an interested party – “I will say this to these men as well, so that I can prove you false,” (l. 783) – shrewdly redefining Creon's task as one of persuading, not him alone, but the citizens of Colonus. When Creon retorts that what he seeks is in Oedipus' best interest, Oedipus replies: “Best for me if these men here are no more/persuaded by you than I am” (ll. 802–3). This affirmation of the chorus members' position as proper judges of the debate is the prelude to their active intervention. When Creon seizes Antigone, they advance on him, then summon their fellow residents to the rescue. Their self-assertion as Oedipus' protectors grows out of their identity as citizens, whose business is to hear and assess the claims of prominent antagonists.

3 Acting like a Chorus

When the chorus' engagement with the principals mimics the behavior of citizen-judges, the chorus members play a role that echoes their real-life identities as participants in civic life outside the theater. Their fictional role conforms to their real identity in another way when chorus members openly acknowledge their activities within the theater, alluding to their status as singers and dancers. Sophocles' plays contain notable moments of “choral self-referentiality,” which exploit the contrast between the festive dramatic performance and the grim circumstances of the tragic plot (Henrichs 1994–5). On several occasions, choruses embrace the joys of song and dance because they misunderstand the direction of the action, displaying the unwary hopefulness to which humans are prone. In the *Trachiniae*, the young women of Trachis celebrate the news that Heracles is coming home with a dance befitting a wedding: “I am lifted up and do not spurn/the flute, master of my spirit” (ll. 216–17). In the *Ajax*, the chorus responds to Ajax's deceptive suggestion that he will not kill himself with open revelry, “I shake with passion, I fly up filled with joy [...] oh, oh, Pan, Pan [...] appear lord, chorus-leader of the gods [...] now I want to dance” (ll. 693–701).

These moments of open revelry, when the prospect of good fortune causes the dramatic illusion to slip, are sadly ironic: the audience suspects, and the characters soon learn, that the chorus' joy is premature. Heracles comes home with Iole, and this leads

to Deianeira's destructive, misbegotten plan. Ajax has misled the chorus along with Tecmessa, and has not really changed his decision to die. Belated recognitions re-immerses the chorus members in fictional roles, in which they obscure their choral identity and in which acting like a chorus is out of place. The incompatibility between choral performance and tragic circumstances is captured in a famous question posed by the chorus of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. When they hear Jocasta reassuring Oedipus that the oracles predicting that Laius would be killed by his own child never came true, the chorus members are made anxious by an outcome that seems to undermine traditional religious observances, such as consulting the oracle and performing at festivals. If the oracles are not true, and if crimes like the murder of Laius go unpunished, they ask, "Why should I dance?" (l. 896). Later, when they believe that Oedipus must be the child of a liaison between a mortal woman and a god, they promise to dance on Mt. Cithaeron, where the baby was exposed and rescued by the shepherd. But the twists of this cruel plot are such that, when Oedipus' full parentage is known and the oracles have been truly fulfilled, the chorus has no thought of dancing, but wish they had never seen him. The chorus members recoil from any involvement with his story, whether as performers or as spectators.

Sophocles' episodes of misplaced choral revelry draw a pointed contrast between participation in a tragic plot and choral performance in the form of joyous, divinely inspired song and dance. But tragic choruses never entirely relinquish their status as singers and dancers when they join the actors in re-enacting a myth. They still sing and dance, especially in those odes between episodes known as *stasima*, in which the chorus separates itself from the actors and performs in a mode that makes no claim to imitate ordinary speech and action. At those times, the chorus' dramatic persona is expanded through the broader perspectives typical of non-dramatic choruses. The non-dramatic chorus was a pervasive feature of classical Greek culture and one of the forms out of which tragedy developed. Choruses performed on multiple occasions, from initiation rituals to weddings to celebrations of athletic victories to civic festivals like the Athenian Great Dionysia, in which competitions among choruses singing dithyrambs (songs with mythical subjects in honor of Dionysus) occurred alongside the competitions in tragedy. Non-dramatic choruses were open participants in the here-and-now of the performance occasion and spoke for their communities, summoning and celebrating the gods, recalling shared myths, and reiterating traditional wisdom. Their communal understandings were inevitably inflected, as well, by the perspectives of the individual poets who scripted their words, in ways that invite speculation but cannot be pinned down.

Sophoclean choruses perform the same functions as non-dramatic choruses and thereby amplify or even transcend their fictional identities. The two choruses that portray groups of Athenians sing songs that evoke and glorify the city in which tragedy was performed and of which it was a proud product. The sailors of the *Ajax* come from Salamis, an island within Athenian territory and the honored site of a decisive sea battle in the Athenian-led defeat of the Persians in 480 BCE; they define the hardship of their life at Troy through a contrasting vision of their home.

Oh glorious Salamis, I know that you
still stand, sea-stroked, favored by gods,
prominent for all to see,
while I in misery live through time grown old,
stuck on the grassy ground of Ida [...]. (*Aj.* 595–602)

Similarly, the elders of *Oedipus at Colonus* are happily settled in their Athenian home, to which they welcome Oedipus with an exuberantly patriotic ode:

This land of fine horses, friend, is the
 best place you could have come to,
 shining Colonus,
 where the clear-voiced nightingale
 sings in the deep groves
 perched on wine-dark ivy
 in the god's untouched greenery,
 screened from the sun,
 sheltered from all storms,
 where reveling Dionysus touches down,
 joining the nymphs who nursed him. (ll. 668–80)

In the three sections that follow, this opening image of natural abundance, security, song, and divine presence is echoed and elaborated on as Colonus is claimed as a favored place of the Muses and of golden Aphrodite; celebrated for the evergreen olive tree, symbol of permanence, hardiness, and the patron goddess Athena; and finally identified with Poseidon, who grants mastery in horsemanship and seafaring.

Tragic choral song can recapitulate the ritual functions of non-dramatic lyric, creating a link between the performance of a play and the ritual context of that performance in a festival in honor of Dionysus (Henrichs 1994–5). Tragic choruses often reach out to the gods, soliciting their help in the predicaments of the plot. At the opening of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as Oedipus acts to solve the mystery of the plague, the chorus prays to the gods who have protected Thebes in the past. Fittingly for a play in which the Delphic oracle is prominent, they begin with Apollo, in words that echo the traditional form of the paean – a song addressed to Apollo as god of healing – then add appeals to Athena, Artemis, Zeus, and Dionysus. At a critical moment near the end of *Antigone*, as Creon tries to reverse the damage he has done, the chorus members appeal particularly to Dionysus, to whom they have a special connection both as fictional citizens of Thebes, where Dionysus was born, and as performers in Athens, where Dionysus was recognized as the god of theater. They invoke him in his many spheres of influence, highlighting his Theban identity (through his mother Semele, the daughter of Cadmus).

Oh lord with many names,
 pride and joy of the Cadmean bride,
 and child of deep-thundering Zeus,
 you who roam through famous
 Italy, and look out for
 all who gather in Eleusinian Demeter's
 sheltered plain. O Bacchus,
 at home in Thebes,
 the mother-city of Bacchants,
 set beside Ismenus' waters,
 field where the fierce dragon's seed was planted. (ll. 1115–25)

Dionysus' healing presence is envisioned in the order of the dance, over which he presides in its cosmic form.

Oh chorus-leader
of the fire-breathing stars, and master
of the voices of the night,
offspring of zeus, appear [...]. (ll. 1146–9)

In the context of the *Antigone*'s action there is no saving intervention, but the elders nonetheless manifest a greater attunement to the divine, which is voiced here in the conventional formulas of cult observance. Earlier, as this chorus enters the stage, they use their expressive powers to summon up an off-stage action, another way in which a chorus can provide an enlarged perspective. As they describe the previous night's battle, they also present Thebes' success in repelling the invaders as part of a pattern of justice-enforcing, divinely guided events, rather than simply as a victory in a human conflict (see Kitzinger 2008: 12–20):

Zeus hates above all
the boasts of a bold tongue. Seeing them
pressing on in a great stream,
with their arrogant clash of gold,
he brandished his fire and knocked back
the enemy who was rushing
to cry victory from our highest walls. (*Ant.* 127–33)

The chorus' ampler purview encompasses the extended mythological tradition, of which any plot is a single chapter, and which offers material for a more general perspective. Choruses place the experiences of individuals within the histories of dynasties, as when the chorus of *Electra* responds to indications of Orestes' return by looking ahead to an act of successful revenge – but also, ominously, back to the origins of the family's troubles in their ancestor Pelops' corrupt and violent victory in a chariot race (*El.* 504–15). Choruses also bring up analogues from myth in order to gain a handle on particular circumstances, as when the chorus of *Antigone* contemplates the varied fates of people who were confined, as Antigone will be (*Ant.* 944–87).

Citing a mythical parallel draws the chorus of *Philoctetes* – out of Sophocles' choruses the one most closely involved in the plot – away from its partisan position toward more humane reflection. As Philoctetes invites Neoptolemus into his cave, the chorus turns to myth to find the one known instance of someone who suffered as much as Philoctetes: Ixion, permanently bound to a whirling wheel (*Ph.* 676–90). But, as the sailors recall Ixion's fate, imposed as punishment for his attempted rape of Hera, they confront a telling difference: Philoctetes suffers as much as Ixion did, but has done nothing wrong. This observation provokes expressions of pity and admiration for Philoctetes' endurance that are out of tune with Neoptolemus' immediate designs, but that chime with the ultimate conclusion and broader vision of the play.

If even the closely implicated sailor chorus of *Philoctetes* shows a capacity for more contemplative, compassionate responses, the older citizen choruses of the Theban plays are particularly suited to longer views through their combination of experience and natural displacement from the arenas of action. Those choruses sing the Sophoclean odes that are most widely known and celebrated for sentiments that can be read as universal statements, and possibly as expressions of the poet's own vision. The chorus of *Oedipus at Colonus* gives voice to a broad statement that human life is too full of suffering to be prized over never having been born; this stance is widely resonant with the Greek

tradition from Homer onward, but it is also grounded in the chorus' observations of Oedipus' struggles and in the first-hand knowledge of old age that they share with him.

Never to be born outweighs
any consideration. Or,
if someone does make an appearance,
next best to go back where
he came from, sooner rather than later.
When youth has gone,
with its light heart,
what trial does not follow?
What ordeal is lacking? (ll. 1224–32)

The most sweeping vision comes from the Theban elders of *Antigone*. When the news arrives of an unexpected burial ritual, performed for Polyneices in defiance of Creon's order, the audience knows that this is the work of Antigone; to the characters on stage, however, it is a mystery. Creon is threatened and provoked, but the chorus responds with a far-sighted commentary on human daring:

There are many wonders,
but none more wonderful than man.
That one skates over the gray sea
on the stormy south wind,
forging ahead through the
engulfing waves. He takes for his own
the oldest of the gods,
tireless, inexhaustible earth,
as plows go back and forth, year after year [...] (ll. 332–75)

As the ode progresses, this survey of human feats expands to include hunting, fishing, the taming of wild animals, and the tools of civilization (speech, thought, statecraft, shelter from the elements), but it finally reaches its limit with mortality: "Escape from Hades is one thing he cannot bring about." And this setback leads to the even more ominous limitation of humanity's uncertain adherence to the code of justice that the gods, by contrast, unfailingly uphold.

Inventive beyond belief,
he presses on, to evil and good.
If he observes the laws of the land
and the binding justice of the gods,
he thrives with his city, but makes a wasteland
if he goes after evil.
I will not have the one who does those things
sharing my hearth,
or my thoughts. (ll. 365–75)

This song can be understood as a close commentary on the circumstances to which it responds, and has been variously mapped onto the plot of the play, most often as a prescient forecast of Creon's evolution from confident ruler to broken offender, but in other ways as well (Goheen 1951). At the same time, the song also reads as a free-standing

meditation on the human condition, for which it has earned the frequent label “Ode to Man.” Its range of reference expands beyond the horizons of its mythical singers: it alludes to and revises earlier poetry, especially a choral song about the magnitude of human transgression in Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers*; and it summons up the celebration of civilized progress and of human accomplishment that was a pronounced strand within late fifth-century thought and that Sophocles reflected in his plays, placing that sense of human possibility in tension with other powerful forces, both natural and divine (Segal 1981: 152–66; Griffith 1999: 179–81).

The evolution in this chorus’ thinking from optimistic admiration for human powers to troubled repugnance at human misdeeds is appropriate to the *Antigone*, but also broadly characteristic of Sophocles. The movement traced here – from confidence to uncertainty, from what humans can proudly know and do to the darker mysteries of their involvement with the enigmatic gods, from triumphant forward progress to a bewildering vacillation between flourishing and annihilation – is the perennial rhythm of human experience as Sophocles reveals it. In their final words, the chorus members hope to distance themselves from the fateful missteps that the tragic protagonists seem unable to avoid. And, in their distinct and many-sided role as subordinates, survivors, and singers, to a certain extent they can. But the chorus members could not speak as informatively or as evocatively as they do if they had not closely witnessed the actors’ stories and registered their sufferings in their own experiences, if they had not shared with them in the action.

Guide to Further Reading

The most comprehensive treatments of Sophocles’ choruses are Burton (1980) and Gardiner (1987). Of the two, Gardiner especially emphasizes the chorus’ role as a character in the drama. A more recent study, M. R. Kitzinger (2008), presents the chorus’ perspective as markedly different from that of the actors and as shaped by ritual and non-dramatic lyric. Budelmann (2000) examines the role of the chorus as the representative of larger communities. Goldhill (forthcoming) analyses the dynamic of chorus–actor interactions in the unfolding of Sophocles’ plots. An introduction to the formal features of tragic lyric can be found in Battezzato (2005). Foley (2003) provides an overview and a comparative analysis of the fictional roles of choruses in Greek tragedy in general. The interplay between tragic chorus’ socially marginal identities and their role in voicing communal traditions is explored in the exchange between J. Gould and Goldhill in Silk (1996). Bacon (1994–5) is a good account of the relationship between tragic choruses and the chorus in ancient Greek culture more generally. Further discussions of the tragic chorus’ self-referentiality and extra-dramatic civic and ritual functions include Henrichs (1994–5) and Calame (1999).

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Lament as Speech Act in Sophocles

Casey Dué

I Introduction

In Greek tragedy, female characters are famously outspoken: they debate, praise, blame, make plans, pray, scheme, sympathize, narrate the past, and make speech acts. But if there is one thing that female characters do in tragedy above all else, it is lament. Both epic and tragedy are infused with the grief of women, despite the fact that they are male-oriented performance traditions. The Greek lament tradition has attracted a great deal of attention from both classicists (who focus on the laments that survive in archaic and classical Greek literature) and anthropologists (who trace the continuity of ancient traditions in modern Greek communities – traditions that have persisted over perhaps more than 3,500 years). The seminal work of Margaret Alexiou (1974; 2nd ed. 2002) was the first to explore the continuity of this tradition. In recent years laments have been interpreted as powerful speech acts, capable of inciting violent action. In the context of lament, women can voice subversive concerns and speak in ways in which they cannot under any other circumstances.

Speech acts are utterances whose words have a particular social effect, which may go beyond the literal meaning of the words and have the force of action (see especially Austin 1962 and Searle 1969, as well as Martin 1989: 22–37). It was a central aim of my 2006 book, *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy*, to point out the many instances in which women in tragedy use what I call the “language of lament” to manipulate their listeners and to achieve various goals. For now, we may define lament as a formal utterance over a dead person, but we will see that women lament in non-funeral contexts throughout Greek epic and tragedy and that these words can have powerful, even violent effects. The women of tragedy frequently lament in anticipation of death and disaster, because lament is the only medium through which women have a sanctioned public voice, the one weapon they possess to defend themselves with in desperate circumstances. Men, too, lament in tragedy (Suter 2008b). I have argued that Ajax's

speech at *Ajax* 430–80 makes use of the language and structure of lament and resembles closely not only the speech of Tecmessa in that play, but also that of Euripides' *Medea* (502–19; see Dué 2006: 49–56). Upon seeing the corpse of his brother, Teucer too laments, with phraseology that resembles all three of these speeches (*Aj.* 992–1039). Likewise, Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Creon in *Antigone* lament upon learning of the deaths of their loved ones and upon seeing their corpses. In this chapter, however, I wish to explore the use of lament as a form of action deployed by female characters in Sophoclean tragedy. After placing this form of speech and song in context, I will argue that, although they are not always successful, the women of Sophocles use the sanctioned speech allowed them by tradition and custom in order to try to effect their will. In this way they stay well within their prescribed gender roles, but it is by stubbornly adhering to these roles that Sophoclean women sometimes make their biggest tragic impact.

2 Lamenting Women on the Tragic Stage

The representation of women in tragedy is one of the most discussed issues in classical studies. (A good introduction to the topic can be found in Griffith 2001; see also Easterling 1987, des Bouvrie 1990, Seidensticker 1995, and Foley 2001.) More specifically, the prominence of women's songs in Greek tragedy, a medium that is composed and performed by and for men, is surprising and poses serious challenges for the modern critic. What is the relationship between the laments of tragedy and the laments of actual Greek women? It is a question fraught with theoretical complexity. Little evidence survives that can inform us about women's speech or song in "real life." All we have are the *representations* of women in men's literature, and the picture that this literature provides is demonstrably distorted. In the case of women's laments, the foundational work of Alexiou shows that, for this one category of feminine speech at least, continuities can be traced from the oral epic poetry of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to archaic and classical Greek lyric and drama, and all the way through to modern Greek funeral lament – a continuity that suggests the power and endurance of lament as a traditional form of song outside of these "literary" and festival contexts. Anthropologists such as Nadia Serematakis and Gail Holst-Warhaft have built on the work of Alexiou, showing that the still living lament traditions of modern rural Greece maintain much of the form and structure, themes, and imagery that we find in the surviving literary examples from archaic and classical Greek poetry.

Indeed, the traditionality of lament is a crucial component of its emotional force. In both funeral and non-funeral contexts, the traditional structure of lament, combined with recurring themes and imagery, offers the mourning women a socially sanctioned and ritualized outlet for the expression of personal pain (Holst-Warhaft 1992: 40–74). At the same time, for an audience accustomed to experiencing and witnessing grief expressed in this way, the use of these elements in tragic discourse provides a powerful emotional cue. Because the laments of women in tragedy formed a continuum with – and in fact evoked for the audience – the rituals and song traditions of actual Greek women, their emotional impact was potentially as powerful as that of the laments sung at actual funerals by the wives, mothers, and grandmothers of the community of listeners. In the modern Greek tradition, Caraveli notes that in some instances merely the first notes of a melody associated with lament were enough to cause a family of mourners to burst into tears (Caraveli 1986: 175–76). Nicole Loraux has made similar suggestions

about the triggering effects of the music that would have accompanied the laments of Greek tragedy (Loraux 2002: 54–65).

3 Lament in Fifth-Century BCE Athens

It will be helpful, before moving on to analyze specific examples of lament in Sophocles, to set both Greek tragedy (as we know it) and the practice of lament in their historical context. Helene Foley's well-known article "The Politics of Tragic Lamentation" (revised and expanded in Foley 2001: 21–55) explores in detail the representation of women's laments in tragedy and their relationship to the laws, customs, and attitudes of fifth-century Athens. The laments enacted in tragedy, particularly those that are closely tied to funeral ritual, have a complex relationship with societal practices. Whereas in tragedy women perform elaborate public laments, tear their cheeks, and rip their clothing, laws enacted from the archaic period onward expressly prohibited these actions. Other elements of the funeral ritual that takes place in tragedy were likewise restricted by laws intended to curb the power and prestige of the aristocracy, while at the same time they shifted loyalties from the *oikos* to the *polis* (see also Alexiou 1974: 21–3; Seaford 1994: 106; Loraux 1998). Building on the work of Alexiou as well as on modern fieldwork, Foley argues that the intent of these laws was to suppress the incendiary power of laments to initiate revenge. In order for the *polis* to be successful, aristocratic cycles of vendetta, in which the laments of women played a crucial motivating role, had to be put an end to (on the connection between lament and vendetta, see especially Holst-Warhaft 1992, and further below).

As women's control over the funeral rituals was weakened and their voices of lament muted, new forms of public mourning began to supplant the aristocratic funeral. First, as Alexiou has shown, in the incipient democracy of Athens there was a gradual transfer of mourning rituals and their associated emotions "from the ancestor of the clan cult to the hero of the state cult" (Alexiou 1974: 19). Similarly, as Athenians were increasingly called to serve the state as sailors and soldiers over the course of the fifth century BCE, the *epitaphios logos* (state funeral oration) effectively replaced the private funeral for honoring the war dead. The grandeur and solemnity of public funerals for the war dead became an important forum for Athenian state ideology (see Alexiou 1974: 21–3; Loraux 1986; Segal 1995: 119–37; Foley 2001: 25). As Foley and others have noted, however, the laws restricting lamentation were never entirely successful: some laws apparently lapsed and were later re-passed, and some customs known to have been prohibited by law are alluded to as still in practice throughout the classical period (see especially Alexiou 1974: 23; Blok 2001: 104–7; Foley 2001: 25–6). Lament continued to be the essential medium for the articulation of grief, as is evidenced by its unbroken continuity of form and function in Greek literary and artistic traditions and in popular culture, up to the present day.

In *The Mourning Voice* (2002), Loraux argues for a renewed appreciation of the emotional dynamic of Greek tragedy, which she stresses in contrast to the didactic and political aspects of Greek tragedy, which have been the focus of discussion in recent decades. Loraux emphasizes the outlet that tragedy provides for grief in a city state where lamentation and elaborate funerals for individuals had become restricted by law. Noting that tragedy was not situated in the political heart of the city, in the agora or on the Pnyx, where assemblies were held, but rather in the theater of Dionysus, Loraux argues that in

the process of viewing tragedy the spectator learns that he is a mortal first, and a citizen second. She concludes:

through the evocation of mourning [...] the spectator will be overcome, and purgation will arouse him to transcend his membership in the civic community and to comprehend his even more essential membership in the race of mortals. This has always been the final word sung, not so much to the citizen as to the spectator, by the mourning voice of tragedy. (Loraux 2002: 93)

Lament, therefore, seems as essential to Greek tragedy as it is to Greek epic, and perhaps even more so (on lament in epic, see Dué 2002 and 2006: 39–46 and Tsagalis 2004). The mourning voices of women on the tragic stage are both re-enactments of prototypical laments for heroes and a vehicle for the exploration and release of contemporary sorrows. Weeping is crucial and, as we explore the laments of Antigone, Electra, and Tecmessa, we will see that they play the essential role of cueing the emotional response of the audience to the tragic events unfolding on stage (Segal 1993: 29). At the same time, through lament, each of these women seeks to accomplish goals as a character within the story of the play.

4 The Language of Lament: Tecmessa in the *Ajax*

What are the features of lament and how do we see them expressed in Sophoclean tragedy? The laments of tragedy are for the most part divorced from funeral ritual, in the sense that tragedy rarely presents to the viewer an actual funeral. But there is, of course, a great deal of calamity and death in tragedy, and the conventions of Greek funeral lament are at the heart of the poetry of tragedy. Lamentation and funeral ritual are both incorporated into and transformed by tragedy, as Charles Segal has shown. Segal argues that, while tragedy is heavily indebted to earlier poetic forms of commemoration and expression of suffering, it is also “radically new” in that it transforms whatever it uses and synthesizes genres and rituals in new ways (Segal 1993: 13–16).

Formal laments for the dead in the Greek tradition generally conform to a three-part pattern, which consists of a direct address, a narrative of the past or future, and then a renewed address accompanied by reproach and lamentation (Alexiou 1974: 133; see also Lohmann 1970: 108–12; Foley 2001: 168–74; Tsagalis 2004: 46–7). In tragedy, these three elements are both combined and isolated from one another in countless ways, so as to express immeasurable sorrow. Any one of the three parts may evoke the genre, emotions, and rituals of lament, thereby contributing to the overall atmosphere of sorrow and evoking the pity of the audience. Just as lamentation in tragedy is generally separated from the rites of an actual funeral, so the poetic structure, traditional themes, and language of lament can be manipulated and employed with great effect in non-ritual contexts.

Questions beginning with “where?” and accompanied by an answer in the perfect tense are the mark of laments for fallen cities; but questions are a common feature of laments for the dead as well (Alexiou 1974: 161–5 and 182–4). The mourner asks how she can begin to express her grief, or she reproaches the dead by asking why he has left her or why he has abandoned his family. In Sophocles’ *Ajax*, Ajax’s captive concubine Tecmessa provides us with a good example. She describes how she was once the daughter

of a wealthy father and then became a slave when Ajax sacked her town. Worried that Ajax will kill himself, she begs him not to leave her, thus allowing her to become (for a second time) a Greek captive and an object of abuse, and not to abandon their son and let him become a helpless orphan. Then, in words that echo Andromache's in Book 6 of the *Iliad*, she exclaims (*Aj.* 514–20):

I have nothing left to which I can look,
save you. Your spear ravaged my country to nothingness,
and another fate has brought down my mother and father,
giving them a home in Hades in their death.
What homeland, then, could I have without you?
What wealth? My welfare is entirely in your hands.

Tecmessa's speech combines an account of the resources she has lost with the rhetorical questions that are typical of Greek laments. Of course, these features are also particularly appropriate for a captive woman in a foreign land, who has nowhere else she can turn. Tecmessa here employs the language of lament even in advance of Ajax' death, in an attempt to save him and to protect herself and her son.

We may compare Tecmessa's speech with that of Andromache's speech/lament to Hector in *Iliad* 6 (see Foley 1999: 188–98; Dué 2002: 67–81). Like Andromache, Tecmessa uses the language of lament to narrate her life story (contrasting the past with her present circumstances) and to express personal pain. She seeks to influence the actions of Ajax, as she begs him not to abandon her without a protector. Like Andromache's in *Iliad* 6, her speech is not a formal lament for the dead. Ajax is still alive, and Tecmessa's speech is in fact just that – a speech, and not a song. Nevertheless, she makes use of the conventions of lament to give herself a voice and the opportunity to try to dissuade Ajax from killing himself. The chorus pities and even praises Tecmessa for this speech: Αἶας, ἔχειν σ' ἄν οἰκτον ὡς καὶ γὼ φρενὶ / θέλοισι' ἄν· αἰνοίης γὰρ ἄν τὰ τῆσδ' ἔπη (“Ajax, I would wish you to have pity for her even as I do; for then you would praise her words,” ll. 525–6). Just as lament earns approval and pity for Andromache where previous attempts to speak failed (see Euripides' *Andromache* 364 and 421, with Dué 2006: 155), so too Tecmessa recalls that, when she attempted to dissuade Ajax from leaving in the middle of the night on his mission to kill the Greek captains, he dismissed her harshly (ll. 292–4):

And he said to me the familiar saying:
“Woman, silence is the adornment of women.”
I learned my lesson and held my tongue, while he rushed out alone.

Only by using the language of lament do Andromache and Tecmessa earn praise for their speech. Tecmessa's lament, like that of Andromache in the *Iliad*, is nevertheless unsuccessful at the level of the narrative. She does not persuade Ajax, and he does indeed kill himself. But Tecmessa's lament, also like that of the Homeric Andromache, serves a larger purpose by eliciting an emotional response from the audience. By lamenting in this way in anticipation of Ajax's death, she initiates the mourning that is the desired response of Sophocles' audience and may even foreshadow Ajax's suicide. As we will see, Electra's lamentation in the *Electra* has a similar function in that, in the eyes of the audience, it provides emotional justification for the violent acts of revenge that are to come.

5 Sophocles' Lamenting Virgins: *Electra* and *Antigone*

It is a happenstance of transmission that the two primary examples of lamenting women in Sophocles (besides Tecmessa) are actually virgin girls of marriageable age, but not yet married. *Electra* should be married but is being kept from doing so by her mother Clytemnestra, together with Aegisthus; *Antigone* gives up marriage by defying Creon's decree and burying her brother. I am going to center my discussion on the *Electra*, a play that is dominated by the laments of its central character. We will see, however, that many of the interpretive questions raised by an analysis of *Electra*'s lamentation are also relevant to the *Antigone*.

The *Electra* is a notoriously difficult play to interpret, critics being divided over the moral implications of the killing of Clytemnestra. A late play in Sophocles' lengthy career, it was probably produced around same time as Euripides' *Electra* (c. 410 BCE), possibly not long before the *Philoctetes* (409 BCE), and some 30 years or more after *Antigone*. (For the dates of Sophocles' plays, see Scodel 2005: 233–4.) A major factor in the difficulties of interpretation is the fact that we do not know the names or plots of any of the other plays that were produced along with it. Was it the second play of a trilogy, as is the case of Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*? Or were the other plays unrelated in plot, but thematically linked in some way?

Similarly, scholars have not found it easy to understand fully Sophocles' characterization of the central character, *Electra*. Moses Hadas, the editor of *The Complete Plays of Sophocles*, introduces her and the play this way:

Electra herself is the usual oversized and passionate central figure of Sophoclean tragedy, but she has little function but to lament, which she does, as Ismene and the chorus say, beyond measure [...] There is a tearful lament over the ashes of Orestes, which cannot be taken as anything other than a display piece because Orestes himself is standing by [...] Because *Electra* has so large a part it has been suggested that the role was purposefully designed for a particular virtuoso in emotional display. When Polus played the part, at the end of the fourth century B.C., he carried the ashes of his own lately deceased son in the urn to give his lamentation authenticity. (Hadas 1982: 37–8)

As the function of lament in tragedy has come to be better understood in recent years, however, so too has the role of *Electra* in this play been more accurately elucidated by scholars. If *Electra*'s only function is to lament, is it possible that that lament serves an important purpose? Helene Foley in particular has shown the important relationship between *Electra*'s lamentation and the theme of revenge in the play (Foley 2001: 145–71). *Electra* and Orestes each undertake the appropriate actions expected of their gender and age status, thus fulfilling an ancient pattern of vendetta that would have deeply resonated with the Athenian audience. *Electra*'s unceasing song of lament and Orestes' killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus go hand in hand, and it is precisely this relationship that makes *Electra*'s lamentation a speech act. Many characters in the play urge *Electra* to put an end to her laments, but she does not. Her lamentation is incomplete until Orestes acts. An analysis of *Electra* as a lamenting woman does not solve all the interpretive questions of this play, but it does put us in a stronger position than critics were in the 1960s and early 1970s, before much anthropological study of lament had been done.

First, we can now say that when Electra uses the genre of lament to express her sorrows and to narrate the history of her family, she is doing so in a traditional medium – the one medium in which it was sanctioned for women to speak in this way. Not all of Electra’s words can be classified as laments; like many women in tragedy, she frequently speaks in assertive, masculine ways and adapts to changing circumstances. But much of her speech does clearly draw on the form and themes of lament, including her opening exchange with the chorus (ll. 86–327) and several other examples discussed below. Indeed, her first words, heard by Orestes and Pylades while she is still within the house, are Ἴὼ μοί μοι δῶσθηνος (“Oh me, me, the wretch!”). Such exclamations – *tsakismata*, which I have linked in other work to the refrains of both ancient and modern Greek laments – are very likely a realistic re-enactment of the cries of grief expressed in lament by actual women – hence outside of Greek literature (see Dué 2006: 158–60). How would Electra’s off-stage cry have affected an ancient audience? I would argue that Electra is being set up for her entrance, and that her entrance song is a lament, with all of the emotional force that such a song would have brought with it for a culture where grief, from the ritual of the funeral down to ordinary life, was most traditionally expressed in song.

If we look at Electra’s initial song (ll. 86–120), though it is compressed, we find that it has a traditional three-part structure and displays imagery and themes that other scholars have found to be typical of Greek lament:

O you pure sunlight, and you air, light’s equal partner over earth, how often have you heard the chords of my laments and the thudding blows against this bloodied breast at the time of gloomy night’s leaving off!

My accursed bed in that house of suffering there knows well already how I observe my night-long rites – how often I bewail my miserable father, whom bloody Ares did not welcome with deadly gifts in a foreign land, but my mother and her bedfellow Aegisthus split his head with murderous axe, just as woodmen chop an oak. And for this crime no pitying cry bursts from any lips but mine, when you, Father, have died a death so cruel and so deserving of pity! But never will I end from cries and bitter lamentation, while I look on the stars’ glistening flashes or on this light of day. No, like the nightingale, slayer of her offspring, I will wail without ceasing, and cry aloud to all here at the doors of my father.

O House of Hades and Persephone! O Hermes of the shades! O potent Curse, and you fearsome daughters of the gods, the Erinyes, who take note when a life is unjustly taken, when a marriage-bed is thievishly dishonored, come, help me, bring vengeance for the murder of my father and send me my brother. I no longer have the strength to hold up alone against the load of grief that crushes me. (Translated after Jebb 1894)

Electra begins by addressing the daylight, to whom she frequently pours out her heart. (Other women in tragedy speak of lamenting to the open sky in this way; cf. E. *Andr.* 91–3 and *Med.* 44–5. Sophocles’ Deianeira confides her laments to her marriage bed.) Electra then goes on to narrate the history that has brought her to this point, the ignoble death of her father at the hands of her mother and Aegisthus. Typically, Greek laments conclude with a renewed address, accompanied by further lamentation. Here Electra concludes by calling, not on the sky, but rather on the gods of the underworld – Hades, Persephone, and Hermes of the Shades.

Two images in this brief song stand out. Both the dead warrior/hero as a fallen tree and the mourner as the nightingale are among the most common metaphors of the Greek lament tradition. Both images are featured prominently in epic in the context of lament or in descriptions of the death of warriors (e.g. *Il.* 17.53–60 and *Il.* 18.55–7; and see Dué

2006: 66–7). Modern Greek laments today still make such comparisons (Alexiou 1974: 198–201; Danforth 1982: 96–9; Sultan 1999: 70–1). The nightingale is the prototypical figure of lament; in Greek myth Procne was transformed into a nightingale after killing her son Itylus in revenge for her husband's rape of her sister (see Loraux 1998: 55–65; Dué 2002: 107–8, 2005, 2006: 140–3). In the *Odyssey*, Penelope compares her own endless song of lament to that of the nightingale (*Odyssey* 19.513–22). Electra shares with Penelope and Procne an extraordinary capacity for lament, and the experience of pain and sorrow that lament brings with it (Foley 2001: 156–7). In the ensuing exchange with the chorus, Electra expresses admiration for Niobe (149–52), the paradigmatic image of lament in epic (see *Il.* 24.601–20 with Dué 2002: 108–9 and Dué 2006: 160–1).

There are several other elements in Electra's song that are common to the lament tradition. First, is the emphasis on her personal pain. Lamenting women use the sanctioned speech of lament to speak out about what they have suffered in their lives and about the suffering that the death will cause them in the future. Michael Herzfeld (1993) has noted that, by voicing this pain before the community, a woman who might otherwise be marginalized by the death of a husband or father or brother can gain the protection and support of that community. Helene Foley has demonstrated that, while Electra begins her lament alone, over the course of the play "the chorus begins to share the heroine's grief and enters into an active conspiracy with Electra [...] The play reconstitutes for the isolated Electra a chorus that, despite occasional criticisms and calls to moderation, hears and responds to her lament in a traditional fashion and becomes fully identified with the heroine" (Foley 2001: 157).

The entire entrance song of the chorus, moreover, may be likened to an antiphonal exchange between chief mourner and surrounding women (on the antiphonal refrain of Greek laments, see Alexiou 1974: 131–60; Caraveli-Chavez 1978; Tsagalis 2004: 48–50). The chorus of this play consists of women from Mycenae. At times, the chorus seems to be encouraging her not to lament, but at the same time they seem to be offering the traditional support of family members. Electra calls them "dear kinswomen" (φιλία γενέθλα, l. 226) and "my comforters" (παράγοροι, l. 229). The extended exchange between Electra and the chorus picks up many of the themes of Electra's initial song. Throughout, Electra emphasizes the pain *she* has endured as a result of her father's death, narrating her life in the first person, as is typical of Greek women's laments. She says that she is unwed and childless (164–5), that she has been abandoned by her father and brother and is totally alone, no better than a slave (187–92).

Second, we find in the passage I have been discussing – and in the play as a whole – a close relationship between the pain of the lamenting woman and the desire for revenge. We have noted already Foley's thesis that Electra's role is most fully understood within a system of vendetta. Foley writes:

Electra practices through her aggressive lamentation what I shall call an ethics of vendetta. Lamentation has a particular function to play in the jural system of cultures that practice feuds or vendetta justice; it aims to provoke revenge through the awakening of shared pain, through the blurring of boundaries between past and present injustice, between the living and the dead. In a fashion traditional both in ancient and modern Greek culture, Electra keeps alive the cause of the dead Agamemnon, and awakens the citizens' longing for the return of Orestes. (Foley 2001: 151)

Electra here closes her song by calling on the Furies and asking them to send an avenger, specifically her brother Orestes. A number of scholars have posited that Electra herself

is characterized as a Fury in this play, much as the Trojan women who lament at the tomb of Agamemnon in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* become the terrifying, vengeful Erinyes of the *Eumenides* (see especially Winnington-Ingram 1954–5; on the Furies of the *Oresteia*, see especially Holst-Warhaft 1992: 135–56 and Ferrari 1997, as well as Dué 2005). The opening choral passage of the play ends with these words by Electra (245–50):

For if the dead is to lie a wretch,
merely dust and nothingness,
while his slayers do not
pay back to him blood for blood in penalty,
then shame and reverence will vanish
from all humanity. (Translated after Jebb 1894)

Thus, we find Electra invoking here an ancient pattern that has been well documented in Mediterranean societies and particularly well studied in modern Greece. The emotions inspired by lament incite the desire for revenge and initiate a vendetta pattern, as exemplified by the events of the *Oresteia*. In that trilogy the pattern is only stopped by the institution of the first trial by jury in Athens.

In the *Electra* many characters urge Electra not to lament. Chrysothemis reports that Aegisthus and Clytemnestra plan to bury her alive in a cavern if she will not stop lamenting (ll. 379–82). The resemblance to the case of Antigone is striking. Everyone tries to convince Electra that her laments have no purpose. But why do they do so? What do they fear? Upon hearing Chrysothemis' dream and Electra's instructions to her for what to do at Agamemnon's tomb in response, the chorus sings a song about the coming of Justice in the form of an Erinyes: "She will come, she of many hands and many feet who lurks in her terrible ambush, the bronze-shod Erinyes" (489–91, translated after Jebb 1894). Electra's laments *do* have a purpose. As in the *Oresteia*, lament summons vengeance.

Where the *Electra* differs from the *Libation Bearers* in its use of this pattern is in the plot device of Orestes' faked death. The audience knows from the beginning that Orestes is in fact alive, but for a brief period of time Electra, together with her mother, believes him dead. Her words immediately upon hearing the report of the messenger and her subsequent exchange with the chorus echo several of the speeches/songs we have already considered, including those of Andromache, Tecmessa, Ajax, and Medea:

Ah, miserable me!
Dearest Orestes, how your death has destroyed me!
For your passing has torn from my heart
the only hopes which still were mine:
that you would live to return some day as the avenger of our father,
and also of me in my misery. But now, where shall I turn?
I am alone, cheated of you,
as of my father. Hereafter I must be a slave again
among those I most hate,
my father's murderers. Am I not in a fine way?
But at least in the time remaining me
I will never enter the house to dwell with them.
No, lying down at these gates,

without a friend, I shall wither away my days.
 Therefore, if anyone in the house be angry, let him kill me.
 It is a favor, if I die,
 but a pain, if I live. I long for life no more. (Translated after Jebb 1894)

Like traditional Greek laments for the dead, Electra's song contains an address to the dead, a narrative about the situation of the lamenting woman, rhetorical questions that highlight the lamenting woman's lack of resources, and a longing for death. As in the first passage from the play we examined, Electra's lament is followed by a long antiphonal exchange with the chorus. Next, Orestes appears, and at this point Electra performs another famous lament, holding an urn that she believes contains the ashes of Orestes (ll. 1126–59). The song is remarkable in that it most closely resembles a mother's lament for her child. Electra narrates her lost toil in caring for Orestes and in rescuing him and contrasts her hopes for him with his pitiful death. She concludes by describing her own bereft state now that he is gone.

As we have seen, scholars have interpreted these laments as the creation of Sophocles for a virtuoso soloist. But what purpose do they serve within the drama, given the audience's knowledge that Orestes is alive and well? Kitzinger (1991) has argued that this unnecessary lamentation for the very much alive Orestes points to the falseness of the justice that Orestes and Electra enact. I do not read it this way. In the *Ajax* we saw that Tecmessa's lament, while ineffective as a method of persuasion in that it does not convince Ajax not to kill himself, serves to rouse the emotions of the audience, in anticipation of Ajax's death. Electra's lamentation, which is very real for her on an emotional level, plays an even more crucial role than Tecmessa's in the emotional dynamic of the drama. It prepares the audience for the matricide to come by drawing them into her grief and suffering.

For far more controversial than the traditionality of Electra's speech in this play is the moral coloring we attribute to it – and the actions that are initiated by this lament. I am in agreement with many scholars in feeling that the morality or amorality of the matricide is perhaps not one of the central questions of Sophocles' play; at any rate, the play is complicated in its presentation of the concept of justice (see e.g. Blundell 1989: 149–83). But the fundamental paradox of achieving justice by way of matricide was at the heart of the *Oresteia*; it was solvable only through the creation of the court system; and even this, its first case, ends in a tie that has to be decided by Athena. In Euripides' *Electra* matricide is explicitly condemned as a paradox: “She has met with justice, but you did not do just things” (δικαία μὲν νῦν ἦδ' ἔχει, σὺ δ' οὐχὶ δρᾶς, l. 1244). Sophocles must have wrestled with this same paradox in considering how to present this myth.

Yet, as I noted above, Foley's work on the play makes a strong argument that, for an ancient audience, Electra behaves in accordance with deeply rooted expectations related to her gender and unmarried status. She is *obligated* to lament her father and to call for vengeance. Orestes, likewise, must take that vengeance. The need for vengeance is so strong that, when Electra believes Orestes to be dead, with no male left to avenge her father's death, she proposes to take the revenge herself. Foley has argued, on the basis of modern anthropological studies, that this, too, would have been expected of Electra in a vendetta culture (2001: 161). In 2008 a *New York Times* article profiled an Albanian woman who effectively became a male when her father was killed, approximately sixty years ago. Her brothers had all died or were in jail. She became a “sworn virgin,” has worn men's clothing ever since, and can even pray in mosques with men. She is treated as the male head of the household.

Being the man of the house also made her responsible for avenging her father's death, she said. When her father's killer, by then 80, was released from prison five years ago, Ms. Keqi said, her 15-year-old nephew shot him dead. Then the man's family took revenge and killed her nephew. "I always dreamed of avenging my father's death," she said. "Of course, I have regrets; my nephew was killed. But if you kill me, I have to kill you." (Bilefsky 2008)

When Orestes returns, the audience – fifth-century BCE Athenians, who had a sophisticated court system of justice – is ready for the killings that are to come.

It is difficult to say more without knowing more about the other plays with which this play was composed and produced. If we are to interpret the play as a unity in and of itself, however, I am inclined to side with scholars who see Sophocles' aim as being to depict the actions of Electra and Orestes in as natural and straightforward a way as possible. The "tragedy" of the action, in which siblings feel compelled to murder their mother, and the emotions depicted in each of the main characters – from Clytemnestra's simultaneous relief and grief upon hearing that Orestes is dead, through Electra's tearful lament for brother, still alive, to Orestes' uncomplicated desire for revenge – rouses sufficient fear and pity to require no further judgment. Electra's lamentation makes it possible for the progression of events to feel natural.

Electra's laments are not empty wailing or useless words, they have power. That power, I argue, exists both on the inside of the play and on the outside of it. They are perceived by characters within the play to have the power to summon Orestes and, by extension, the murderous vengeance that he enacts. They make Electra, some would argue, the equivalent of a Fury. Her laments are what brings justice for the death of Agamemnon. For the audience, Electra's laments elicit the sorrow and anger that allow the deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus to be satisfying and necessary, even at the high cost of matricide. Our awareness that there will be serious consequences for this vengeance does not diminish the power of this drama to evoke these primal feelings.

If we turn now to think about Antigone, we can say that she, too, uses lament within her prescribed gender role to powerful effect, although there are only two places in the play where she can be said to lament, and the first of these is reported only in the third person. Antigone's insistence on her brother's burial, in express defiance of a decree issued by Creon, Thebes' new ruler, puts her squarely at the center of a controversy that, as we have seen, had important echoes outside of the play, namely the battle over the right of women to lament in public and, more generally, to control funeral ritual (Holst-Warhaft 1992: 161–6; Segal 1995: 119–37; Foley 2001: 172–200). Charles Segal has written of the *Antigone's* dramatization of the conflict between the powerful pull of ancient, female mourning traditions and the attempts by the Athenian state to establish austere, public forms of commemoration. He argues that the play dramatizes a failure on the part of the male authority of the *polis* of Thebes to contain the disorder and violence of female lament and to assert its own controlled rituals of mourning. In light of this work, I will conclude this brief overview of the topic of lament as speech act in Sophocles by simply pointing out some of the many points of contact between my discussion of Sophocles' *Electra* and the *Antigone*, a play produced as many as three decades earlier.

First, like Electra, Antigone sees it as her duty to lament her brother. As the oldest daughter in a family with no mother or remaining sons, she is obligated to perform the funeral rituals, which include lament (Foley 2001: 179). Although the account is given by a male witness (ll. 422–31), we can clearly see ritual lament being described:

When, after a long while, this storm had passed,
 the girl was seen, and she wailed aloud
 with the sharp cry of a grieving bird, as when inside her empty
 nest she sees the bed stripped of its nestlings.
 So she, too, when she saw the corpse bare,
 broke into a cry of lamentation and with harsh curses
 cursed those who had done it.
 Immediately she took thirsty dust in her hands,
 and from a pitcher of beaten bronze held high
 she crowned the dead with thrice-poured libations. (Translated after Jebb 1891)

Antigone's wailing is compared to that of a mother-bird who has lost her young. This itself is one of the most pervasive metaphors of Greek laments, as I have explored with reference to the *Iliad* and the plays of Euripides (Dué 1995). The comparison here is highly suggestive, given the much discussed passage, later on in the play (ll. 909–12), in which Antigone says that she values her brother more highly than she would a husband or children, whom she could replace. The simile of the mother-bird is, very likely, a traditional one in Greek women's laments for the loss of children. In Euripides' *Hecuba*, Hecuba's daughter Polyxena compares herself to a frightened bird when Hecuba first calls her out onto the stage in order to tell her of her fate (*Hec.* 178–9). In the *Trojan Women*, Andromache compares Astyanax to a young bird trying to hide under her wings when Talthylbius comes to announce the decision to kill him (*Tr.* 750–1). In Hecuba's opening monody of that play Hecuba says that she will lead off the song of mourning for Troy, and she compares herself to a mother-bird screaming over her lost young: μάτηρ δ' ὡσεὶ τις πτανοῖς/ὄρνισιν, ὅπως ἐξάρξω ἄγῳ/κλαγγάν, μολπᾶν ("Like some mother-bird that over her fledglings screams, so I will lead off the shout, the song and dance," *Tr.* 146–8; cf. Euripides' *HF* 71–2 and 1039–41 and, for the mother-bird imagery in the *Oresteia*, see Dué 1995). Like Electra, Antigone mourns her brother as a mother would mourn her child.

Antigone's lament is action, just as much as her sprinkling of the dust over her brother's corpse is (Segal 1995: 120). In performing it, she knowingly chooses the punishment of death. In this way Antigone, like Polyxena in Euripides' *Hecuba*, attempts to choose her manner of death and thereby to define her own legacy. And, while we are not allowed to hear the words of her lament for Polyneices, we do hear the words she sings and speaks of herself as she approaches imprisonment and death (ll. 806–943). Antigone laments herself in an antiphonal exchange with the chorus, in the tradition of the young person who dies before marriage. Throughout she emphasizes the marriage she is giving up and the fact that the only wedding she will have will be in Hades (ll. 810–15, 869–71, 876, 891, 916–18). Her solo lament at 891–928 begins with her addressing her own tomb as a marriage chamber (ὦ τύμβος, ὦ νυμφεῖον, l. 891). Antigone's words are effective. The messenger speech uses the same language to describe the cavern in which Antigone is left to die; he calls it "Hades' hollow bridal chamber" (νυμφεῖον Ἄιδου κοῖλον, l. 1205). Antigone's bridegroom to be, Haemon, is of course Creon's own son. When he kills himself upon finding her dead, he is said, like Antigone, to find marriage only in Hades (τὰ νυμφικὰ/τέλη λαχῶν δειλαιος εἰν Ἄιδου δόμοις, ll. 1240–1).

Antigone's lament in anticipation of her own death follows the structure of laments for the dead outlined throughout this chapter. As we have seen, she begins by addressing her own tomb. She then narrates the past – how she washed and prepared the

corpses of her father, mother, and brother for burial and poured libations at their tombs. Next, she addresses the dead Polyneices directly, telling him that these actions have now caused the punishment of death she is to receive. (We may compare how Tecmessa and Andromache, in anticipation of the deaths of Ajax and Hektor, narrate the danger they will be left in if Ajax and Hector die. In *Iliad* 22 and 24, Andromache details the wretched fate to which Hector's death has consigned Astyanax, herself, and all the women of Troy.) At the climax of Antigone's lament come the accusation of abandonment and the rhetorical questions that, we can now see, are an essential component of laments for the dead (ll. 916–23):

And now Creon leads me thus in his hands' strong grasp,
when I have enjoyed no marriage bed or bridal song
and have not received any portion of marriage or the nurture of children.
But like this, deserted by friends, in misery
I go living to the hollow graves of the dead.
What law of the gods have I transgressed?
Why should I look to the gods anymore?
What ally should I call out to? (Translated after Jebb 1891)

Through her lament, Antigone establishes the narrative of her death and constructs the memory of her that will be left behind in Thebes. Indeed, the chorus tells her from the outset that she is going in glory and with praise, by her own law (κλεινή καὶ ἔπαινον ἔχουσ' [...] αὐτόνομος, ll. 817–21). After she is led away, the chorus performs a choral ode (ll. 944–87) that tells tales from the mythic past of marriages gone wrong, imprisonments, and the vengeance of the gods against those who deny their power. Most significant perhaps is Dryas, who “sought to quell the god-inspired women and the Bacchanalian fire” and was imprisoned by Dionysus (ll. 955–65). Through mythic precedent the chorus reveals that Creon has made a mistake in attempting to stop the funeral rites of women, which are authorized by the gods.

As I noted above, Charles Segal has argued that the *Antigone* as a whole explores the conflict between male, state-sponsored and controlled forms of commemoration and mourning and the emotional violence and disorder of female lamentation. After the death of Haemon, “the Theban elders of the chorus attempt to move their mourning away from the female lament, with its immersion in the pure grief of loss, toward a masculine and civic effacement of death's sorrow in civic ‘glory’; but the voice of maternal sorrow, like Antigone's voice earlier (ll. 423–7), proves the more powerful” (Segal 1995: 121). Before the *polis* can even begin to commemorate Haemon, Creon and the Theban elders are interrupted with the news of Eurydice's suicide. Like Antigone's first lament of the play, Eurydice's laments for Haemon before her death are reported only in the third person (ll. 1301–5). They are replaced by the lamentation of Creon himself, whose antiphonal exchange with the chorus concludes the play (ll. 1283–353).

For an ancient audience, the sights and sounds of Creon employing the traditional form of lament to mourn his wife and son at the culmination of the play would have been deeply moving. What he tried so desperately to suppress has proved to be more powerful than his political authority. Like Electra, Antigone and Eurydice have asserted their right to speak through lament and their power to act by means of the violence that lament engenders.

Guide to Further Reading

The work of Margaret Alexiou on Greek ritual lament has been expanded upon by such scholars as Vermeule (1979), Holst-Warhaft (1992), Sultan (1993), Derderian (2001), Dué (2002 and 2006), and Tsagalis (2004) for ancient laments, and by Danforth (1982), Caraveli (1986), Dubisch (1986), Seremetakis (1990 and 1991), and Alexiou (2001) for continuity in modern communities. A recent bibliography on lament can be found in Roilos and Yatromanolakis (2002). On the various kinds of women's speech in Greek tragedy, see McClure (1999) and Lardinois and McClure (2001). On women's experience of marriage in Sophoclean tragedy, see Ormand (1999). On the concept of revenge in Athenian tragedy, see Blundell (1989), Mossman (1995), and Burnett (1998).

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PART IV

**Sophocles and Fifth-Century
Political, Religious, and
Intellectual Thought**

Sophocles and Class

Peter W. Rose

1 Introduction

I will focus on the ideological import of class in Sophocles' plays, by examining in some detail only two of his dramas and by offering only schematic suggestions about the rest. As products of a state-supported institution aimed at the very least at the entire adult male citizenry (Henderson 1991; Goldhill 1997), Athenian tragedies clearly did – despite the distancing mechanism of plots set in the Mycenaean era (Easterling 1984) – explore political, social, and religious matters of concern to their audience and offered a distinctive perspective on the issues with which they engaged.

The whole problem of whether, and/or in what sense, Athenian tragedy was “didactic” (Cartledge 1997; Goldhill 2000; Croally 2005) and “political,” and its relation to democracy, to ritual in general (Easterling 1993), and to specific elements in the Panathenaia (Goldhill 1990, 2000; Winkler 1990) – even the extent to which it was specifically Athenian (Rhodes 2003) – has been subject to heated debate. One unfortunate consequence of these debates is the tendency to aim at generalizations applicable to all three major tragedians. Acknowledging that the whole range of conditions of possibility for tragic composition and presentation entails fundamental constraints as well as incitements for specific artists does not preclude examining their significantly different responses. Not only the reality of formal competition, but chronology, too, play key roles: Sophocles begins composing in an ideological arena already heavily shaped by Aeschylus' successes. Most of Sophocles' and Euripides' careers overlapped: the pressure to differentiate artistic productions in an explicitly competitive arena deserves perhaps as much weight as the reality of shared artistic constraints. To echo Marx's famous dictum about history, poets make poems, but not just as they please; they do not make them under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past (see *MECW* 11: 103). The three dramatists differ sharply in their dealings with issues of class.

What do I mean by “class”? While scholars treating many aspects of fifth-century Greece almost inevitably speak of “aristocrats” or “elites,” occasionally of “peasants” or “small farmers,” and sometimes of “slaves,” the concept of class and the corresponding relationships between these categories are rarely theorized. Without a clear notion of class and class conflict on the ideological plane, the temptation to assume a homogenized civic or *polis* ideology is hard to resist (e.g. Sourvinou-Inwood 1989; Goldhill 1990).

To be sure, an adequately nuanced definition of class and class ideology might well require more space than my entire little allotment: my definition of class relies on the Marxist focus on ownership of the means of production and on the capacity of some members of society to exploit the labor of others and to control substantially the economic surplus created by that society. In a predominantly agricultural society the primary means of production is agricultural land. Moreover, those who obtained great wealth by other means tended to transform that wealth into landed property and/or to adopt the values of the dominant elite. I will cite only two sources for designating what functioned as the dominant class in fifth-century Athens. Lin Foxhall (1992: 155), relying primarily on fourth-century evidence, has concluded that “nearly half of the land available in classical Attika for agrarian exploitation was owned and/or controlled by around 9% of the population (a wealthy elite), despite the undoubted existence of a range of smaller-scale, land-owning farmers.” John Davies (1971) made a massive study of all the evidence he could find for the performance of “liturgies” – services to the *polis* paid for by the richest citizens. He concludes:

it looks as if there was at any one time a virtual identity in size and composition between the class of men who performed the agonistic or festival liturgies and the class that performed the trierarchy; from both points of view it comprised a group of about 300 men. This is 1% of the standard fifth-century figure of 30,000 for the male citizen population of Athens. (Davies 1981: 27)

Thus, we may posit the numerical proportion of this economically dominant group as somewhere between 1 and 9 percent of the total citizen population.

One can point to the known holders of major offices such as those of general (*strategos*) and treasurer of the empire – both offices held by Sophocles (Jouanna 2007: 27–32) – to make the case that, perhaps down to at least the death of Pericles in 429 BCE, the leadership of the democracy was drawn exclusively from this class. But it is always a mistake to infer a specific individual’s class values and commitments from her or his class origin. At the same time there is every reason to assume that class tensions existed between this dominant class and the majority of middling to poor farmers and other fractions of the citizenry, such as the craftspeople. Plato and Aristotle refer repeatedly to conflicts between “rich” and “poor,” as indeed does the “Old Oligarch” (that is, Pseudo-Xenophon’s *Constitution of the Athenians*). Indeed, any Marxist account of classes insists “they must always be apprehended relationally” (F. Jameson 1981: 83). Direct exploitation of a very substantial slave population by both large and small landowners is a given in classical Athens, but the degree to which the “free” majority was economically exploited by the rich minority is open to question (e.g. Wood 1989). What seems to be an indisputable fact is that the amount of labor required in relatively short periods of the agricultural year makes an entirely slave labor force quite impractical even for the richest landowners, so inference of at least short-term hired labor seems inescapable (M. Jameson 1977–8: 132). Finally, the wealth extraction

of the empire depended on the life-threatening labor of Athens' sailors, the poorest free citizens – a fraction that appears, understandably, to have been particularly conscious of its political interests (see the Old Oligarch).

The concept of ideology, closely related to class, is likewise rarely theorized within a framework of class in general and of the relation of ideology to class. Marx theorized the dialectical relationship of the primary economic relations to ideology in the following terms: “a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in short, *ideological* forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out” (*MECW* 29: 263). “Class struggle” over the means of production is thus radically displaced into ideological struggles over issues that are, essentially, “legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic.” Ideology is a highly complex affair. It is inherently shot through with ambiguities and contradiction, precisely because it attempts the simultaneous self-serving legitimation of the privileges of one class and the persuasion of other classes that it represents the whole truth about reality. As Fredric Jameson put it, “ideology is designed to promote the human dignity and clear conscience of a given class at the same time that it discredits its adversaries; indeed, the two operations are one and the same” (F. Jameson 1971: 380). Theodor Adorno is equally succinct: “it is not ideology in itself which is untrue but rather its pretention to correspond to reality” (Adorno 1981: 32). The very fact that ideology is *persuasive* entails conceding, in at least some distorted form, the grievances of the underclass as the precondition to its efforts at containment and promotion of the interests of the dominant class. Moreover, this persuasive function guarantees that ideology, whether successful or not, is by its very nature totally bound up with assumptions and expectations about the consciousness of its target audience. Ideology is, accordingly, shot through with ambiguities and structured silences; but it does have an agenda, a persuasive goal. Ideology in the strong sense of the term arises in the context of a perceived struggle for “hearts and minds” under circumstances where one group is unable or unwilling to impose its views by force; it then seeks, in Gramsci’s terms, to achieve “hegemony” (1971: 57–8) in order to win over its opponents to the conviction that the status quo is either the best imaginable one or that there exists no viable alternative. Moreover, Fredric Jameson introduces the useful concept of the “ideologeme [...] the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes” (F. Jameson 1981: 76). In any given text, different threads or themes of ideological discourse will predominate at any specific historical moment.

Given the persistence of great aristocratic clans like the Alcmaeonidae and the Philaetae (see Davies’ tables, 1971, back folder) and the whole tradition of Athenian *eupatridae* (wealthy families; see Rhodes 1981 on the lost beginning of the peripatetic *Constitution of the Athenians* attributed to Aristotle, and also *IG XII 9.296*), it is clear that a key ideological ground for the self-esteem and public legitimation of this class was the “ideologeme” of *inherited* superiority, reflected in a range of terminology all of which refers to inborn nobility: *agathos* (“noble”), *esthlos* (“noble”), *kalos* (“good, well-born”), *aristos* (“best”), *kalos k’agathos* (“noble and well-born”), *gennaios* (“well-born”), *eugenes* (“well-born”), *phusis* or *phua* in Pindar (“inborn nature”). In general this kinship and begetting terminology is deployed to celebrate clan achievements and to create a corresponding designation for those situated outside this class, as *kakoi* (“bad, base-born”). In a democracy the chief ideological options vis-à-vis this class can be summed up in the figures of Pindar (active until at least to 446 BCE; see *scholion* to

P. 8) and Aeschylus: on the one hand, celebration of what is inherited as best and as alone “authentic” excellence; on the other, critical exploration of the penchant of the great clans to foster arrogance and various forms of anti-social perversion (Rose 1992: 141–265). Apart from this alternative, a third option, articulated by modern scholars and not infrequently attributed to Sophocles, was the metaphorical transformation of the concept of innate nobility as something available in principle to any Athenian citizen, regardless of his actual class origins. This option, I would argue, is not necessarily as progressive or “innocent” as it might appear.

There are three obvious areas where we may look for indications of class in Sophocles: first and most clearly, the representation of protagonists drawn from “heroic” myth and from the ruling element in the Mycenaean world, which is the source of the vast majority of Greek tragic stories and of all the surviving Sophoclean plays; second, the representation of the chorus – whose members may be characterized as themselves part of the elite or as “ordinary” citizens – and of the interactions of the protagonists with the chorus; finally, the marked non-elite characters – guards, messengers, the rare slave – whose interactions with the protagonists are potentially revealing of class ideology in the plays. At the same time the degree to which any ideological construct succeeds in its primarily persuasive function – and Sophocles was eminently successful – depends on deployment of its chosen means of persuasion. In the case of tragedy, this entails most obviously organization of plot, construction of character, diction, imagery, and meter (see Aristotle’s *Poetics*). With Sophocles, as suggested above, the conditions of possibility of his art entail not only all the specificities of the state-supported theatrical contests and associated rituals, but the massive heritage of Aeschylus, where, few would deny, meditations on class and class conflict play a central role. As Goldhill has rightly declared (Goldhill 2000: 34), Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* “sets the agenda for all of Greek tragedy’s subsequent engagement with the polis.” In looking at the evidence for the role of class in these plays, I will leave to others the potential impact of the ritual context and apply a Marxist ideological critique that is primarily philological in method (cf. Taplin 2009: 473–4).

As Knox long ago (Knox 1964) demonstrated more compellingly than any other scholar, Sophoclean protagonists adhere, in key respects and to a striking degree, to a specific “heroic” pattern. Focusing closely on the actual language of the plays, Knox cites quasi-formulaic attributes: the hero’s/heroine’s decision is “always announced in emphatic, uncompromising terms” (10); “this heroic resolve [...] is nevertheless put to the test” by “the appeal of those who have claims on his affection” (11–12); but beyond this is “an appeal, not to emotion, but to reason” (12); “the method of rational argument is persuasion” (13); but the heroes “refuse persuasion” (14); and, although friends and enemies alike believe that the hero/heroine needs “to learn” (15), s/he refuses to “yield” (15–16) and “will not listen” (18); the hero/heroine is hard on those who attempt this persuasion, which “provokes their anger” (19–21); this anger is perceived by others as “thoughtless, ill-counselled” (21). This heroic type adheres consistently to what Dodds dubbed, with reference to Homer, a “shame-culture” ethic: s/he is obsessed with honor (*time*) and with a “glorious reputation” (*kleos*). The laughter of enemies is the worst imaginable “disgrace” (*aischron*), and avoiding disgrace and seeking or preserving “glory” are matters worth dying for. Though a concern for “justice” (*dike, to dikaion*) is, terminologically at least, a post-Homeric addition to this code, by the fifth century it was an integral part of it. On the other hand, the hero’s/heroine’s relationship to the gods seems to be a variable function of the specific plots: theologically distressing as this may be to some critics, Sophocles seems quite comfortable presenting several of

his heroes as essentially innocent victims of perverse gods and others, or the same heroes as validated by gods who endorse the “justice” and “piety” (*eusebeia*) of the heroes. I would argue that this perfectly reflects a deep ambivalence manifested in most of Greek literature, especially in the fifth century.

Though Knox does, in general terms, speak of the hero remaining “true to himself, to his *physis*, that ‘nature’ which he inherited from his parents and which is his identity” (1964: 8), about the heroes’ conceptions of themselves he declares that “these conceptions *vary* from one hero to another.” Among these conceptions he cites “the claims of noble birth” (29), but he does not subject the language of *eugeneia* or *physis* and the related heavy use of forms of the verb *phuein* to the same rigorous philological examination that he applies in spelling out the other factors, which unite at least six of those he dubs heroes or heroines. Yet I will try to demonstrate that it is precisely in Sophocles’ relentless and pervasive recourse to heavily aristocratic terminology – terminology so often ignored, even by scholars who claim fully to historicize their readings (e.g. Sourvinou-Inwood 1989), or mystified by translators – that his plays strikingly demand some account of the implicit conception of class. Heavy engagement with aristocratic terminology cannot be unproblematically compatible with inviting democratic Athens to see itself in such heroes. Indeed, critics’ hypostatization of the term “hero” – rarely used of Aeschylean or Euripidean protagonists – contributes to the mystification of the Sophoclean protagonist’s specific social, political, and economic role in the society envisioned in the play. How Sophocles was able to represent these “aristocrats,” and the precise senses in which this language of class is nuanced in his texts, is the chief problem I pose for myself in this text. Moreover, what is often left “open” in so many treatments of Sophocles that emphasize “ambiguity and tension” (e.g. Segal 1981), “a plurality of perspectives” (Foley 1995: 143), “the ‘unsettling, questioning process’” (Goldhill 1986: 161), or “a questioning of the terms of that civic discourse” (Goldhill 1990: 126), as if these constituted the chief goal of the tragedian, is the extent to which the *movement* of the plot – often by blatantly manipulative means – validates the heroic types as specifically worthy of the subordination of “lesser” figures. Friis Johansen 1962: 152), echoed by Winnington-Ingram (1980: 9), long ago suggested that scholarly treatments of Sophocles could be divided between hero-worshippers and pietists – that is, between those who saw the plays as in some sense endorsing/celebrating the “heroic” type and those who saw the burden of the plays in more Aeschylean terms, as a demonstration of the social and political dangerousness of these towering figures. It is precisely this exploitation of “ambiguity” that lies at the heart of what I see as Sophocles’ ideological agenda in exploring class for a specifically democratic audience: accepting the Aeschylean critique of the aristocratic *genos* as the ideological default position, he lures his audience into a reassuring early echoing of this position only to lead it, gradually but relentlessly, to a more positive re-assessment, while the emphasis on the suffering of these protagonists reassures the pious that they are in the right pew.

2 *Ajax*

We encounter strikingly complex interactions of human and divine, and of two radically differentiated heroic types, in the prologue of the *Ajax*. In this context we may easily be tempted to read Athena’s final warning not to speak arrogantly to the gods or take on any airs “if you surpass someone in the [might of] your hand and the depth of your great

wealth" (ll. 127–30) as a straightforward Aeschylean moral condemnation of excessive power and wealth. Such airs might seem to engender a criminal level of arrogance in figures of whom Ajax is the play's central exemplar. Sophocles might thus be seen as offering an ideological reassurance to an audience accustomed to Aeschylean class politics; but the prologue at the same time lays the groundwork for a serious undermining of such a reading of the play's ideological agenda. Athena's gleeful malice, for example, in taunting Ajax – whom she acknowledges to have been outstandingly sensible before his madness (ll. 119–20) – does not easily jibe with a view of her as the embodiment of divine justice (see Podlecki 1980: 53–5). Even the mention of Ajax's tent's position at the most dangerous end of the encampment may remind an audience schooled in the *Iliad* that he is thus parallel to Achilles (*Il.* 11.7–9), while Odysseus holds the safest middle position (*Il.* 11.5–6, cf. 8.222–6).

Though one may readily think of Ajax as a man of surpassing physical strength, the reference to great wealth rings hollow. Central to Sophocles' treatment of the "heroic" types is a stripping away of the social, political, and economic supports that are constitutive of such characters in Aeschylus as Xerxes, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Aegisthus, or Eteocles, each of whom holds supreme political power, has enjoyed massive political subservience in their respective communities and displays the towering confidence associated with unlimited wealth, including the self-serving assumption that the gods are "naturally" on the side of the powerful. In the *Ajax* chief political power is clearly in the hands of the Atreidae (l. 1050), and Odysseus indicates immediately after the fact that "everyone attributes this blame [*sc.* for killing the flocks] to that man [*sc.* Ajax]" (l. 28). Though the issue of democratic voting versus the influence of the Atreidae in the award of the arms is purposely mystified (e.g. ll. 1135–7), it is clear that the entire Greek community is represented as hostile to Ajax. Finally, Athena, the only serious representative of divinity in the play, declares that she has appeared as an "eager guardian/overseer" of Odysseus' "dogged pursuit" of the truth of this charge (ll. 36–7) and through the reported account of the seer Calchas (ll. 756f.) articulates the heavily "Aeschylean" grounds of a long-standing feud with Ajax. Nothing in the elaboration of Ajax's interactions with the chorus, Tecmessa, or his son suggests the trappings of great wealth: rather all the emphasis is on exploring the range of his alienation from society at large, as well as from his family and from the gods.

Many scholars take it as self-evident that Ajax's dismissal of divine aid is clear proof of his criminality or outright madness (e.g. Winnington-Ingram 1980: 40–2). In support of an alternative, specifically fifth-century Athenian understanding of this apparent crime, I would cite not only the notorious comment of Protagoras about the difficulty of knowing anything about the gods (D–K B4), but also Plutarch's direct quotation of Pericles' extremely cautious – indeed circular – declaration in a funeral oration. In that oration, he declares the war dead were "immortal like the gods: for we cannot see the gods [...] but we infer [*tekmaïrometha*] them to be immortal from the honors we pay them and the good things we receive from them, and so it is with those who have given their lives for their country" (Plu. *Per.* 8.6). Strikingly absent here, as in Thucydides' reported funeral oration delivered by Pericles (Th. 2.35–46), is any hint that the heroic achievements of the dead entailed any divine aid. In any case, Teucer's later account of Ajax's most heroic moments (ll. 1272–89) attests to a superiority that owes nothing to divine aid.

It is in the subtlety of the deployment of the idea of inherited excellence that Sophocles displays the greatest sensitivity to, and careful manipulation of, his audience's own ideological commitments and ambivalences. Mark Griffith (1995) has, I believe,

overstated greatly the degree of deference he assumes in poorer Athenian citizens toward their rich and “well-born” fellow-citizens (more or less Davies’ “liturgical class”); but it is plausible that such feelings were at least a potential to be encouraged by those for whom they were advantageous. At one extreme is the fully literal insistence of Ajax on his aristocratic descent from the highest god (“O Zeus, forefather of my forebears,” l. 387), his specific summing up of his life-time achievements by comparison with those of his father, his affirmation of his innate essence – his *phusis* – to his son (l. 549) and his *ethos* (“character”) to Tecmessa (l. 595). His specific embrace of class terminology proclaims the simplicity of his code: “Rather the well-born [*eugenes*] must either nobly [*kalos*] live or nobly [*kalos*] die” (ll. 479–80). The audience has been treated to a full initial display of the capacity for brutality of this figure (ll. 25–6, 55–65, 105–10), but it is significant that his assertions about his specific “nobility” are made in connection with his resolve to die. P. E. Easterling (1984) has emphasized well the subtlety of Tecmessa’s efforts to play on Ajax’s very code of *eugeneia* by outlining its inclusion of loyalty to one’s *philoî* (friends, allies, family) and of gratitude for favors received. Aeschylus seems to associate a macho denigration of women with the criminal aristocratic type: Agamemnon is initially sharply scornful of his wife’s welcome (*Ag.* 914–27), while Eteocles’ ferocious treatment of the female chorus (*Th.* 181f. and *passim*) is the first and clearest sign of his criminal arrogance. Sophocles subtly suggests that Ajax fits the type; then he undermines the suggestion. For all Ajax’s gruffness, his address to his infant son indirectly acknowledges these obligations by emphasizing the role he hopes Teucer will play in protecting his son; he even glances at a role for Tecmessa by telling his son that he will be a “delight to his mother here” (l. 559). At the same time, Ajax’s surprising decision not to kill himself in his tent, surrounded by the hideous evidence of his madness, entails clearly the most philosophically and psychologically – not to mention imagistically – rich meditation in the whole play (Knox 1961). The very magnificence of his language already lifts him above anyone else in the play. Ajax’s acknowledgment of his pity for his wife and son goes some way to countering the distinctly nasty impression conveyed by his brusque response to Tecmessa’s earlier, moving appeal (Ormand 1999: 110–16), while his exploration of the theme of change points to an awareness of a movement of history that runs counter to the survival of his specific class values and his person.

In the latter part of the play it is Teucer who specifically raises the issue of noble birth, but only after Menelaus has referred to Ajax as a “base/wicked” (*kakou*) man, a disobedient “man of the *demos*” (*demoten*; ll. 1071–2). Teucer, initially crushed (l. 980) and exposed to unjust danger (ll. 721–32) through the crime of his greater brother, seems only to reinforce the chorus’ earlier emphasis on the danger of attaching oneself to a scion of the great clans. But he soon comes to represent a key persuasive device that Sophocles will use again – namely the conversion, late in the play, of a distinctly non-heroic character to the hero’s set of values and stand. His initial exploration of his grounds for despair (ll. 1006–24) recapitulates Ajax’s own first explorations of his situation, which were far more eloquent (ll. 394f.). Teucer, pointedly addressing the chorus rather than Menelaus, implicitly links “authentic” nobility with the sort of correct behavior that should function as a model for those who lack it:

Gentlemen, I would never still marvel at a man,
 If one who is nothing with respect to his ancestry errs,
 When those who *seem* to have been *born* [*pephukennai*] *well-born* [*eugeneis*]
 Err in their statements – [speaking] such words as these. (ll. 1093–6)

Teucer's defiance provokes more class-based arrogance from Menelaus, who demonstrates a hoplite's scorn for a member of an auxiliary military force: "It seems the bowman has no small opinion of himself" (*ou smikron phronein*) (l. 1120); but it is Agamemnon who more explicitly expresses a specifically birth-based snobbery:

I mean you – the one [born] from a captive woman.
Surely, if you had been bred from a well-born [*eugenous*] mother,
you would speak towering words and strut on your tip-toes,
when, being nothing, you stood up on behalf of one who is nothing. (ll. 228–31)

Agamemnon proceeds to lump both brothers together as "slaves" (*doulon*, l. 1235).

After having already referred to Ajax as a "nothing," he proceeds to repeat that Ajax is now "nothing, but already a shadow" (l. 1257; see Pi. P. 8.95–6 and Brown 1951) and to accuse Teucer of "acting boldly, committing *hubris*, and speaking from a free mouth (*ka' kseleutherostomeis*)" (l. 1258). He goes on to invoke the language of *phusis* ("inborn nature"):

after learning who you are with respect to innate nature [*phusin*],
Won't you bring some other *free* man here,
Who will speak your case before us?
For when you are speaking, I wouldn't be able to understand you:
For I don't comprehend barbarian speech. (ll. 1259–63)

The net effect of this display of escalating class snobbery and implicit tyrannical scorn for free speech, which Athenians prided themselves on – a scorn that ranges from the "bowman" to "slaves" to "nothings" to "base-born" to "barbarian," all coming from explicitly "Spartan" rulers (l. 1102) – is to discredit a *false* pride of birth that retroactively validates Ajax's claims of innate superiority. His superiority on the battlefield is climactically spelled out by Teucer (ll. 1269–87), emphasizing deeds that, as noted above, are defiantly his own achievement (ll. 764–77) rather than the consequence of the sort of divine favor enjoyed by Odysseus, as illustrated in the prologue. Striking, too, is the implicit "populism" of valorizing, in this context, the "innate" worth of the "bowman," whose close military association with Ajax's great achievements (ll. 1288–90) dramatizes the paternalistic social vision spelled out in the first chorus:

And yet the small [*smikroi*] apart from the great [*megaloi*]
Constitute a slipshod defense of the fortress.
For the little beside the great would be best,
And the great sustained by those who are smaller. (ll. 158–61)

Moreover, under the impact of Ajax's model and of the oppressive "tyrannical" behavior of the "Spartan" Atreidae (l. 1102), Teucer is converted to the "live-or-die nobly" code of his brother, proclaiming the literal nobility of his birth (*aristos eks aristoin duoin*, "best from two best," l. 1304) precisely at the point where he declares that to die in defense of Ajax's burial is for him "noble" (*kalon*; ll. 1310–11).

In this vision "true" nobility is validated by appropriate action, so that Odysseus, earlier vilified as the son of Sisiphus (l. 190), is granted his legitimate birth (l. 1393) as a consequence of his "noble" support for Ajax's burial, who is climactically proclaimed by Odysseus "the single best man of the Argives, as many as came to Troy, except Achilles" (ll. 1340–1), and then by Teucer "this man, the one in all ways good and inferior to none of mortals" (ll. 1415–16). Scholars who stress only the, admittedly substantial, evidence adduced

earlier in the text of negative elements in Ajax's makeup ignore what I have called the "rhetorical" (Rose 1995) structure of the play, the almost courtroom strategy of initially not denying the prosecutor's undeniable negative evidence, only to undermine his case through a relentless build-up of favorable elements and contrasts with far worse characters.

The chorus, as the representative of "ordinary" mortals, does not come off very well. The first instinct of its members, upon learning about the dark side of their dependence on Ajax, is for flight (ll. 245–53). Their identity as sailors (l. 201) seems clearly calculated to "interpellate" most of the audience members as implicitly supporters of Ajax – to interpellate is, in other words, to offer an ideologically loaded version of their identity (Althusser 1971). Their invocation of Salamis (l. 596; cf. l. 135), moreover, clearly calls to mind Ajax's well-known Athenian associations, climactically declared in his final words (l. 861); nonetheless, they are quick to endorse the idea of Ajax's suicide without even recognizing that he is no longer mad (ll. 635–40). Moreover, they are wildly misguided (ll. 693–716) in their reading of Ajax's ambiguous monologue at lines 646f. After the death of Ajax, having been exhorted by Teucer to be brave defenders of the corpse, they curse the "inventor" of warfare, pine for the delights of the wine, flutes, and sex, and again affirm their specifically Athenian identity (ll. 1217–21) in terms calculated to interpellate every sailor in the audience. As such, they are sympathetic in their fears and desires, but only reinforce the message that, while viewed in the light of all that is beyond human control, all humans are, in Odysseus' terms, "nothing but images [...] empty shadow" (ll. 125–6): in the real social, political, and military sphere, men are either "big" or "small" (ll. 154–9). While I am somewhat skeptical of claims for Ajax's literal status as an Athenian "cult-hero" (Burian 1972; see Currie in this volume), Sophocles has clearly used every means to associate Ajax with Athens, despite the fact that his probably most immediate source, Pindar's *Nemean 8* (see Brown 1951) cast him as the very antithesis of Athens.

The play is explicitly a tragedy, in the sense that the limitations and the inevitable passing of Ajax and the aristocratic domination for which he stands are fully acknowledged but heartily lamented. Though not a single martial achievement of Odysseus is alluded to in the play by comparison with earlier sources, the Odyssean alternative of enlightened self-interest, modesty, comfortable subordination to constituted authority, persuasive speech, and flexibility is, to all appearances, given its due. Nonetheless, nostalgia for lost grandeur is palpable. The cumulative ambiguities reassure the audience that Sophocles is not offering a simple validation of everything Aeschylus critiqued about the old aristocracy of birth; at the same time his play strongly implies a paternalistic vision of society – an ideological agenda – that could easily be recognized as compelling in "the age of Pericles."

Sophocles seems to accept that the world dominated by the scions of the great clans was in some fundamental and losing contradiction with the growing power of the demos and to accept that many of the Aeschylean critiques had some basis in reality. Nonetheless, with varying degrees of militancy, he affirms the unique superiority of the best representatives of this class and indicts a society that cannot incorporate them.

3 *Antigone*

Virtually every reading of this play describes Antigone as in some sense representative of the "family" and directed towards an audience whose humblest members are as likely to have strong feelings about family ties as the wealthiest scions of the great clans. Knox's reading had the great virtue of stressing the specifically *aristocratic* aspect of Antigone's embrace of "family" values. Within the fifth-century context, the very strategy of a

female protagonist represents a “naturalization” of a focus that in fact overlaps gender with class. I believe the best gloss on what is at stake in this valorization of the family is Winnington-Ingram’s reading of Aeschylus’ *Septem contra Thebas* (*Seven against Thebes*), a play – a whole trilogy, of which the *Septem* was the climax – that I believe was very much in Sophocles’ mind as he composed the *Antigone* (as well as the *Oedipus Tyrannus*):

If Aeschylus dramatized the salvation of a city which had been endangered by a *genos*, he could have had in mind a political process which had been carried out in his own lifetime. It had been a result, if not a purpose, of the constitutional reforms of Cleisthenes to disembar-rass the political life of the city-state from the dangerous influence of the *gene*, the clans, with their loyalties and rivalries and feuds. The clans were an archaic element in the body-politic, deeply rooted in an earlier world and in its standards of value, inimical to the order of the *polis* and menacing its security. (Winnington-Ingram 1977: 43)

It is precisely this assault on the aristocratic *genos* that Sophocles seems to assume is the default ideological predisposition of most of his audience, and that he sets out to subvert, transform, or at least call into question. The harshness of Antigone in the prologue, her own invocation of the sufferings of her family line rather than their crimes as in Aeschylus (*Th.* 734–57) invite the audience – as Athena’s speech did at the end of the prologue in the *Ajax* – to anticipate an Aeschylean moral tale of aristocratic excess and yet another lesson in the virtues of moderation. Not only is the special tragic fate of the family line evoked in Antigone’s opening lines – in which she presents the sufferings of its members as a direct imposition from Zeus – but the language of inherited excellence is both valorized by Antigone and subjected to a sharp distinction as she invites Ismene to join her in burying Polyneices:

This is the situation for you, and you will demonstrate quickly
Whether you are noble [*eugenes*] by virtue of your birth [*pephukas*] or born base
from noble parents. (ll. 37–8)

Thus, as in the *Ajax*, the dynamics of the action are played out in terms of the ambiguities of *eugeneia*, noble birth. To this invocation of inherited nobility Ismene opposes not only a focus on the two sisters’ “natural” weakness as women in a male-dominated society, but a pointed reminder of the sins/errors Oedipus had himself discovered, his self-punishment, their mother’s suicide, and their brothers’ slaughtering each other (ll. 49–56) – not, on the face of it, a heritage to be proud of.

The chorus expresses its eagerness to put the war behind it in its entrance song (ll. 148–54), but is unenthusiastic in its response to Creon’s harsh decree (ll. 211–16). For all its distress at the arrest of Antigone, however, the chorus is quite ready to interpret her behavior in Aeschylean terms, as *inherited* folly:

I am of two minds – whether this is a monstrous sign sent by heaven.
But how, since I know [it’s she], shall I say in opposition that
This child here is not Antigone?
Ah, poor wretch and [daughter] of a wretched
Father Oidipous,
What in the world is this? Surely, I hope, they are not leading you off,
As one disobedient to the kingly laws,
Having caught you in *folly*? (ll. 376–83)

Once Creon has cross-examined her and she has expressed her total defiance of his authority, their comment appears like pure Aeschylean moralizing: “She displays [that she is] the savage child, the begetting [*genem*’] from a savage father” (ll. 471–2; the same word *omon* is used that Ajax had applied to himself at *Aj.* 548). But their next comment is, as Knox implicitly argued, one that the Athenian audience, ever under threat of war, might identify with: “she does not know how to yield to evils/bad men” (*kakois*; cf. Thuc. 2.64.3).

The capturing of Antigone follows right after the famous *polla ta deina* chorus (ll. 368–411; see Segal 1966). The potentially progressive thrust of the sophists’ anthropological speculations celebrating the achievements of human intelligence in that chorus (Havelock 1957) is constrained by hints at there being divinely imposed “natural” limits:

[The human being: *anthropou*, ll. 332–3] having some clever device
 Beyond the hope of [mere] skill
 Now advances toward evil, another time towards good.
 Fastening upon the laws of the land
 And the gods’ sworn justice,
 He is high in his city. May that man be stripped of city who,
 Through daring, is companion to what is not noble [*to me kalon*]. (ll. 365–71)

The ambiguity of the relevance of this account to the behavior of Antigone and/or to that of Creon is inevitably commented on: Creon, first introduced as *strategos* (l. 8) – which is the nearest to an “executive” position in democratic Athens – presents himself as the defender of the laws of the city and offers a number of sentiments that the audience would consider familiar democratic commonplaces; but Antigone invokes the divinely sanctioned laws of earth, by insisting on the burial of her brother (e.g. l. 519). To the extent that she religiously trumps his political positions and he shows himself as a tyrant, the play implicitly discredits these commonplaces. At this point we get another tell-tale Sophoclean conversion: Ismene, earlier on the voice of conventional “common sense,” is now ready to share her sister’s death by falsely claiming a share in the burial. Nonetheless, the chorus, after the exchange between Antigone, Ismene, and Creon, offers its own Aeschylean-sounding meditation on the house of the Labdacids, in which divinely imposed sufferings are fused with implicit denunciations of disastrous delusion (*atas*):

Blessed are those whose life-time has no taste of evils.
 For to those whose house is shaken from a divine source,
 Nothing of disaster/delusion is lacking as it proceeds against the whole of the race
 (*geneas*). (ll. 582–5)

The members of the chorus go on to invoke the specifically Aeschylean focus on the generational continuity of disaster; but, again, there is the ambiguity between emphasis on “sufferings” imposed by some one of the gods and “folly” (*anoia*):

I see the ancient sufferings of the house of the Labdacids –
 Sufferings falling upon the sufferings of the dead;
 Nor does one generation set free a generation, but there falls upon it
 Some one of the gods, nor does it have any release.
 For now there was spread over the last roots a light of hope in the house of Oedipus,
 In turn bloody dust of the gods below extinguishes it, as does speech’s folly and a Fury
 [Erinys] of the mind. (ll. 594–603)

The metaphor of a “Fury,” used to describe what appears to be Antigone’s rage, almost inevitably recalls Aeschylus’ repeated evocations of the “Furies” attached to the house of Atreus; but the nearer we get to the *dénouement* of the tragedy and the more the chorus focuses on the aberrations of the house of the Labdacids, the closer we come to the destruction of Creon’s house – his son and his wife – through *his* folly and *his* mad fury. Indeed, Teiresias will use the name in its plural form (Erinyes) to designate the force that will punish Creon (1075).

Just as in the *Ajax* we have a populist moment in Teucer’s “freedom-speaking” defiance of the “tyrannical” Atreidae (cf. *Ajax* 1350), it emerges in the *Antigone* that the seemingly arrogant aristocrat – bent on supporting her family values in defiance of the constituted authority of the *polis* – is supported by the whole city, which believes that she merits a golden honor (ll. 688–700; cf. l. 733). The scene with the Guard, the only direct representative of the non-aristocratic citizenry, offers, on the one hand, a patronizing image of the primary concern of “ordinary” people for their own survival and self-interest. On the other hand, his fear and quasi-defiance of Creon establish the tyrannical aspect of Creon, more fully developed later, while the Guard’s expression of sympathy for Antigone as implicitly among his *philoí* (ll. 438–9) points to Haemon’s later claim of public admiration for her. If the audience might be inclined – as apparently the singularly obtuse chorus is – to attribute this claim to *eros*’ power over Haemon (ll. 788–800), it is precisely the clear revelation of Creon’s blatantly tyrannical conception of his political role in this scene with his son (ll. 734–9) that invites members of the audience to shift their sympathies from Creon to Antigone. Indeed, the chorus, still the weathervane of the audience’s responses, now bursts into tears (ll. 801–5) as Antigone is brought out for her death-journey to her “bridal chamber.” In this context the chorus’ meditation on the power of *eros* prepares the audience for the full-press pathos of Antigone’s end – not, I suspect, diminished by her childishly sophistic rationalizations of her behavior at lines 905–12. It is worth recalling that Greek girls were normally married soon after reaching puberty, and that the audience would think of Antigone – several times called *pais*, “child” – as approximately 15 years old. Nonetheless, until her final lament, the chorus persists in reading her fate in Aeschylean terms. There is, however, a neat reversal: she accuses their self-righteousness of constituting the *hubris* (l. 840) of men with abundant possessions (*poluktemones andres*, l. 843; cf. Knox 1964: 176–7 n. 8). For their part, they accuse her of injustice by invoking the now irrelevant notion of the family curse – the desperation of their quest for a pretext being underlined by *tin’* (“some” – and cf. Kamerbeek 1978 *ad loc.*):

Advancing to the ultimate limit of daring,
Against the lofty altar of Justice
You fell down hard, child.
You are paying in full *some* trouble inherited from your father. (ll. 853–6)

Antigone acknowledges (ll. 857–66) that the entire fate of the “glorious/famous Labdacids” weighs on her mind, but she alludes only to the “objective” crime of what Sophocles consistently presents as unintentional incest, omitting any reference to the murder of Laius, which at the very least implies an aggressive spirit. Her final emphasis in this connection is on the wretchedness of her own birth, a tragedy for which she obviously bears no responsibility.

Through the scene with Teiresias the complete vindication, by the gods, of Antigone’s moral stand is confirmed even as Creon is forced to acknowledge that, tyrant-like

(cf. Hdt. 3.80), he has violated the “established laws” (*kathestotas nomous*, see Harris in this volume). Moreover, the damaged text at line 1080 alludes to the cities that are stirred up with hatred by the rotting corpses. In commenting on this line, Jebb plausibly argues: “Everyone knew how Creon had refused burial to the Argives, and how Theseus had recovered their corpses by force of arms.” Thus, just as a patriotic allusion to Athens helps nudge the audience of the *Ajax* toward greater sympathy for the protagonist, so here the poet throws in a specifically Athenian allusion, calculated to intensify an alienation from Creon that functions to undercut the “Aeschylean” reading of Antigone’s fate.

What I propose implies such unpleasant notions as ideological manipulation, or even sleight of hand. But in both the *Ajax* and *Antigone* I cannot escape the feeling that Sophocles set out to valorize an ideological position that, as he was aware, was inimical to most people in his audience. His chief vehicle for doing this was to echo the familiar ideological stance of his great predecessor Aeschylus, then relentlessly to exploit other elements in order to build sympathy for his protagonists by alienating his audience from these protagonists’ antagonists. Central to the ideological agenda of both these plays is the relentless emphasis on the language of inherited excellence, which is reinforced on a literal level as well as subjected to a sustained effort to distinguish “true” nobility based on action from mere snobbery or simple biological reality.

4 The Other Plays: A Schematic Overview

At this point I will resort to a few necessarily schematic suggestions of how the ideological agenda I have tried to delineate in *Ajax* and *Antigone* fares in the rest of the Sophoclean oeuvre. In general I see an ongoing tension between, on the one hand, the Aeschylean and more blatant Euripidean assault on *eugeneia* and, on the other, a stubborn insistence that, for all the faults of its exponents, the old heroic type still represents the best that can be hoped for in society as it is.

Cedric Whitman (1951: 103–46) long ago linked the *Trachiniae* and the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, different as they are in so many ways, as a consequence of their heavy insistence on the idea of late knowledge, of terrible human suffering as the result of the epistemological inadequacies of human beings vis-à-vis arbitrary forces beyond human control – the gods. This emphasis is “ideological” insofar as it counters the Aeschylean quest for a world that “made sense” – specifically, one in which the gods punish *hubris* (e.g. Pollitt 1972: 23–4 cites A. *Pers.* 807–29). Both plays also have in common a radical questioning of a key ideologeme central to the *Ajax* and *Antigone*: that of divine or “noble” descent, with its associated fixed social hierarchy in which a figure from the ruling class is the antithesis of the slave and other “little” people. In the *Trachiniae* the direct son of Zeus is subjected not only to hideous physical suffering, but to a life of terrible toils, which included reduction to slavery. He is twice called the “best” of all men, and the catalog of his “services” to humanity, in the context of his hideous suffering, tends toward a validation of that claim. The bitter final declaration of the irrelevance of literal divine parentage seems to me more in line with *Iliad* 18 than with any implicit theodicy (*pace* Lloyd-Jones 1971: 104–28). On the other hand, Heracles’ terrible penchant for amoral violence and for uncompromising machismo are in counterpoint to the thoroughly sympathetic Deianeira and pathetic Hyllus. As Wohl (1998: 3–56) has eloquently argued, the representation of Deianeira as a “subject” rather than a mere “object of exchange” calls into question Heracles’

apparent success in re-establishing patriarchal law and aristocratic succession by forcing Hyllus to marry Iole.

In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the withering interrogation of inherited nature is carried to a sort of ideological *ne plus ultra*. The rootless stranger, cut off from all social, economic, and familial support, who sees himself as truly “the son of *tuche*” (chance, l. 1080), and in his darkest moment is crammed by the traditional-minded chorus into the pattern of the *turannos*, turns out to be the all too “legitimate” heir to supreme political power and wealth in Thebes – from which, in patriotic zeal, he has exiled himself. He is nonetheless the best man in his society; he has proved his worth in saving his city and, as he compellingly declares, is the victim of cruel gods (again, *pace* Lloyd-Jones 1971).

In the *Electra*, Sophocles again has recourse to the strategy of a female protagonist – therefore one who is not politically threatening, like a potential oligarch or would-be aristocratic tyrant. Critics (e.g. Segal 1966: 529; Ormand 1999: 77; McCoskey 2009) who stress Electra’s ultimate displacement by Orestes, or even her implied marriage to Pylades (what else is he there for?) underestimate I think precisely the ideological cooptation in presenting a so thoroughly aristocratic protagonist as an inherently helpless female in a male-dominated society. As in the *Ajax* and in the *Antigone*, the philological evidence of the vocabulary of *eugeneia* is quite pronounced – if anything, even more so than in the earlier plays. Moreover, the play builds toward a climactic conversion. The chorus, which earlier had articulated the usual attacks on the extremism and folly of the heroic protagonist, is moved precisely by her uncompromising adherence to the principle of just vengeance (cf. Thuc. 2.63.4) and made to endorse, first, the partial conversion of Chrysothemis, who agrees to throw away her mother’s offerings for the tomb of Agamemnon, then, more fully – and in strictly aristocratic terms – her wild plan to kill Aegisthus herself:

Who would be born so excellent with respect to her father [*eupatris*]?
 None of the nobles [*agathon*] would wish
 By living basely [*kakos*] to disgrace his good glory [*eukleian*],
 [Becoming] nameless [*nonumos*], o child, child:
 Thus you too chose a life full of lamentation
 [But] glorious [*kleinon*],
 Arming a noble [*kalon*] cure
 To win [*pherein*] a dual [praise] in one speech:
 To be called both wise [*sopha*] and noble/best [*arista*]. (ll. 1081–9)

Though they address Orestes in language emphasizing inherited identity for the last time, Electra is the visual embodiment of that innocent suffering imposed on a clan:

O seed of Atreus, how – after suffering many things –
 In Freedom with difficulty you have emerged,
 By the present attack made perfect. (ll. 1508–10)

Yes, it is a morally shocking and cynically bitter ending. But the note of affirmation of a specifically aristocratic triumph over the clan’s *kaka* (“base things”) is undeniable.

Towards the end of his life Sophocles seems to have returned to a more militant affirmation of the heroic temper. The *Philoctetes* places an indisputably heavy philological emphasis on the issue of inherited excellence, both for the protagonist and for Neoptolemus (Rose 1992: 266–330). Moreover, the motif of divine rehabilitation after the gods’ perverse impositions on the hero, so fully elaborated in the *Oedipus at Colonus*,

is central to the movement of the plot of the *Philoctetes*. The rejected, suffering, and totally isolated hero is divinely chosen as the indispensable man to achieve the most decisive military goal of his whole society – a society the corruption and meanness of which is proclaimed ultimately irrelevant for the protagonist’s redemption. As in the *Ajax* and in the *Trachiniae*, one should not underestimate the ideological appeal of purely military prowess in a society so constantly at war.

Finally, in the *Oedipus at Colonus*, dominated as it is by the relentless contrast between appearances and reality, the *eugeneia* of the hero is insisted on from the very outset (ll. 8, 75–6), precisely in the typically Sophoclean context of the hero’s radical separation from all the attributes of Aeschylean wielders of wealth and power – which is equally insisted on. The viciousness, hypocrisy, and self-seeking of actual society, represented by the figure of Odysseus in the *Philoctetes*, are here embodied by the totally odious Creon. Our own knowledge of Athens’ imminent defeat inevitably colors our response to the moving idealization of Athens through the figure of Theseus and to the retrospectively pathetic wish-fulfillment element in the motif of Oedipus’ grave, which somehow guarantees that Thebes will never harm Athens. (We know from Xenophon that after the defeat the Thebans were particularly insistent on the destruction of Athens: X. *Hell.* II 2.19–20.) Yet, in context, these elements share with the representation of Ajax’s followers as sailors a demagogic impulse to win the audience over and make it approve of the poet’s radical defense of his “noble” protagonist – accept ideas of his total innocence, of his hideous victimization by the gods, and of his ultimate divine vindication (like that of Philoctetes, and despite all appearances) as an indispensable man in his society.

To sum up, relying primarily on the verbal insistence on the language of inherited excellence, I have argued that Sophocles displays throughout his plays a profound ideological commitment – and a consequent agenda – to the idea that, however justified many elements in the critique of *eugeneia* by his rival tragedians are, his society should recognize precisely the natural superiority of these elements to all alternatives. In pursuit of this agenda he presents his protagonists as aristocrats of noble birth; and, although they are stripped of all the support of social, economic, and political power, degraded by their fellow-citizens, and persecuted by perverse gods, Sophocles affirms their ultimate superiority and their essential contributions to their society.

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Sophocles and Contemporary Politics

Robin Osborne

Another conventional move is to say that something is a mistake or a misfortune or inevitable, just as Sophocles said that he was trembling not, as his slanderer alleged, so as to seem old, but because he could not do otherwise. It was not his choice to be eighty years old.

Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1416^a13–17

I Introduction

Anyone undertaking to write about Sophocles and contemporary politics has reason to tremble. If it was not clear to contemporaries how to interpret the actions of Sophocles himself performing for real in a trial, can we have any confidence about interpreting the words and actions Sophocles has performed in the theater?

This is not a matter of merely academic importance; the question of how individuals' actions are interpreted, of whether these individuals are sufficiently self-aware to be able to control them, is itself a political question. Inadvertent actions and feigned actions both have real effects, whether the inadvertence is due to ignorance or a consequence of madness and whether the feigning is innocent or deceitful. The inability ever to be confident about the advertence or sincerity of actions is a fact of political life.

Aristotle tells three anecdotes about Sophocles in the context of the adversarial exchanges of the law. Jameson made the case for their referring to the poet and for all three belonging in the same context of an *eisangelia* (impeachment) against Peisander (Jameson 1971: esp. 547–50; cf. already Foucart 1893). All of them expose something of Sophoclean stagecraft, as Sophocles himself is revealed as a product of his performance. Between them they cover the full range of difficulties faced by the interpreter of the politics of Sophoclean tragedy.

In a second story, Aristotle notes:

when Sophocles, asked by Peisander if he had thought, as the other *probouloi* had thought, that setting up the Four Hundred was a good thing, he agreed, and when Peisander then asked “What? did this not seem to you to be a wretched thing to do?” he agreed to that too. And when Peisander asked whether “You did these things knowing they were wretched?” he said, “Yes, for there was nothing else that was better.” (Arist. *Rh.* 1419^a26–31)

It is a particular feature of Sophoclean tragedy that characters faced with choices have no clearly better choices to make. Whatever the shortcomings of the political behavior of a Creon or an Odysseus, there is no political behavior they could engage in that would not have shortcomings. However ideal Sophocles’ characters (Arist. *Po.* 1460^b33–4), Sophoclean tragedy deals with the politics of the possible, with political choices as they are, not as we might wish them to be.

The third story is slightly different. “Sophocles, when speaking on behalf of Euctemon, when he had killed himself after suffering *hubris*, said that he would not seek a lesser penalty than the victim had laid upon himself” (Arist. *Rh.* 1374^b36–1375^a2).

Politics cannot be divorced from moral values. The life of the community and the life of the individual are intertwined in Sophocles’ plays, and political decisions are matters of life and death. There is no political world apart from the moral world, and political expediency does not remove moral responsibility. Just as here Euctemon’s treatment relative to others is what causes him to take his own life (so Jameson 1971: 555–7), so the relativity of Sophoclean political actions is always against a backdrop of absolutes.

The lives of poets regularly serve as critical commentaries on their work (Lefkowitz 1981; cf. Graziosi 2000), and the life of Sophocles is no exception. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* shows how that process begins – with anecdotes that illuminate not just an author but his work. Whatever the historical truth behind Aristotle’s anecdotes, they alert us to some issue fundamental to any discussion of Sophocles’ politics.

2 What Was Sophocles’ Own Political Position?

Sophocles had a life beyond writing plays. We have better independent evidence for Sophocles’ participation in politics than for Aeschylus or Euripides, and that evidence shows him taking on a financial office (proof also of his wealth), the generalship, and membership of the advisory council of *probouloi* that was set up after the failure of the expedition against Syracuse (see Scodel in this volume). Aristotle’s anecdotes say something about the man as well as about his tragedies.

Sophocles’ name almost certainly appears in the Tribute Quota List for 443/2 BCE as one of the ten Hellenotamiae (treasurers; *IG* i³ 269.36). The fourth-century Attidographer Androtion is quoted listing him as *strategos* for 441/0 BCE (*FGrH* 324 F 38), and other ancient authors (*TrGF* 4, T 20–25, 69, 75 Radt) refer to his having been one of the *stratego*i sent to Samos with Pericles. The *Life of Sophocles* (§1) has him serve as general also with Thucydides, meaning apparently Thucydides son of Melesias, ostracized in 443 BCE (Ehrenberg 1954: 117 n. 1), and also “against Anaians” seven years before the Peloponnesian War and when he was 65 (§9; Lewis 1988: 40 n. 21 would amend to 57). Plutarch has him serve with Nicias at some point when he was old enough to claim to be the “most ancient” (*palaiotatos*) and to reckon

Nicias *presbutatos* (Plu. *Nic.* 15.2; Ehrenberg 1954: 117 n. 1) – no wonder his shaking was thought to be acting!

How to reconstruct Sophocles' career as general is disputed. That Sophocles did serve as general is not in doubt. Whether he did so on a small number of occasions around the time of the campaign to put down the Samian revolt, or on a larger number of occasions over a longer period is less clear, and what his relationship was with Pericles is open to conflicting possibilities: "The mere fact that Sophocles has been regarded by modern scholars either as a follower of Pericles or as one of his oligarchic opponents makes both these views look rather improbable" (Ehrenberg 1954: 138). Beyond showing that Sophocles was happy to be involved with imperialist military campaigns, his generalship is compatible with a wide range of political positions.

The same is hardly true, however, of his service as a *proboulos*, for which the Aristotle passage discussed above is the evidence. Thucydides says that the Athenians, after hearing of the disaster in Sicily, decided that they should not give in but should prepare a fleet, secure their allies, make sensible economies in domestic arrangements, and "elect some older men to a particular office with responsibility for taking counsel in advance about the current circumstances, as opportunity might offer itself" (Th. 8.1.3). These *probouloi* acquired a certain reputation; Aristophanes (*Lys.* 387–461) has the women on the Acropolis show precious little respect to the Proboulos who comes to admonish them; they end up treating him as a corpse. The Proboulos shows a petty-minded obsession with economy and a bully's readiness to employ force. But, at more or less the same time as *Lysistrata* was performed, they had a role, perhaps the leading role (see Hornblower 1991–2008 on Th. 8.67.1) in proposing the arrangements under which the Four Hundred were set up (Th. 8.67, [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 29).

The setting up of the Four Hundred and their subsequent actions left the Athenians with sour memories. Internal divisions arose and one faction at least within the regime decided that peace with Sparta was the appropriate price to pay to retain power. Athenian troops on Samos were stirred into opposition and the Four Hundred were ousted, being replaced first by an "intermediate regime" whose rule Thucydides much admired, and then by the restored democracy. One of the ring-leaders of the Four Hundred, Phrynichus, was assassinated, and judicial proceedings were undertaken against others. These trials continued over several years, and the allegation of complicity with the Four Hundred became widely used to damn opponents – so much so that in 405 BCE, in *Frogs*, Aristophanes has the chorus in the *parabasis* plead for a more tolerant attitude.

While we must keep the *idea* of a government by the Four Hundred distinct from what actually happened under that government, the proposal to set up such a government was certainly a proposal to abandon democracy. And it was a proposal brought – in an attempt to escape the associations of the Pnyx and to restrict who attended – before an Assembly uniquely held in Sophocles' own deme of Colonus. One of Sophocles' fellow *probouloi* was Hagnon, the founder of the Athenian colony at Amphipolis and *strategos* in 440, 437, 431, 430, and 429 BCE. Hagnon and Sophocles were resurrected by the Athenians from exactly the same period of political activity, but in the case of Hagnon we have one further indication of his politics: he was the father of Theramenes, who was to be involved both with the Four Hundred and with the Thirty – albeit a self-proclaimed "moderate" in both cases.

We do not know how Sophocles' activities as *proboulos* connect with his being questioned by Peisander, a leading member of the Four Hundred, in the forensic exchanges recorded by Aristotle. Scholars have debated whether Sophocles was speaking for the prosecution or for the defence in these exchanges, but most plausibly they all

come from the context of a prosecution arising from the suicide of Euctemon. Sophocles would, on this reading, have joined an attack on Peisander for having occasioned Euctemon's suicide, and Peisander would have counter-attacked with allegations of Sophocles' complicity in the setting up of the Four Hundred and of covering up his active role by feigning old age. Since we know nothing of Euctemon or of Sophocles' relationship to him, we cannot tell whether the motivations for this prosecution were personal or political, but they show at least that Sophocles was not a die-hard supporter of Peisander.

Was Sophocles' response to Peisander's question about culpability for the Four Hundred simply a way of diverting blame, or should we take it as a political position? The claim that in 411 BCE it was either the Four Hundred or something worse is a striking claim. It is equally striking whether it was made under the intermediate regime or under the restored democracy. There are two contexts that would make sense of the move: either Sophocles was saying that the democratic regime was proving so catastrophic in 412–11 BCE that replacement was essential, or he was saying that the anti-democratic forces were so strong that some replacement of democracy was inevitable and that the Four Hundred was the best solution that could be found. The latter is not altogether implausible. Thucydides and the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians* present very different views of the background in 411 BCE; but, whether one follows Thucydides (8.66) and imagines an Athens that has degenerated into a society dominated by fear of revolution, where everyone thought everyone else was gunning for oligarchy, or one follows the *Constitution of the Athenians* and imagines an Athens where a hundred-and-one alternative plans for how the city ought to be governed were under discussion and the issue was only which one of them to adopt, the claim that the Four Hundred were the best outcome that could be contemplated is credible (see Osborne 2003, 2004). Sophocles' taking that view shows only that he was not a doctrinaire democrat. Few were.

3 Do Sophocles' Tragedies Intervene in Day-to-Day Politics at Athens?

If Sophocles the man intervened in Athens' day-to-day politics, do Sophocles' plays also make such interventions? Answering this question depends upon being able to date the plays, and we have secure dates for only two plays: *Philoctetes* (409 BCE) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (produced posthumously, in 401 BCE). Sophocles cannot remotely have foreseen the events following his death, which would form the immediate political backdrop to the performance of *Oedipus at Colonus*, but the temptation to see links between *Philoctetes* and the politics of 410/9 BCE is much stronger.

The strongest case for contemporary reference in *Philoctetes* is not to political debates, but to a piece of political ritual. There are good reasons for reckoning that the oath of Demophantos, by which every Athenian citizen declared that he would resist attempts at tyranny, was administered immediately before the Dionysia in 409 BCE and accompanied by the proclamation of honors for the assassin of Phrynichus (Wilson 2009: 23–9; see Shear 2007; Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 180–2). That oath will have been still vivid in the minds of the audience when giving oaths and keeping oaths become an issue in *Philoctetes* (ll. 811–3, 1289). But oath-keeping was not itself a divisive political issue; no Athenian would dispute the importance of loyalty to oaths. There was no political debate about

oaths to make reference to: what the oaths do is further impress upon the audience the relevance of the issues of manner of persuasion highlighted in the play.

Philoctetes is a play about persuasion. The task that Odysseus and Neoptolemus have is to persuade Philoctetes to come to Troy in order to ensure the success of the Greeks. The issue of the play is how this is achieved. By contrast to Aristophanes' *Frogs*, where the issue is whom to bring back from Hades in order to save Athens, but the success of any mission is assumed, here the question is not who but how. Interpretations that equate bringing Philoctetes to Troy with getting Alcibiades back to Athens (see Vickers 1987) quite miss the point (as Jameson 1956: 219–20 showed; cf. Rose 1992: 329, Bowie 1997: 56–61, and Calder 1971: 170 – though Calder's own proposal to see Philoctetes as Sophocles himself, old, sick, and duped is equally problematic). But how much emphasis should be put on the person whose manner of persuasion prevails? Jameson (1956) stressed the similarity between Neoptolemus, son of a famous father now dead, and the younger Pericles, who was coming to political prominence after 411 BCE. But, while Neoptolemus' ancestry has relevance to the particular persuasion of Philoctetes, it does not impinge on the nature of persuasion. Threats of violence and sophistic claims had been prominent in 411 BCE, not least over the issue of how best to win the war. But *Philoctetes* explores those issues outside any political setting – deliberately making Lemnos an uninhabited island (Easterling 1997a: 33 n. 57). There seems to have been a rich intertextual relationship with Aeschylus' and Euripides' plays about Philoctetes, and this may well have given Sophocles' play even more of a political edge – but it only makes political allegory even less likely.

Arguments for the immediate relevance to contemporary political debate of the five extant Sophoclean tragedies whose dates are uncertain are necessarily circular. The best evidence that we have for the date of *Antigone* is the claim, made in its *hypothesis* (§ 1), that public esteem from the production of this play earned Sophocles his appointment as *strategos* against Samos. This has generally been held to indicate a date of 442 BCE (because of the precise timings of the Dionysia and of the elections to the office of *strategia*). Such a production would have come in the wake of the ostracism of Thucydides son of Melesias, but at a time when we know little of the agenda of domestic politics. Attempts to see a link made between Creon and Pericles make nothing of the particular date of the play (see e.g. Ehrenberg 1954: 114–16, resting on the use of the word *strategos* to designate Creon).

The strongest attempt to link *Antigone* with a particular political debate has been that of Lewis. Lewis (1988) argues against the date of 442 BCE for the *Antigone* on the grounds that Sophocles was too busy that year being Hellenotamias, and he seeks instead to link the story of the *hypothesis* with Sophocles' generalship against Anaians (Anaiia being the promontory to which rebel Samians had retired), and so to a date of 438 BCE, when Sophocles is known to have beaten Euripides into second place in the competition. Lewis argues that Sophocles' decision to focus his play on the issue of burial was politically determined by a desire to join the critics of Pericles' decision during the Samian campaign to have the bodies of Samian trierarchs and marines, who had been clubbed to death at his order, exposed unburied for ten days (Plu. *Per.* 28.2, drawing on Douris of Samos, *FGrH* 76 F 67). Although refusal of burial to traitors was regular Athenian practice (and the actions of revolting allies could be equated to treachery), Pericles' action is supposed to have raised an outcry.

The attractions of juxtaposing the *Antigone* to an historical case of refusal of burial are immediate, but unsatisfying. Although refusal of burial is the occasion for the debate

between Creon and Antigone, the tragic heart of the play turns not upon the particular provocation provided by burial, but upon the kinship relationship between Antigone, Polyneices, and Creon. If leaving human corpses unburied were always unethical, we would have no tragedy here. Unless we can show that the Samian corpses, too, gave rise to claims to burial that conflicted with the proper punishment for traitors, any contemporary outrage at Pericles' action would undermine Sophocles' tragedy rather than give it an extra and contemporary political point.

Oedipus Tyrannus is generally dated by the Athenian plague (see especially Knox 1956). The descriptions of the plague at the beginning are held to be so close to those given by Thucydides that the play must date after Athens' plague (see also Mitchell-Boyask 2008: ch. 5). This argument is not fully conclusive: Thucydides' descriptions are themselves influenced by literary precedents (see Müller 1984). Nor are the arguments that *Oedipus Tyrannus* is alluded to in Aristophanes' *Knights* (*Equites*; especially in the treatment of the oracle about Cleon) beyond dispute – which leaves us with no firm terminus *post quem* or *ante quem* (Segal 2001: 14 n. 3).

At least part of the motivation for seeing direct allusion to the Athenian plague in the plague at Thebes – which does indeed seem to be one of Sophocles' additions to the Oedipus myth – is the desire to see the play's exploration of “the first of men” (*OT* 33) as a reflection on political leadership at Athens – and particularly on the political leadership of Pericles (so particularly Ehrenberg 1954: esp. 112–16). Even those who believe that “[i]t would be reductive to read *Oedipus* as a pietistic critique of Pericles' humanism or even as an expression of anxiety about his approximation to the power of a ‘tyrant;’” nevertheless reckon Oedipus to have been to some degree modeled on Pericles (Segal 2001: 13). Yet the combination of a post-plague date with a belief in allusion to Pericles makes Sophocles' exercise a very odd one – for Pericles died in the plague. *Oedipus Tyrannus* is not a play about how the first of men deals with plague, but a play about (self-)knowledge, the limits of knowledge, and the relationship between human reason and the gods. It is true that Plutarch's *Life* raises in relation to Pericles issues about rationality related to those raised by Oedipus' methods of proceeding, but Pericles' life history offered no parallel to Oedipus', and thinking about Oedipus' life history provides no *aperçu* on Pericles, or on any Athenian politician for that matter.

For *Trachiniae*, *Ajax*, and *Electra* we have no dates; the main arguments about a possible dating concern poetic details and relations to other dramas, not political reference in these plays. The main exception to this has been occasioned by the desire to link *Ajax* to the politics of the 450s and 440s BCE, in order to see Cimon behind the character of Ajax (but see Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 102–4 on *Trachiniae*). Others find allusions to Pericles' Citizenship Law and to its requirement that an Athenian citizen should have an Athenian mother as well as an Athenian father, behind Agamemnon's call for someone who is not the bastard son of a prisoner of war mother to speak (*Aj.* 1260–1; Robert 1964: 213–15). Issues of status are certainly under examination in *Ajax*, but conceiving of status here as a matter of legal status is far from enlightening – in fact it obscures the political issue in the play.

Overall, the case for any extant Sophoclean tragedy engaging closely with the political debate of the day is weak. Although this situation is partly a result of our having only one play whose production we can securely date and place in a decently thick political description, it is also a consequence of the nature of the issues that Sophocles tackles. These are certainly political issues, but not the issues of day-to-day politics.

4 Do Sophocles' Tragedies Address Contemporary Political Issues?

Much discussion of Sophoclean tragedy has presented it as if political issues were not on Sophocles' agenda. In Karl Reinhardt's classic study (first published in 1933) the most important thing in Sophoclean tragedy is "the portrayal of universal human types [...] outlined and defined against the background of the divine" (Reinhardt 1979: 2). For Bernard Knox, stressing the Sophoclean invention of "the presentation of the tragic dilemma in the figure of a single dominating character" (Knox 1964: 1), the city is on Sophocles agenda only in as far as the tragic hero may figure the city, as he thinks that the Oedipus of *Oedipus Tyrannus* was created in the image of Athens itself (Knox 1964: 60; cf. Knox 1957). For Mary Whitlock Blundell, it is "the stuff of moral life," "conflicting loyalties to friends, family and city, justice towards friend and enemy, expediency versus justice, retaliation or forgiveness" whose confusions Sophocles explores (Blundell 1989: 273; see Goldhill 1986: 85). Charles Segal stressed:

Breaking the moral laws that give our lives order and security, and bypassing the usual mediation between god and beast that constitutes civilization, the hero lacks that stability of place and identity which ordinary men, who do not have his capacity for greatness or proneness to excess, possess as a given of their humanness. (Segal 1981: 12)

Morality and politics are far from mutually exclusive, and, if the personal is the political, then the famed extremism of the Sophoclean "heroic temper" will itself become a political matter. So, too, since the work of Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988), it has become regular to see tragedies against the background of the institutions of the *polis* (whether of the democratic *polis* or not is a different issue: Goldhill 1987 and 2000; Griffin 1998; Rhodes 2003; Wilson 2009). The form of tragedy, with its debate watched by the collectivity of the chorus and the form of a festival competition – where individuals sponsored plays as part of their civic duty (Wilson 2000) and the plays competed for prizes, like so many triremes – makes a relationship to civic ideology inevitable. These factors all undoubtedly played an important part in shaping tragedy's political *effect*; but whether they constituted political *issues* is another matter. For, although scholars of tragedy have often preferred to construct their sense of Athenian politics out of the tragedies themselves, believing, for example, that, since extremist behavior is a Sophoclean obsession, it must also have been an Athenian political issue, we have a great deal of independent evidence – from Thucydides and Xenophon, from Aristophanes, from Lysias and other orators, from the epigraphic record, from Plato, and from anecdotes preserved in Plutarch – for what Athenian political preoccupations were. It is against Athenian politics as known from that evidence that I want to assess Sophocles' own particular engagement with contemporary politics.

No two members of an audience will have heard exactly the same play. Any attempt to stress the political relevance of one aspect of a tragedy's plot will inevitably prove reductive. To assert the political relevance of one set of concerns in a play is neither to deny the relevance of other concerns nor to suggest that the play has nothing to say to those who do not share that particular set of concerns. But it is to suggest that, while a reading strategy that turns plays into riddles about particular political moments and politicians emasculates them, a reading strategy which sees tragedy as nothing more than a high-level exploration of "what it is to live in a *polis*" removes them from contemporary debate so far as to eliminate their cutting edge.

Ever since Hegel claimed, in *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, that “Antigone reverences the ties of blood-relationship, the gods of the nether world. Creon alone recognizes Zeus, the paramount Power of public life and the commonwealth” (in Paolucci 1962: 68), the clash between family and state has been seen as at least one of the core concerns of *Antigone* (for the influence of Hegel’s *Antigone* on French post-structuralist thought, see Leonard 2005: 96–156).

The particular circumstances in the mythical city of Thebes do much to enhance the richness of the tragic situation (see Easterling 2005: 54–5, 58–62). It is important that Thebes is governed by a hereditary monarchy, important that the family that supplies the monarchs has so chequered a recent history. It is in such royal families that the link between blood and power both renders familiar relationships also political and ensures that political decisions will have a familial purchase. Hegel himself noted that “we find immanent in the life of both [Antigone and Creon] that which each respectively combats, and they are seized and broken by that very bond which is rooted in the compass of their own social existence” (Hegel 1962: 73). It is precisely because the story is set in a monarchical state that the conflict between family and state cannot be reduced to an academic debate between spokespersons for each.

The fundamentals of the clash between Creon and Antigone, however, do not depend upon any peculiarities in their familial or political circumstances. Sophocles has Creon assume powers not available to any individual in classical Athens when he issues the prohibition on burial, but that does not mean that Sophocles’ focus is upon the problems of illegitimate government (*contra* Harris 2005; Hester 1971: 21 puts it well: “Creon’s decision is part of the background to the play, not part of the play”). As regularly in tragedy, which never situates its plots in an oligarchy (Easterling 2005: 53), concentration of the source of political authority into the single figure of the ruler sharpens and gives a personal edge to conflict between state and family. So, too, with the assumption throughout the play that there are only two options for the body of Polyneices: being buried or not being buried. The option that Athenian law made available to traitors, of being buried outside the territory of the state, is ignored not in order to characterize Creon’s law as peculiarly unreasonable, but in order to concentrate the audience’s mind on the issue of burial itself by ruling out any third way (Hester 1971: 20–1; Easterling 1997: 27). There is no dodging here either that law is made by men – and by men who have also familial ties – or that men’s law extends throughout the inhabited world: the simplifications of the historical world by the investment of total political power totally in one individual ensure that there is clearly no escape from duty or responsibility.

We should not underestimate the extent to which burial itself was a contemporary issue. Quite apart from the alleged exposure of the bodies of crucified Samian dead (see above), at various moments in the Peloponnesian War, the question of the return of the war dead and of their burial is a fraught one. After the battle of Delion the Athenians and Boeotians get into an argument in which the Boeotians refuse to hand back the Athenian dead unless the Athenians leave the sanctuary at Delion, and the Athenians claim that such bartering with the bodies of the dead is impious (Th. 4. 97–9).

Nevertheless, burial is not the political issue in *Antigone*. The political issue is about the competing claims of loyalty to kin and obedience to the state, and about how that competition plays out in a time of civil strife. In the analysis of civil conflict on Corcyra, Thucydides (3.82.6) remarks on how (in Hobbes’ translation) “to be kin to another was not so near as to be of his society,” and the background to *Antigone* in the fratricidal strife between Polyneices and Eteocles should not be overlooked. This is not a play about

treachery, in the sense of a person from inside the city siding with outside attackers; it is a play in which the winning side in a civil war – albeit one that has involved bringing in outsiders to fight – has branded the other side “traitors”: the contrasting treatment of the two dead brothers is what Antigone first emphasizes (ll. 21–30).

Antigone expresses the conflict as one between decrees, moved by a man, and laws, that stem from the gods and that the gods can be expected to enforce (ll. 450–60). This passage was already, by the time of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (1373^b9–13, 1375^a33–^b2), the classic expression of the idea that there were laws common to all, regardless of the existence of any specific society, and not subject to change over time. The question of whether it is appropriate to talk of such universal obligations as laws is perhaps already implicit in *Antigone*, where they are referred to as *nomima* rather than *nomoi*. Plato, at *Laws* 793A, while denying that such obligations are properly called laws, nevertheless acknowledges that they are “the bonds of every constitution.” The question of how laws made in any society related to such universal laws was such a hot topic by the time of Thucydides that his re-telling of Pericles’ funeral oration claims that in Athens actual law aligned with unwritten laws (Th. 2.37.3; see Gomme’s note *ad loc.*; Craik 1993 and Harris in this volume).

The Athenians would come, when restoring democracy in 403 BCE, to draw a distinction between laws and decrees, so that motions moved in the Assembly could only ever be particular, and general rules could be made only by the Nomothetae (law-makers). The *Antigone* certainly shows an interest in the question of where law comes from, but how law is made is not the issue in the play. The clash between general principles and particular political rules existed regardless of the law-making process (and the clash existed in classical Athens in the contrast between the demarch’s obligation to bury any unclaimed corpse found in his deme and his obligation not to bury certain corpses, especially those of traitors: Osborne 2008).

The earliest political pamphlet surviving from classical Athens, the Xenophonic *Constitution of the Athenians*, takes it for granted that those who have power govern in their own interests. Sectional use of law was shown up in the real world, as well as in tragedy, by situations of civil strife. Athenian imperial rule, on Thucydides’ testimony, intensified civil strife throughout the Greek world. The successive attempts of cities in the Delian League to free themselves from Athens’ overlordship caused on most occasions splits within the citizen body in the revolting city. Athens would experience for herself these divisions in 411 and 404 BCE. The issue in *Antigone* was an issue in political theory, but no one in the audience can have thought it an issue in theory alone.

Most scholars have believed that Sophocles added the plague to the Oedipus story in the light of Athenian experience and in order to draw the audience’s attention to the immediate relevance of his play (Knox 1956). Thucydides almost certainly downplays the importance of the religious reaction to the plague in Athens and the importance of oracular consultations for Athenian politics (Hornblower 1992; Bowden 2005: esp. chs. 4 and 5); and the assumptions made in the play about the value and political use of the Delphic oracle were anything but alien to the Athenians. But the political issue at the center of the play is not the role of the oracle as such. The political conundrum of the play is how those who govern a city can secure adequate knowledge on which to base their decisions. Once more, monarchy sharpens the issue: how, in particular, can one man know enough to lead a city, and what should the relationship be between the personal life of the individual in charge and the life and fortunes of the city?

The context in which (fore)knowledge became a vital matter for the Greeks was that of embarking on major wars; Thucydides’ famous stress (1.138.3, 2.60.5, 2.65.4) on the

foreknowledge of Themistocles and Pericles occurs in the context of inter-state relations. It is precisely the importance of having some idea of what might happen when they faced up to the invading might of Persia that led Athens to consult the Delphic oracle in 480 BCE and to invest so much in the oracular response (Hdt. 7.139.5–143). In subsequent years, most Athenian military enterprises had been short term, and in increasingly few cases were the results seriously in doubt. But the prospect of war with Sparta in 432 BCE was a different matter (as Thucydides' "archaeology" stresses, 1.1–21). Neither side could well predict the probable results of their clash, not least because this was a conflict between an elephant and a whale. Thucydides brings out quite a strong sense of the issues of 432 BCE in his account. He has Pericles not only offer an assessment of the relative resources of Athens and Sparta in his speech urging the rejection of the Spartan ultimatum, but then go on, when Sparta is invading Attica for the first time, to enumerate the Athenian resources in great detail, emphasizing that the Athenians can survive (see de Ste Croix 1972: 208; and note that Ephorus made this the speech by which Pericles urged the Athenians to war, as is recorded by Diodorus Siculus 12.40). But the question of secure foreknowledge is even more clearly raised in relation to the Sicilian expedition, where Thucydides frames his account with questions about whether the Athenians had ascertained adequate knowledge of what they were doing (6.1, 8.1).

Notoriously, Thucydides seems to give different explanations at different points in his history for the Athenian failure in Sicily, and from the frame of his account readers might well think that it was about Syracuse, and about Sicily more generally, that the Athenians were disastrously ignorant. But Thucydides' (later?) verdict at 2.65.11 appears to place emphasis on the role of Alcibiades. This confirms the impression variously conveyed by Aristophanic comedy (particularly the *Knights*) and by Plutarch's *Lives* (particularly *Pericles*) that Athenians set some store by the character of those to whom they entrusted formal and informal political authority (the abuse of "demagogues" as "sellers" and "manufacturers" also relates to this). When the plot of *Knights* turns on the correct interpretation of an oracle predicting who will be politically supreme in Athens by reference to their lifestyle, Aristophanes is raising, in comic form, an issue that is at the heart of *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

(It is worth noting, at least parenthetically, that what drives Oedipus to punish himself and to leave Thebes is not that he has broken the city's laws (Laios' murder took place outside Theban territory) but that he has infringed unwritten laws. The *OT* makes reference to such laws at ll. 863–71, and when Xenophon raises the issue of unwritten laws at *Mem.* 4.4.19–25, avoiding incest and honoring your parents is what is at issue. The *Antigone's* interest in the interaction of a city's rules with more general obligations continues to be on the agenda.)

Issues of knowledge dominate the opening of Sophocles' *Ajax*, and issues of burial dominate its second half. One way of reading this play, therefore, is as another discussion of issues yet more powerfully explored in *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The question of whether those who act in ignorance or delusion are culpable is certainly a political one, but no Greek city in the fifth century was seriously worried about what to do about a certifiably mad political leader (the case of Cleomenes at Sparta, Hdt. 6.75, 84, suggests that madness constituted useful grounds for decisive intervention). What marks out *Ajax* is not that it puts issues of political knowledge or dilemmas over political versus religious obligations into a particularly pertinent form, but that it foregrounds the political importance of personal relations between political leaders and draws attention to the rhetoric of political decision-making.

This is a play particularly concerned with *hubris* (see briefly Garvie 1998: 12–16 with reference to earlier scholarship). The *hubris* is not simply that of Ajax (only his enemies claim his behavior to be hybriatic, as they also claim about Teucer), but that of the other Greek leaders in their relationship to him. The relationship between the competitive and cooperative virtues is highlighted here (Segal 1995: 6, 17) as Athena calls for temperate behavior (*Aj.* 132–3), but temperate behavior is in short supply (not for nothing does Adkins 1960 refer to *Ajax* predominantly in the context of “the persistence of traditional values”). In historical terms, we might think primarily of the bickering of the leaders of the different Greek cities in the Persian War (Hdt. 8.123–4; cf. 79–83), but the issue of competition and collaboration between leaders arose on any Athenian military expedition, and it would be a serious one in Sicily (Th. 6.47–50).

Ajax is famous for Ajax’s own “deceptive speech” (646–92). The dilemma (summarized by Garvie 1998: 184–6) that critics feel when faced with this speech – unwilling to think that Ajax can change, unwilling also to think that he can deceive – is a central dilemma of politics. Audiences will hear what they wish to hear, politicians will frame their sentiments so that that is what they hear. For the politician, as for the Sophoclean hero, it is vital to be able to claim not to have changed (see Pericles at Th. 1.40.1, 2.61.2, Cleon at Th. 3.38.1) – even if all know that change is constant (see *OC* 607–29). But, for the politician, it is also vital to be known to have listened to public reaction instead of blindly ignoring those for whom he is supposed to care (see the opening of Diodotus’ speech, Th. 3.42.1). Ajax’s is the speech of the consummate politician, a speech heard as utterly sincere, but the point of which those who have heard it are unable to agree about.

With the exception, perhaps, of Ajax’s final speech (ll. 815–65), every time a character speaks in *Ajax* we find ourselves in a familiar political dilemma. The relevance of personal considerations, of issues of expediency, of the question of the advantage of the individual or of the group, of issues about the effect of decisions on those who have no political voice – all these are explored. It is not surprising that there is little difficulty in mapping these speeches onto the speeches in Thucydides – the personal politics of Alcibiades and Nicias (Th. 6.16–17.1), the expediency of both Cleon and Diodotus over Mytilene and of the Athenians in discussion with the Melians (Th. 3.37–48, 5.61, 107), the issue of personal or community advantage raised by Pericles in his final speech (2.60), the question of Athenian responsibility to effectively powerless communities in the Melian dialogue (5.104–5, cf. 109). Whatever the date of Ajax, its dramatization of the personal in politics would have triggered recent experience in the Assembly.

Trachiniae takes up the issue of how one understands political advice from a different angle. As Hall (2009) has recently pointed out, the plot of this play, which on one level seems primarily about personal relationships, turns on the question of distinguishing good from bad advice and acting accordingly. Deianeira consults the chorus as to whether or not to send Heracles the robe smeared in Nessus’ blood, and they advise caution and acting only once one knows from experience (ll. 585–93). But before she can take their advice the arrival of Lichas interrupts, and she subsequently reverts to the plan of sending the robe. Deliberation and decision are part of the stock-in-trade of tragedy, but *Trachiniae* is notable among Sophoclean tragedies for this explicit consultation with the chorus and for the way in which events – the arrival of Lichas – impinge upon and alter the decision-making (though comparable is Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, as also for the precipitation of Hyllus cursing, ll. 807–12). Within Athenian politics the decision to execute all the men of Mytilene is marked as ill-considered by its subsequent reversal under the persuasion of Diodotus, who warns that speed and passion are inimical to

good decision-making (Th. 3.42.1). But second thoughts were a regular feature of Athenian politics – as we see with the second thoughts about the wisdom of going to war with Sparta at all (Th. 2.59.1–2).

Issues of persuasion similarly dominate the *Philoctetes*. The consummate politician Odysseus had brought about resolution in *Ajax*, but in *Philoctetes* a rather different Odysseus is unable to achieve any resolution; divine intervention by Heracles is required to secure Philoctetes' participation in the Greek sack of Troy. It is the political process itself – and not any issues of political exile – that constitutes the drama, as throughout the play the audience will a way to be found for Philoctetes to take his part in the assault on Troy without his personal standing being compromised.

Why does the political process break down? It does so because the deception which Odysseus plans fails (as has been stressed by those who see here an attack on sophistic education: Greengard 1987: 12; Rose 1992: 288–327), and it fails both because Philoctetes proves even more marked by past history than anticipated (*Ph.* 254–9, 314–16, 942–4) and because Neoptolemus is finally unwilling to pay the price of sacrificing his personal reputation (compare ll. 86–94 with ll. 1222–34). Expressed like that, the play might be taken to be about how the interest of the community suffers when individual political actors put their personal interests before the interests of the group. But throughout the play the commodity which is most traded with is trust. Philoctetes lives in a world from which trust has been banished by past actions; Odysseus proposes to operate as if trust can be sacrificed; Neoptolemus is not prepared to make that sacrifice. But, although Neoptolemus can restore trust in himself by returning the bow (ll. 1350–1, 1402), he cannot turn the Greeks at Troy into a community in which Philoctetes can trust – all that Philoctetes is prepared to trust are his own people (l. 1368).

The contemporary relevance of exploring the failure of the political process is patent. Breakdown of trust is a feature both of Thucydides' reflections on the *stasis* occasioned by the events on Corcyra (3.82–4) and of his explanation of how the oligarchic coup of 411 BCE succeeded in Athens (8.66). Thucydides explicitly signals both the intelligence of the leaders of the oligarchic coup in 411 BCE and the popular suspicion of the cleverest of them, Antiphon (8.68). The legacy of history was repeatedly paraded before the Athenian courts in the aftermath of 411 BCE (cf. *Ar. Ra.* 687–92), as it was already the center of debate in 413 BCE, after failure in Sicily (Th. 8.1). Heracles insists that capturing Troy depends on both Philoctetes and Neoptolemus (*Ph.* 1434–7): it is collaboration that is required for political success. And it is the possibility of healing that is held out as the final lure to Philoctetes (ll. 1437–8). There is nothing either distinctively democratic or distinctively oligarchic here, for trust – and cooperation – are required within any political body (see Farrar 1988: ch. 5, esp. 153–87). (We should not, as I think Rose does (1992: 330; and cf. Rose 1995), overemphasize features inherent in the heroic mythology on which the plot is founded.) That said, cooperation to win a war had a particular resonance in the Athens of 409 BCE, as the Athenians sought to get their act together to carry on the fight against Sparta.

Electra is politically much more subversive than *Philoctetes*. The trickery and injustice in *Philoctetes* achieve no advantage, but in *Electra* they are ordained by Apollo, who orders Orestes to use trickery, not force (ll. 36–7). The lying tale of Orestes' death (ll. 660–763) is basic to the plot, and *Electra* proceeds to employ deception, with fatal success, against Aegisthus (ll. 1448–63). All of this is put in the context of a *polis* where our political expectations are repeatedly confounded: the citizens (and this is a play which explicitly extends citizenship to women: see l. 1227 and Budelmann 2000: 258; Finglass 2005: 204–5; Ormand 2009) have no respect for their rulers, are enthusiastic to see them

killed (ll. 976–85, cf. ll. 1458–63), and regard Clytemnestra's death as the end of the city's days of affliction (ll. 1413–4). The rulers in turn fear the people and feel obliged to conceal their plans (ll. 637–42). Against those who see this play merely as a character study of Electra (Griffin 1999a), scholars have rightly insisted that Sophocles repeatedly draws attention both to the setting within the *polis* and to the importance of the citizen body (Budelmann 2000: 245–68; Finglass 2005: 10–12, 2007; cf. MacLeod 2001).

The point at which *Electra* comes closest to the world of the contemporary Greek city, and of contemporary Athens, is when Electra, believing Orestes now to be dead, is trying to urge her sister Chrysothemis to join her in the undertaking of killing Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (ll. 947–89). As part of the persuasive strategy of her speech, she imagines the reception that they would get from the rest of the world (citizens and strangers alike) if they carried off this deed. People would, she imagines, point them out as having saved their ancestral house, and declare that the two women should be loved, revered, and honored by everyone at festivals and in the whole city for their bravery (*andρεία*; ll. 977–83). Although the phraseology here is not identical to that of public decrees, we are very clearly being carried into that world. In the fourth century the world of public honors was extremely well populated (though even then it was not one populated by women), but in the fifth century public honors were given much more sparingly. The archetype of those honored by their community – and the only precedent for the use of the dual in honoring of two figures together – is provided by the honors for the tyrannicides. Even if there is no pejorative overtone to the use of *tyrannos* in this play (see Finglass 2005: 296 on l. 664 (and cf. l. 661)), it is into the world of tyrannicide that this civic focalization of the killing of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra projects us.

The issue of tyrannicide became an active one in Athens with the assassination of Phrynichus in 411 BCE and the subsequent battle over honoring the assassins (where the issue was not whether the assassins should be honored, but who exactly had been responsible; see Meiggs and Lewis 1969: no. 85). It was an issue kept at the forefront of public attention by the clauses of the oath that the Athenians were required to swear in 409 BCE (Andocides 1.97–8). But it was not an issue created by the events of 411 BCE. Tyranny was a current phenomenon in the classical city, and tyrant scares rippled through Athens at various points. Athenians did not themselves face, until 411 BCE, the question of how to remove a government that was feared and hated, but the question of intervention to remove such governments was never far away. The questions of what means justify this end, and of who should be expected to carry out the task, which are central to *Electra*, were real political questions.

The chorus is still more important in bringing community issues to the fore in the *Oedipus at Colonus*. The Athenian community is substantiated both in the chorus of men from Colonus and through Theseus; the Theban community is represented by Creon. The chorus is given a particularly substantial role in the play, and its relationship with Theseus is at least a significant subplot – though it is important that the *choristai* are members of a single deme only (l. 78; see Budelmann 2000: 201–2), and their failure to act as, or for, the whole Athenian body should not be seen as implicit criticism of the Athenian assembly (*contra* Wilson 1997: 191–9). The relationship between chorus and Theseus plays out in one form in the issue of the reliance of communities upon leaders, and the same issue is played out in another form in the Theban need for Oedipus, which the latter refuses to meet, whichever side presents it to him, Creon or Polyneices. The different individuals in the play offer different accounts of the basis of authority. Oedipus has the authority of a charismatic individual, with a charisma that both precedes his

identification (ll. 149–69) and survives his revelation that he is Oedipus (ll. 220–4). Theseus has the authority of a magnanimous and rational political leader (ll. 569–70, 631–41, 656–67), free of any hint of self-interest (although this does not mean that he does not have to beware of subversion from within: ll. 1031–3). Creon and Polyneices, in their different ways, forfeit all authority by bringing in the expectation that they can achieve their ends by force (ll. 830–83, 1291–332).

Alongside the issue of authority is the issue of the power of words. Theseus is identified as the one who rules at Athens “by word rather than strength” (l. 68) rather than “the word being with the masses” (l. 66); the chorus members give their word that Oedipus will not be removed from the land if he removes himself from the sacred grove (ll. 176–7, 227), though they then regard themselves as deceived into this (ll. 228–32); Theseus gives his word to Oedipus that he will protect Oedipus’ daughters (l. 1632). Oedipus is the man whose word curses his sons (ll. 787–90, 1375–96), but who also reveals in words that the future fate of Athens rests on Theseus’ ability not to divulge in words the place where Oedipus is buried (ll. 1518–29, 1760–5). By contrast, the word Polyneices cannot speak to his comrades is about Oedipus’ refusal to support him (ll. 1402, 1429–30). Repeatedly, the word that matters is characterized as a “little word” (ll. 443, 569–70, 620, 1615–16): what makes a difference, for good or bad, does not have to be an eloquent speech.

Authoritative speech and the power of certain speech acts were high on the late fifth-century political agenda. As evidence of the importance of speech acts we could cite the repeated revisiting, in Aristophanic comedy (*Th.* 275, *Ra.* 101, 1471) and elsewhere (Arist. *Rh.* 1416^a28ff.), of the lines from Euripides’ *Hippolytus* (l. 612) in which the hero claimed that his oath was sworn only by his tongue. More positively, the decision of the Athenians to impose – and in the context of the Dionysia – an oath upon all citizens following the restoration of democracy in 410 BCE represented a quite novel use of the oath to bind the citizen population (Shear 2007; Wilson 2009). Thucydides’ discussion of Pericles’ paramount position as an authoritative advisor – at 2.65, in a context which guarantees a date after the end of the Peloponnesian War – and Aristophanes’ concern in *Frogs* to resurrect a voice that can give guidance also point to this same concern.

Although some commentators have seen *Oedipus at Colonus* as a negotiation between the political rationalism of Theseus and the religious irrationalism of Oedipus (Nietzsche 1967: 42, 68–9; Ahrensdorf 2009: ch. 2), this is actually a play in which the gods have little active role to play: it is much more a play about the relationship between speech and silence, on the one hand, and action, on the other. It proves to be important to speak in some circumstances, equally important to maintain silence in others. Political authority is measured by being bold enough to speak and keep one’s word, in some circumstances, by maintaining silence about what one has heard in others. Successful decision-making is not always achieved by putting everything into the middle in speeches. That was something that the experience of the Peloponnesian War had impressed upon Athenians; but what to do with that lesson was, and remains, a difficult matter.

5 Sophocles, Politics, and Democracy

Sophocles sought involvement in Athenian politics; of that his career leaves no doubt. But we should not see his tragedies as coded interventions in the politics of the moment, offering covert advice about individual politicians and what attitude should be taken to them. Rather, what we see in the plays is how personal issues play out against a political

background, and how moral and religious attitudes cannot be divorced from questions of political power and authority. There is little or nothing in Sophoclean tragedy that addresses the particular questions of living specifically in a democracy, but at almost every point the audience is made to think about issues of living in a community, and more particularly about how political power is distributed and controlled. These issues are perennial ones, but they were also issues of great pertinence to contemporary late fifth-century politics.

Guide to Further Reading

Fundamental on Sophocles the man is Jameson (1971). There remains much valuable discussion in Ehrenberg (1954). General issues of reading tragedy against its political background have been much discussed of late, for example, by Griffin (1998), Goldhill (2000), Rhodes (2003), and Wilson (2009); but the best place to start is Easterling (2005). On particularist readings of tragedy, see Bowie (1997). The most insightful interpretive work has been done on individual plays and is discussed as appropriate above, but note more generally Budelmann (2000). Perhaps the most serious obstacle to richer political readings of tragedy is the curious absence of a good political history of Athens in the late fifth century; for as good as it currently gets, see Ostwald (1986).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am very grateful to the editor and to Pat Easterling, Simon Goldhill, and Caroline Vout for extremely helpful comments on an earlier draft.

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Sophocles and Athenian Law

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1 Introduction

One of the key cultural values of the Greek *polis* was the ideal of the rule of law. When Sophocles was composing his plays, the Athenians, the metics at Athens, and the foreigners who came from the Greek *poleis* to attend the Dionysia all believed that citizens should obey not any one individual or group, but the laws, which embodied everything they considered good and just. This was the ideal that made them different from barbarians, who in their opinion were the slaves of kings unrestrained by any laws. According to Herodotus (7.104.4), Demaratus, a Spartan exile living at the Persian court, told Xerxes that the Spartans are free, but not completely, because the law is their master, which they fear more than Xerxes' subjects feared him. This view is also found in Attic tragedy: Tyndareus in Euripides' *Orestes* (ll. 485–7) tells Menelaus that Greeks do not wish to place themselves above the laws. The Athenians believed that the form of government that best upheld the rule of law was democracy. Aeschines (1.4–6) claims that democracy differs from oligarchy and tyranny by the fact that in the former the law protects the bodies of all citizens, but in the latter forms of government rulers rely on suspicion and armed guards to maintain their own power. In Euripides' *Suppliant Women* (ll. 429–37) Theseus contrasts tyranny, in which the law is controlled by a single man, with democracy, in which the written laws are the shared possession of all citizens and permit the weak to receive the same amount of justice as the wealthy. In Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (ll. 913–14) Theseus informs Creon that Athens is a community that practices justice and does nothing without the law (cf. Th. 2.37).

The average Athenian male citizen who came to see the plays of Sophocles learned about the rule of law by serving as a judge in court. Each year 6,000 Athenian citizens over the age of 30 were selected to decide cases in court, and they swore the judicial oath to vote in accordance with the laws and decrees of the Athenian people (Harris 2006b). In the late fifth century the average Athenian probably served in the courts once

every six or seven years and heard dozens, if not hundreds, of cases (Harris 2010: 1–2). Even without receiving formal training, most Athenians would therefore have acquired an extensive legal education. For instance, the citizen Nicobulus, in his speech as defendant against Pantaenetus, assumed that the court already knew the law about releases without his telling them about it (Dem. 37.18).

The average citizen would also receive a legal education from serving in the Council or attending meetings of the Assembly. In the fifth century 500 Athenians older than 30 served every year in the Council, and some served more than once. If a private individual accused an official of violating the laws, the case was brought before the Council, which heard the charge and sent it to a regular court if the defendant appeared to be guilty. In the Assembly the average citizen heard debates about laws and voted to pass or reject proposed statutes. Individual citizens, metics, and foreigners also had to know the laws, because they had to bring legal charges on their own; they could not hire a lawyer to do it for them. The Athenians made sure that the laws were easy to read and understand (Dem. 20.93) and were easily accessible to all. For instance, during the fifth century the laws about homicide were found at the Stoa Basileios, where the archon called the Basileus presided. The rule of law was not an ideal to which the Athenians only paid lip service, but was an integral part of public life.

This chapter explores the importance of Athenian law for understanding the plays of Sophocles. The first part examines the debate about the meaning of the term “law” (*nomos*) in the *Antigone*; the second shows how a careful study of Athenian homicide law can clarify the nature of guilt in *Oedipus Tyrannus*; and the third reveals how the procedure of supplication shapes the dramatic action of *Oedipus at Colonus*.

2 *Nomos* in the *Antigone*

No other Attic tragedy is more concerned with the nature of law than Sophocles’ *Antigone*. In his first speech as king, Creon says that he will make Thebes more powerful through his laws (l. 191), and the chorus admits that he has the authority to administer the laws (l. 213). Yet Antigone refuses to call Creon’s order to leave her brother Polyneices unburied a law (ll. 21–36). When Creon charges her with breaking the law, Antigone denies his accusation and argues that his orders do not have priority over the laws of the gods (ll. 449–55). After Teiresias tells the king that the gods have sent omens indicating their disapproval of his refusal to bury Polyneices, however, Creon rescinds his order and admits that it is best to preserve the established laws (ll. 1113–14). Who is upholding the law and who is breaking it?

Several scholars have interpreted the play as a conflict between the laws of the gods and the laws of men (e.g. Goldhill 1986: 96), or between the political obligations of the state and the religious obligations of the family (e.g. Ostwald 1986: 149). These views appear to assume that there existed in classical Athens a division between “church and state” similar to that found in modern society, and that the laws of the state might come into conflict with those of the church. But there was no such separation between politics and religion for the audience of Sophocles’ plays. The Athenian Assembly discussed religious business as a regular item on its agenda ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 43.6), and many laws and decrees passed by the Assembly regulated sacred rites and set rules for administering sacred precincts (Parker 2004). Political officials also had religious duties. The archon

called the “King” (Basileus) supervised the Mysteries and the festival of the Lenaea ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 57.1) and resolved disputes about priestly privileges (57.2). The Polemarch conducted sacrifices to Artemis the Huntress and to Enyalios (58.1). All the priests and priestesses of public cults were accountable for their conduct to the political authorities (Aeschin. 3.18). Finally, charges of impiety could be brought before the city’s courts against those who did not show respect for the gods.

In fact, the Athenians and other Greeks thought that the gods laid down the fundamental principles of justice on which the laws of the city were based. According to Heraclitus (fr. 250 KRS), “all laws of men are nourished by one law, the divine law; for it has as much power as it wishes and is sufficient for all and is still left over.” In Plato’s *Crito* (54C6–8) the laws of the city are called the brothers of the laws of Hades, which punish in the afterlife those who have broken the former. Demosthenes (23.81; cf. Antiphon 1.3) attributes the foundation of the courts for homicide to the gods. A plaintiff in an inheritance case heard by an Athenian court has the clerk of the court read out an oracle from Delphi about rites for the dead, so that the court can see that “the god speaks in the same terms about relatives as the laws of Solon” (Dem. 43.66–7). The Athenians might also seek divine approval for political measures; when Cleisthenes passed his reform of the Council introducing the ten tribes, he sought the blessing of the Pythia at Delphi ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 21.6). Because the laws of the *polis* had the approval of the gods, anyone who violated these laws offended both gods and men. In the *Third Tetralogy* attributed to Antiphon the accuser states: “Whoever kills someone in violation of the law sins against the gods and breaks the rules of human society” (4.1.2). To read into the *Antigone* a conflict between the laws of the gods and those of man would be to impose modern liberal ideas on the text and to interpret the play in anachronistic terms.

The laws established by the gods were often called the “unwritten laws” (X. *Mem.* 4.4.19) or the established laws (Th. 3.82.6). One of the unwritten laws was the duty to respect one’s parents (cf. A. *Supp.* 698–704). The laws of Athens made it possible to enforce this duty by providing for a public action against harming parents (*graphie kakoseos goneon*), which could be brought by any citizen (And. 1.74; Dem. 24.60, 103, 107). They also barred a man who beat his father or mother or did not give his parents food and shelter from addressing the Council, the Assembly, and the law courts (Aeschin. 1.28). The unwritten or established laws of the gods did not therefore constitute a realm of justice separate from that of the state. They formed the basic principles of justice on which the laws of the city were founded and from which they drew their legitimacy (Harris 2006: 54–6).

Another one of the established laws was the duty to grant the right of burial to all free persons, including enemies of the state. This practice dates back to the period of the Homeric poems; when Achilles refuses to return the body of Hector, the gods express their disapproval and insist that he give it back to his father Priam (*Il.* 24.39–45, 112–15). According to Thucydides (4.97–8), when the Thebans refused to return to the Athenians the bodies of their comrades after the battle of Delium in 424 BCE, the Athenians accused them of violating a common law of the Greeks. One scholar has observed: “The Greek convention was not that the victor had to perform funeral rites over the dead of the vanquished, but that he had to extend the right of *anairesis* (recovery of corpses) when it was requested by the vanquished” (Pritchett 1985: 240). It is true that the laws of Athens denied burial to traitors in Attic soil (X. *Hell.* 1.7.22), but they did not prohibit burial to traitors in other territory.

When Creon forbids the burial of Polyneices in the *Antigone*, he is violating one of the most important unwritten laws in Greek culture. This is why, in the prologue, Antigone decides to disobey his order and invites her sister Ismene to join her in giving their brother burial rites (ll. 21–38, 41, 43, 45–6). She does not believe that she is breaking the law, because Creon’s order is only the command of a magistrate and does not have the force of law. She has a strong case; besides violating the laws of the gods, Creon has not gained the approval of the Theban people. When Creon invites the chorus to enforce his command (l. 215), the elders of Thebes express their reluctance to carry out the task (l. 216) and never voice their approval. After the Guard reports the burial of Polyneices, the chorus thinks that the gods have brought this about, a view that reveals their doubts about Creon’s decision (ll. 278–9). Ismene, too, implicitly admits that Creon’s order is wrong but claims that she, as a citizen, must obey the ruler and, as a woman, must obey men (ll. 49–68).

The Athenians who watched the play would not have found Antigone’s disobedience to Creon’s order dangerous or unusual conduct. In Athens all magistrates had to swear that they would obey the laws. The orders of an official had to conform to the laws of Athens; if they did not, the official could be deposed and prosecuted by various procedures. Citizens had the right to disobey an illegal order made by a magistrate. The Ephebic oath, which all young men swore before performing military service, required that citizens obey only those orders given by officials who were governing prudently, that is, according to the laws. Socrates was a good Athenian citizen and obeyed the authorities, but “only in regard to the law’s command” (X. *Mem.* 4.4.1–3; Pl. *Ap.* 32B–C). When the Thirty instructed him to arrest a citizen whom they planned to execute without trial, Socrates considered the command illegal and did not carry it out. Antigone’s refusal to obey Creon was therefore in keeping with Athenian ideas about the rule of law.

When Antigone is caught burying Polyneices and brought by the Guard to the palace, Creon asks if she denies guilt (l. 443) and then whether she is aware that she has violated his order (ll. 446–7). She acknowledges her actions and admits she knew about the order (ll. 443, 448). Creon then asks if she dared to violate his laws (l. 449). Here Antigone makes a crucial distinction. She insists that Creon’s command is only the order of an official, but she denies that it has the status of a law, which must have divine approval. She expresses herself with care and precision (ll. 450–5).

It was not Zeus who issued this command [*keruxas*],
 Nor did Justice, who lives with the gods below.
 Mark out such laws [*nomous*] among men.
 Nor do I think your orders [*kerugmath'*] are so strong
 That one who is mortal can override the unwritten and
 Unshakable laws [*nomima*] of the gods.

Many scholars pay the most attention to the contrast between the authority of the gods and the power of a mere mortal. But Antigone’s legal point should not be overlooked. She contrasts orders (*kerugmath'*), which can be disobeyed, with laws (*nomous*, *nomima*), which cannot be violated. Despite this passage’s importance, it must not be taken in isolation and out of context, which would give the mistaken impression that Antigone bases her arguments only on the will of the gods. She also takes account of popular opinion. When Creon says that she alone of all the citizens opposes him, she answers that

the Thebans agree with her but remain silent out of fear (ll. 508–9). She does not set the laws of the gods in opposition to the interests of the state but takes both into account to justify her disobedience to a tyrannical ruler.

The popular support for Antigone is further stressed in the next scene, when her fiancé Haemon attempts to get his father Creon to change his mind. Creon extols the virtues of obedience and denounces lack of respect for authority (ll. 672–6). He goes so far as to assert: “Whomever the *polis* places [in command], it is necessary to obey him in small matters and in just matters and in their opposites” (i.e. in important and unjust matters) (ll. 666–7). In reply, Haemon confirms what Antigone has said in the previous scene: the people of Thebes side with her (l. 733). When Creon then indignantly asks, “Will the *polis* then tell us what we must order?” (l. 734), Haemon says: “There is not a city that belongs to one man” (l. 735). Although some critics think Creon defends the *polis* against the claims of the family, the king shows no respect for popular opinion and treats the *polis* as his personal property, a view that the Athenians and other Greeks would have associated with tyranny. Like Antigone, Haemon finds Creon in the wrong both because he pays no attention to the will of the people and because he transgresses the laws of the gods. In reply to Creon’s indignant question – “Am I making a mistake in honoring my office (*archas*)?” – his son coolly observes that he does not respect his office by trampling on the honors due to the gods (ll. 744–5).

Creon realizes that he is wrong only after the seer Teiresias tells him that unfavorable omens show the gods are angry that Polyneices lies unburied; and he predicts misfortunes about to fall on Creon and his family. Previously confident, Creon starts to waver and ask the chorus what he should do (l. 1199). This is a significant moment in the play: it is the first time that the king asks anyone for advice. The chorus does not hesitate and tells him to bury Polyneices and to free Antigone. After he takes their advice, he reveals that he understands his error (ll. 1113–14):

I fear that it is best to live one’s life until
The end preserving the established laws [*kathestotas nomous*].

Here Creon finally realizes that his so-called laws lacked the legitimacy of the established laws, which transcend the power of the officials of the *polis*. As a ruler, he could issue orders and call them laws, but his power is still subject to a higher authority, which he must respect. In the rest of the play he pays the price for his error and loses both his son and his wife.

One can thus interpret the play as a debate about the nature of law (*nomos*). Creon takes the approach of a tyrant: whatever he says is a law and must be obeyed without question. Antigone and Haemon follow the Athenian view that the law must enjoy the approval of the gods and receive the consent of the people. If Antigone makes a tragic mistake, it is to surrender to despair too quickly. If she had not committed suicide, she would have been rescued, and the play would have ended happily. While Creon has too much confidence, for too long, in a mistaken view about his power to make the law, Antigone does not have enough confidence in her correct view about the role of divine law in the *polis*. The tragedy does not arise because Creon and Antigone are both stubborn and intransigent. Indeed, if Antigone had been more persistent in her conviction and had not killed herself in despair, there would have been no tragedy. Her disobedience to Creon’s orders is an attempt to uphold Athenian ideas about the rule of law, which the audience would have found admirable.

3 *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the Law on Homicide

In the prologue to *Oedipus Tyrannus* there is a plague in Thebes. Crops are failing, cattle are dying, and women cannot give birth (ll. 22–7). Oedipus, the ruler of Thebes, has sent Creon to Delphi to find out from Apollo the cause of the plague (ll. 68–72). Upon his return, Creon reports that the plague has been caused by pollution arising from the murder of the previous king, Laius. To deliver the city from the plague, the people must remove the pollution through the death or exile of his murderer (ll. 100–1). In the following scenes Oedipus gradually discovers that Laius is his father and that he, Oedipus, is the one who has killed him.

J.-P. Vernant, in an essay widely cited in some circles, argued that, even though Oedipus killed Laius, he is morally innocent: “When he kills Laius, it is in a state of legitimate self-defense against a stranger who struck him first.” To explain why Oedipus is polluted, Vernant claimed that there were two different standards of justice, one religious, another human. “Innocent and pure from the human point of view, he is guilty and polluted from the religious point of view” (Vernant 1972: 110–11). The reason why Oedipus blinds himself and must be driven out of the city is that he is a *pharmakos* or scapegoat, an *agos* or stain that must be expelled to avert the plague. Though innocent himself, “Oedipus in reality carries the weight of all the misfortune that devastates his fellow-citizens” (Vernant 1972: 122).

This view of Oedipus’ guilt collides with several objections. First, the word *pharmakos* (“scapegoat”) never occurs in the entire play. When Creon reports the response of the oracle, the remedy for the plague is to punish the murderer of Laius, not to select a scapegoat and drive him out (ll. 106–7). Second, what happens to Oedipus does not fit the pattern of the ritual, which requires that the scapegoat be driven out of the city (Bremer 1983). As the play ends, Creon does not expel Oedipus but orders him to retire inside the palace (l. 1515). Later on, when Oedipus is driven out of Thebes, the reason is the ingratitude of his sons (*OC* 1354–6). Finally, does Oedipus kill Laius in legitimate self-defense? The answer to this question requires a brief review of Athenian homicide law.

There were three main private actions (*dikai*) for homicide. The first category was “deliberate homicide” (*phonos ek pronoias*), which was tried by the Areopagus (Dem. 23.22; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 57.3). The penalty was death. If the defendant feared conviction and fled Attica before the court voted, the court could impose a sentence of permanent exile (Antiphon 5.13; see Dem. 23.69 with MacDowell 1962: 114). The second category applied to the person who killed someone against his will (*akon*); this sort of case was tried at the Palladion ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 57.3; Dem. 23.71). The penalty on this charge was exile (Dem. 23.72). If the convicted man could convince the relatives of the victim to pardon him, he could return to Athens. Once pardon was granted, it could not be revoked (Dem. 37.59).

The third category covered cases in which the relatives of the victim accused a man of murder and the accused did not deny killing the victim, but claimed that he did it justly (*dikaios*), or in accordance with the laws (*kata tous nomous*). These cases were tried at the Delphinion ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 57.3; Dem. 23.74). The laws of homicide did not leave this category undefined, but listed the specific cases falling under this rubric. The defendant could claim that he had killed justly in the following circumstances:

- 1 he killed his victim in an athletic contest and against his will (Dem. 23.53; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 57.3);
- 2 he killed his victim in ignorance during battle (Dem. 23.53; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 57.3);

- 3 he killed his victim when the latter was caught in sexual intercourse with the defendant's wife, mother, sister, daughter, or concubine kept for the purpose of (bearing) free children (Dem. 23.53; Lys. 1.30). The law did not take into account the woman's consent and applied both to those who seduced and to those who used force (Harris 2006: 283–93);
- 4 he killed someone carrying off his property without legal grounds (Dem. 23.60);
- 5 he killed someone stealing at night (Dem. 24.113);
- 6 he killed someone who had been condemned for murder and returned to Attic soil (Dem. 23.28);
- 7 he killed a tyrant, someone aiming at tyranny, or someone attempting to overthrow the democracy (Dem. 20.159; Lycurgus, *Against Leocrates*, 124–7);
- 8 he killed someone “in the road” (Dem. 23.53: *en hodo kathelōn*). This cryptic phrase is helpfully glossed by Harpocration (*s.v.*) as “in ambush” (*en locho* or *en enedra*).

The meaning of this clause of the law is key for our analysis of the murder of Laius. The word *lochōs* appears first in Homer, where it is used several times to describe the attempt of the suitors to kill Telemachus on his return from Pylos. The suitors plan their attack in advance and choose a hiding place; their intent is to kill Telemachus (*Od.* 6.667–72; cf. 4.842–7; 13.425–6; 14.180–2; 15.28–30; 16.369–70, 22.53). One should also note that, when Bellerophon kills in self-defense those who attack him from an ambush, the king of the Lycians does not hold him guilty of murder nor does he demand retribution (*Il.* 6.187–90) but regards the killing as justified. The meaning of the term does not change in classical literature, where it retains the meaning of “ambush.” The word *enedra* is a virtual synonym and is used to describe the same kind of plot. In all the passages where the two words are found, there are three main elements, either implicit or explicitly mentioned. First, the person who sets an ambush plans ahead and anticipates the arrival of his intended victim. Second, the person lying in ambush is concealed from view until he emerges from his hiding place and attempts to take advantage of the surprise he has caused. Third, the person who attacks from ambush intends either to kill or to capture his intended victim. This clause of the law on just homicide therefore absolved from guilt the man who killed someone who plotted to kill or capture him and lay concealed, then attacked him suddenly. It did not cover the case of the person who killed someone who had merely struck him on the spur of the moment. This is clear from a case described by Demosthenes (21.73–6), who recounts how Euaeon killed Boeotus in retaliation for an insulting blow. The two were at a party, and Boeotus was drunk and acted spontaneously. Euaeon did not have to strike back to avoid being killed, because Demosthenes (21.73) says that he could have restrained himself and won the approval of others present. The court was divided in its votes, but a majority found Euaeon guilty of murder (Dem. 21.75). Had it been permissible to kill someone merely in retaliation for a single insulting blow where there was no threat of deadly harm, the court would have acquitted him unanimously. We will return to this case later.

Each type of homicide incurred a different type of ritual pollution. A person convicted on a charge of deliberate homicide incurred the most serious or ineradicable pollution. In this case nothing could remove it from that person in the land of the victim. Someone judged guilty of unwilling homicide could remove the pollution if s/he gained pardon from the relatives and carried out rites of purification (Dem. 23.72). The person who killed justly or according to the laws was “pure” or “clean.” For instance, Demosthenes (9.44; cf. 20.158) states: “It has been written in the laws about homicide in cases where

it is not permitted to bring a suit for murder, but the killing is sanctified [*euagos*] and says 'let him die without honor [*atimos*].' Indeed, this means the killer of these men is ritually pure [*katharos*]."

We can now turn to the account of Laius' murder that Oedipus gives to Jocasta (ll. 800–13):

My wife, I will tell you the truth. When I was traveling near this place where the road forks, there I met a herald and a man mounted on a chariot drawn by horses, as you say. The man in front and the old man attempted to drive me out of the road by force. For my part I struck the man pushing me aside, the charioteer, in anger. The old man, seeing this, watched until I was alongside the chariot and hit me right in the face with his two-pronged lash. He did not pay an equal [*isen*] penalty, but suddenly struck by the stick in my hand, he collapsed right away, falling on his back from the middle of the chariot. Then I killed every last one of them.

A careful study of the passage shows that Oedipus is guilty of deliberate homicide. First, Laius did not attack Oedipus from an ambush in a concealed place. There is no indication that Laius knew that Oedipus was coming or had plotted to assault him. Second, Oedipus does not say that Laius and his companions intended to kill him; their aim was to drive him out of the road (*elauneten*). When he hit the charioteer, Oedipus says that he was "pushing me out of the way" (*ektreponta*). Third, when Oedipus struck the charioteer, his intent was not to defend himself against a mortal blow, but to retaliate in his anger at an insult. Fourth, Oedipus does not state that his life was in danger; his account makes it clear that he could have restrained his anger and allowed Laius and his companions to go on their way without risk to himself. Fifth, when Laius struck Oedipus, his intent was to retaliate for his blow to the charioteer. He did not use a knife or a sword, which could have inflicted a mortal wound, but a whip, which could inflict insult but not death. Sixth, Oedipus himself says that Laius paid a penalty "not equal," that is, disproportionate (*ouk isen*) to his offense. Oedipus therefore thought that what he did to Laius (death) was not proportionate to what he had suffered (grievous insult).

Oedipus' killing of Laius clearly does not resemble any of the cases of just homicide. He did not kill Laius during an athletic contest; Laius was not caught in sexual relations with Oedipus' wife or any of his female kin; Laius was not killed in the act of stealing Oedipus' property; Laius was not attempting to overthrow the democracy or to set up a tyranny; Laius had not prepared an ambush for Oedipus. *Pace* Vernant, Oedipus' murder of Laius was not a form of legitimate self-defense. Because Oedipus has committed deliberate homicide, he incurs ineradicable pollution, which cannot be removed except by his death or permanent exile (ll. 100–1). These are exactly the same penalties for deliberate homicide found in Athenian law. There is no need to resort to the ritual of the scapegoat to explain the guilt of Oedipus and his punishment.

The story of Oedipus' killing of Laius is very similar to Euaion's murder of Boeotus described by Demosthenes (21.70–6) in his speech *Against Meidias*. In both cases the murderer received an insulting blow from his victim. In both cases the murderer struck

his blow in anger and without prior deliberation. In both cases the murderer could have held back without suffering further harm. The Athenian judges who tried Euaeon appear to have found the case difficult, but a narrow majority voted for conviction. Demosthenes argues that those voting to convict did so because Euaeon hit Boeotus in such a way that he brought about his death (*apokteinein*). In other words, Euaeon struck as the result of a conscious decision, and his intentional blow caused the victim's death. Those who voted to acquit were prepared to grant an excessive amount of retribution (*hyperbolen tes timorias*) to a person who had suffered physical insult. In other words, the minority took into account extenuating circumstances or *epieikeia* (on this term, see Harris 2004). Here the similarity with Oedipus' description of Laius' murder is striking: he says that Laius "did not pay an equal [*isen*] penalty." In both cases the killer inflicted an amount of harm disproportionate to the insult he had suffered.

Sophocles has carefully constructed the account of Oedipus' murder of Laius as part of his aesthetic strategy. For the murder of Laius to cause the plague, Oedipus must be guilty of deliberate homicide, but for the audience to feel pity for Oedipus, he must not be entirely wicked. If Oedipus had killed Laius to rob his property or from some other base motive, he would not have gained the sympathy of the spectators. His reaction to Laius' insult may not have been justified in legal terms, but it is understandable. Sophocles had to maintain a delicate balance to prevent his audience from hating Oedipus and to win for the hero a measure of sympathy and understanding. This case of provocation, which the Athenian courts found to be a hard one, gave the poet the legal means to achieve his aesthetic aim.

4 Supplication in the *Oedipus at Colonus*

A legal procedure can give structure and meaning to action on stage. For instance, Aeschylus uses a trial to present a conflict and its resolution in the *Eumenides*. Aeschylus deftly exploits the legal format to create a dramatic clash of personalities and suspense about the outcome of the dispute. The verdict serves both a legal and an artistic role: it decides the case by acquitting Orestes, it provides a resolution to the dramatic conflict between Orestes and the Erinyes, and it leads to the *dénouement* of the entire trilogy.

Another legal procedure used by the tragic poets to shape dramatic action was supplication. This procedure was a common ritual that combined religious and legal elements and contained four basic steps. The first step was the approach of the suppliant to the *supplicandus*, the person to whom he or she wanted to make a request. The suppliant would naturally select someone in a position of authority, who had the power to help or protect (Naiden 2006: 30–41). In the second step the suppliant might employ one or different gestures toward the *supplicandus*. The most common was to lower oneself and to grasp the knees of the *supplicandus*. This is the gesture that Priam uses when he wishes to ask Achilles to return the body of his son Hector for burial (*Il.* 24.477–8). To lend further weight to a request, the suppliant might touch the chin of the *supplicandus*, as Thetis does with Zeus when asking him to restore honor to her son Achilles (*Il.* 1.500–2). There is no magical or coercive force to these gestures; they are a way of expressing the relationship between the two parties. The suppliant shows that he or she is dependent on the favor of the *supplicandus* and honors him/her, and s/he does this through a gesture that acknowledges the *supplicandus*' superiority, in hopes of gaining a positive response (Naiden 2006: 43–62). Alternatively, the suppliant might

carry a laurel bough to symbolize his status (*Il.* 1.14; *S. OT* 3, 143 with Naiden 2006: 56–7). In the third step the suppliant makes his request and gives the reasons why the *supplicandus* should grant it. This speech may combine different types of argument. The suppliant may be the victim of injustice and seek retribution; s/he may stress the bond of similar experiences; or s/he may promise future benefits if his/her request is granted (Naiden 2006: 69–104).

In the first three steps the initiative lies with the suppliant; in the fourth and final step it passes on to the *supplicandus*. The suppliant has made a request; it is now up to the *supplicandus* to decide whether to grant or to reject the request. The *supplicandus* must therefore evaluate both the request and the person who is making it; and s/he may consider several different factors. S/he must consider whether the suppliant is worthy, whether the request is justified, and what the advantages and disadvantages of granting the request are (Naiden 2006: 105–69). S/he should not take the final decision lightly. Once the *supplicandus* grants the request, it is considered binding. If s/he does not abide by his/her promise to the suppliant, Zeus will punish him/her in his capacity as the god of suppliants (Hikesios), and the *supplicandus* will lose trust and respect in the human community. To indicate acceptance, the *supplicandus* may raise the suppliant from his/her kneeling position, as Achilles does with Priam, to show that he will return the body of Hector for burial (*Il.* 24.515). After the priest of Thebes asks Oedipus to save the city from the plague, the king conveys his pledge to honor their request by inviting him and the other citizens to rise and depart (*S. OT* 145: *histasthe*). To indicate rejection, the *supplicandus* may push the suppliant away, so that the contact between the two is broken (*Il.* 6.61–5).

There are two main types of supplication: private and public. In the Homeric poems the suppliant appeals to an individual, who gives his personal decision without consulting the community. With the development of formal legal and political institutions, there arose a public form of supplication, in which the suppliant appealed to the community and to its leaders. Instead of grasping the knees of an individual, the suppliant would go and sit at the altar of a public shrine (Naiden 2006: 36–41). When the Plataeans wanted an alliance with Athens and protection against the Thebans, they sent representatives to sit at the Altar of the Twelve Gods in the Agora (Hdt. 6.108.4). In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the people of Thebes take boughs and sit at the city's altars to present their request to Oedipus, the leader of the community (*S. OT* 2, 142). Eventually, the Athenians regulated this form of supplication ([Arist.] *Ath, Pol.* 43.6), and the acceptance of a public supplication might take the form of a decree of the Assembly (*IG* ii² 218, 276, 337). The procedure might be used to allow those outside the community to gain access to the Assembly (*Dem.* 24.12).

The procedure of supplication was inherently dramatic. The gesture of grasping the knees sent a strong visual message to the audience and conveyed in stark physical terms the power relationship between two characters. The third step provided an opportunity for a character to make an eloquent speech, full of pathos and emotion. The moment between the third and fourth steps, between the request of the suppliant and the decision of the *supplicandus*, was full of uncertainty and suspense. The suppliant waits anxiously to hear the decision; the *supplicandus* may hesitate as s/he weighs the implications of acceptance and rejection. Or there may be a delay between the request of the suppliant and the arrival of someone in authority, who can make a decision regarding the request. Because of the dramatic potential of this moment, poets might prolong the interval between request and decision, so as to increase the sense of expectation and fear. For

instance, when Priam supplicates Achilles, the latter does not immediately grant his request, but pushes him away at first and weeps for his father, who will never welcome him home alive (Il. 24.507–15). In Aeschylus' *Suppliants* the Danaids make their request early in the play (ll. 335–41), but they must wait for a long time until the king is able to consult the Assembly and report their decision (ll. 600–5).

The procedure of supplication might give structure not just to one or two scenes but to an entire play. A suppliant drama contained four basic parts. First, there is the request of the suppliant. Second, there is the decision of the *supplicandus*. Once the *supplicandus* grants the suppliant's request, however, the drama is not over but enters a new phase. The question now arises: will the *supplicandus* fulfill his promise by protecting the suppliant? The first two parts of the drama concentrate on the character of the suppliant and on whether s/he deserves to gain his/her request. The second two parts of the drama test the resolve of the *supplicandus* and show whether s/he is pious and honest. In the third part of a suppliant drama, there is a threat to the safety of the suppliant. In Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, the Egyptian herald comes, backed by an army, to demand that the Argives surrender the Danaids to his custody (ll. 827–910). In the fourth and final part, the *supplicandus* rescues or defends the suppliant and thereby fulfills the pledge s/he gave in the second part of the play. In Aeschylus' *Suppliants* King Pelasgus demonstrates his piety and virtue by preventing the Egyptians from dragging away the Danaids from Argive soil (ll. 911–49). The defeat of the Egyptians completes the action of the play in a celebration of victory and connects the final scene with the promise granted to the Danaids at the beginning of the play.

Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* is arguably the most complex suppliant drama in all of Athenian tragedy. The play presents two main supplications: the first one by Oedipus, made to the community of Athens, the second one by Polyneices, made to his father. The two supplications form an effective pair of contrasts, which give the play an overall structure. The first supplication is public: Oedipus makes his appeal to the Athenian community led by Theseus. The first request is justified and therefore successful: Oedipus has been unjustly driven into exile and gains membership in the community and the right to burial in Attica. The second supplication is private: Polyneices begs his father for his personal support. Unlike his father's request, Polyneices' supplication is rejected, and for a good reason: he is returning to his native Thebes as an invader, with foreign allies who wish to destroy the city. Polyneices in effect is seeking the private help of his father in order to harm his country's public good. The play therefore serves in part to instruct the audience through example, by showing both the right and the wrong ways to supplicate.

The play opens with Oedipus' arrival at Colonus, a settlement not far from Athens (ll. 1–24). Shortly after, a local inhabitant arrives to tell Oedipus that he is seated in the sanctuary of the Eumenides (ll. 39–40, 42–3) and must leave it. At this point Oedipus declares that he is the suppliant of these goddesses and will not leave (ll. 44–5). Once he learns where he is, Oedipus needs to find out who rules the area (ll. 66, 68). The man from Colonus tells him that a king rules and that his name is Theseus (ll. 68, 70). Once he knows who has authority, Oedipus asks for Theseus' presence, so that he can address his supplication to him directly (ll. 70–5). The local inhabitant has a different view and says that the people of Colonus have the right to decide (ll. 75–80). This introduces a legal question about jurisdiction and leads to two separate evaluations. Yet the two evaluations are also effective from a dramatic perspective, because they prolong the interval between the initial request of Oedipus, made in the prologue, and the final decision of Theseus, taken in the second scene (ll. 631–41), and they delay the king's

arrival to enhance its importance. During this interval Oedipus must wait anxiously for the king's arrival and must defend himself before the people of Colonus, who are reluctant to welcome a man who has committed parricide and incest.

When the chorus arrives, its members immediately demand that Oedipus leave the precinct of the Eumenides. Oedipus agrees on condition that they do not harm him (ll. 174–5). The chorus members assure him that their order is not tantamount to a rejection of his supplication, and they promise that they will never drive him out against his will (ll. 176–9). They then proceed to interrogate Oedipus. The aim of their questions is to evaluate his worthiness as a suppliant (ll. 203–24). Once they learn his identity, their immediate reaction is to reject his request and to drive him out (l. 226). When Oedipus reminds them of their promise, they justify their rejection by claiming that he has deceived them and that he would bring evil upon them (ll. 229–36). At this point Antigone intercedes to plead his case and ask for pity (l. 241, *hiketenuomen*). Oedipus then adduces several arguments on his own behalf. He appeals to Athens' reputation for piety and next states that he killed his father in self-defense and married his mother in ignorance (ll. 258–91). These are standard legal arguments given by defendants in Athenian courts, which took exculpatory factors into account when judging cases (Harris 2004). Oedipus ends by promising benefits to Athens if his request is granted. These arguments convince the people of Colonus not to reject his supplication but to place the decision in the hands of a higher authority (ll. 292–5). They realize that the matter is too important for them to adjudicate, and they acknowledge the power of the central authority over their local affairs.

In the next scene Theseus arrives and immediately expresses sympathy for Oedipus' suffering on the grounds that he, too, was an exile from his native land (ll. 551–68). Because Oedipus has already proven that he is an innocent and worthy suppliant, all that remains is for him to present his request for burial in Attica, which will confer great benefits on Athens (ll. 575–628). In marked contrast to the people of Colonus, Theseus does not hesitate to grant Oedipus' request and to make him a citizen (ll. 631–41). The king thereby reveals his confidence, his generosity, and his piety. After receiving the promise of protection, Oedipus now starts to worry about the threat from Thebes and whether the king will keep his word (l. 648). Theseus assures him that he will not betray him (l. 649). Oedipus does not insist on him swearing an oath, which would be a sign of distrust (l. 650). Theseus replies that an oath would only give him protection in word, which implies that what Oedipus needs is real protection, through actions (l. 651). But Oedipus still wants to know how the king will act when a threat appears (l. 652). Theseus repeats his assurances, but Oedipus continues to fear (ll. 653–6). As he departs for Athens, he once more pledges that no one will take him away against his will (ll. 661–3).

This interchange is crucial for the development of the plot, because it stresses the transition from the second part of the suppliant drama (decision about the suppliant's request) to the third part (threat to the suppliant from a foreign power). In the third scene the play follows the standard pattern, with Creon's attempt to seize Oedipus, his capture of Ismene and Antigone, and Theseus' defense of Oedipus and rescue of his two daughters (ll. 720–1149). As Theseus declares, these actions show that the *supplicandus* is true to his word (ll. 1145–9). The entire sequence of (1) request by the suppliant, (2) decision by the *supplicandus*, (3) threat of danger to the suppliant, and (4) rescue by the *supplicandus* gives a coherent dramatic structure to the first two-thirds of the play.

The next scene presents Oedipus' rejection of his son's supplication and forms a contrast with Theseus' acceptance of Oedipus' request. Polyneices has come to Athens and

has made a public supplication at the altar of Poseidon, with a request to speak with Oedipus and to gain safe passage through Athenian territory (ll. 1285–8). Theseus correctly grants this reasonable request by raising him from the altar (l. 1286, *anestesen*). Although Oedipus does not welcome him as he approaches but maintains a stony silence, Antigone encourages him to present his request (ll. 1280–3). Polyneices then explains to his father how his younger brother Eteocles has driven him out of Thebes by winning over the citizens (ll. 1292–301). He has now collected an army of Argives to attack Thebes and regain his throne (l. 1307). He ends his appeal by promising to have Oedipus live with him in the conquered city (l. 1342). Oedipus replies only because he must obey the officials of his new country (ll. 1349–52). He then lays out his reasons for rejecting the supplication: Polyneices drove him into exile and failed to provide him, his father, with food and shelter (ll. 1354–79). He has therefore violated the child’s duty to provide support for his parent (*gerotrophia*), which was one of the unwritten laws of the gods (X. *Mem.* 4.4.19) and was also enforced by the laws of Athens (Harris 2006a: 55–6). Oedipus does not turn away his son simply because he is angry with him. Acting as a responsible *supplicandus*, he justifies his rejection on strong legal principles (ll. 1381–2: “These reasons overpower your supplication and your throne because long-famed Justice sits next to Zeus with his ancient laws”). Polyneices further undermines his case by threatening to invade his fatherland and to sack his native city. This motivates Antigone to make her own supplication (l. 1414, *hiketemo*). She begs her brother to call off his attack on Thebes and to return to Argos (ll. 1416–17). But Polyneices stubbornly refuses and insists on leading the army to defeat, even though he knows that his father’s curse has doomed him (ll. 1432–8).

The three supplications in this scene subtly reveal the character of each *supplicandus*. As a good ruler, Theseus follows international law and grants Polyneices’ request to present his request to Oedipus and to pass through his territory without harm. Oedipus in this scene becomes a *supplicandus* instead of a suppliant. This change in his position marks an important stage in his transformation from a weak and vulnerable old man into a fearsome hero who has the power to destroy his enemies and protect his friends. Polyneices’ rejection of Antigone’s supplication shows that he is stubborn and unreasonable. Even when warned about the outcome of his invasion, he persists in his treason against his country and ignores the pleas of his sister.

5 Conclusions

These plays of Sophocles illustrate three ways in which knowledge of Athenian law can enhance our understanding of Athenian tragedy. In Sophocles’ *Antigone* contemporary ideas about the relationship between the unwritten laws of the gods and the laws of the community and about a citizen’s duty toward the law and the orders of officials inform the debate between the two main characters. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the laws about homicide and ritual pollution enable us to uncover the causal link between the plague in Thebes and the murder of Laius, two key elements that drive the plot. By analyzing the legal aspects of the murder, we can also gain a greater appreciation of Sophocles’ artistry and insight into the character of his hero. In the *Oedipus at Colonus* the legal procedure of supplication provides a sequence of steps that structure the dramatic action and create thematic unity as the scenes of the play unfold.

Guide to Further Reading

On the legal knowledge of theater audience, see E. M. Harris, “Introduction,” in E. M. Harris, D. Leao, and P. J. Rhodes (2010: 1–24). On the legal arguments in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, see E. M. Harris, “Antigone the Lawyer,” in Harris (2006a). On the legal issues in *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, see E. M. Harris, “Is Oedipus Guilty? Sophocles and Athenian Homicide Law,” in Harris, Leao, and Rhodes (2010: 122–46). On supplication, see F. S. Naiden (2006). On the role of *epieikeia* (consideration of extenuating circumstances), see E. M. Harris (2004: 1–13).

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The Necessity and Limits of Deliberation in Sophocles' Theban Plays

Edith Hall

In a curious exchange at *OT* 1367–8 the chorus says that they do not think that in deciding to blind himself Oedipus deliberated well, since he would have been better never to have lived than to live as a blind man. Oedipus responds: “Do not tell me that things have not been best done in this way. Stop lecturing me. Don’t give me any more advice!” This interchange raises an unexpected question. Oedipus, it is implied, after discovering his identity and finding his mother/wife dead, could have deliberated about alternative courses of action. He could have decided to do something other than blind himself. Oedipus has decided upon the worst possible course of action, the chorus says, in ending up both blind and alive.

The same stem, *boul-* underlies the verbs used both by the chorus to describe Oedipus’ decision, and by Oedipus in his last clause: “Don’t give me any more advice.” *Bouleuesthai* means “to deliberate” or “to give and receive advice.” Good deliberation, *euboulia*, is the ability both to deliberate to one’s own (and/or one’s community’s) advantage and “to recognize good deliberation and the good advice arising from good deliberation” (Stevens 1933: 104). Words with this stem recur in the plays of Sophocles, who was fascinated by the manner in which human beings facing extremity come to decisions. His characters take many decisions impetuously, often explicitly and conspicuously rejecting advice to take time, find out more, gather information, test assumptions, or consider alternative courses of action. Such impetuous decisions usually lead to greater calamity. In this chapter I explore the instrumentality of deliberation, advice, and decision-taking in the Theban plays, taken in the chronological order of the events they portray; my argument is not concerned with the question of the dates at which *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* were written and premiered (see Hall 2010: 300–1). These processes are presented in drastically different ways in each play. Also dissimilar is the interface in each play between the way in which crucial decisions are taken and the outcome of the action in the non-mortal sphere, or at least in the sphere where divine will is what determines

mortal outcomes. An enquiry into this interaction between human decision-taking and theological imperative can illuminate Sophoclean tragedy's "bottom line" on the question of whether there is any causal relationship between human happiness and human intellectual agency. The textual analysis will follow a brief explication of what Sophocles' democratic Athenian audience understood by deliberation and its importance in running a city state, since this topic has been under-emphasized by scholars on tragedy over the last few decades.

In classical Greek ethics there was a body of "popular wisdom" about deliberation, manifested in proverbs. "Deliberate at night" (that is, "sleep on it"); "don't deliberate in anger"; "the enemy of good counsel is speed"; "women and deliberation don't mix"; "don't drink and deliberate" (see further Stevens 1933 and Hall 2009: 81–3). Two of these proverbs are combined by Thucydides' Diodotus when he tries to dissuade the inflamed Athenians from implementing a massacre at Mytilene (Th. 3.42.1): "There are two enemies of good counsel: haste and passion" (*tachos kai orgē*). Indeed, fifth-century literature shows that the intellectual theorization of the nature and constituents of good deliberation was by the time of Herodotus and Thucydides already well advanced towards its expression in Aristotle. The historians' discussions of deliberation reveal that they would have agreed with the philosopher's fundamental account in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

People do not deliberate about certainties or unalterable situations – for example, whether the sun will rise tomorrow or whether one's dead grandfather has died. Nor do people deliberate about things over which they have no control – for example, whether it will rain tomorrow. People only deliberate about *how to act in response* to inevitable sunrise, actual bereavement, or possible rain – or to the discovery that one is an incestuous parricide, or that the incestuous parricide has arrived as a suppliant in one's *polis*, or that the individual who has performed proscribed funeral rites over a traitor's corpse is one's niece. Deliberation is therefore prominent in the spheres of Ethics and Politics, which are concerned with action (Arist. *NE* 10, 1179^{a-b}). Deliberation consists of "figuring out" the answers to action-related questions on the basis of information or results derived from experience, sensory perception, or scientific proof. Such deliberation, when represented in tragedy, is one part of what Aristotle called the representation of *dianoia*, or "thought," the third most important constituent of tragedy after plot and character (*Po.* 1450^b4–13). Not all thinking in tragedy, says Aristotle, is related to character, since there are speeches in which the individual is *not* shown in the process of making choices about action – speeches expressing general opinions, for example. Speeches in which the speaker neither chooses nor avoids anything are not related to character. But this leaves all the parts of tragedy where characters are shown thinking about what choices to make; such speeches inform the audience's growing apprehension, in any play, of a particular individual's personality.¹ And there are also the speeches representing the deliberative process often signaled in tragedy by words formed on the *boul-* stem, or through a cluster of associated words designating aspects of intellectual work. These include *skopein* ("consider," "examine": e.g. S. *OT* 130) and the middle form *skopeisthai* ("reflect," S. *Tr.* 296), *krinein* ("draw distinctions," "make judgments," S. *Aj.* 443), *parainein* ("advise," "recommend," S. *OC* 464), *nouthetein* ("advise," *OC* 1194), *didaskein* ("teach," "tell," "inform," *OC* 594), and *manthanein* or *ekmanthanein* ("learn," "understand comprehensively," S. *OT* 286, *OC* 114, *Ant.* 175). Sophocles' interest in these intellectual processes has attracted attention, notably in Bernard Knox's seminal *Oedipus at Thebes* (Knox 1957: 116–38); but the way they relate to terms with the *boul-* stem has suffered neglect.

Aristotle's terms for intellectual activity in tragedy, *dianoia* and its cognates, do not fit into the iambic meter of Greek tragic dialogue, the metrical form where most choices are discussed. Yet iambs are hospitable to words with the *boul-* stem and the associated semantic cluster which I have just identified. Moreover, the processes denoted by the two semantic stems in *bouleuesthai* and *dianoia* are inextricably connected, as is clear in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. When Aristotle identifies choice about action as incorporating an element of desire, he calls this same phenomenon both desire (*orexis*), which "has to do with deliberation" (*bouleutike*, III.3, 1113^a10–11), and *orexis*, which "has to do with *dianoia*" (*dianoetike*, IV.2, 1139^b4–5; see Deslauriers 2002: 104). One scholar argues that Aristotle sees *dianoia* as preceding, or constituting, the first part of deliberation: *dianoia* would then be specifically the faculty "by which we affirm or deny fundamental propositions about reality," a process that is followed by the weighing up of the different ways to *respond* to that reality – or deliberation (*to bouleuesthai*; Chamberlain 1984: 153).

Yet no amount of sensible deliberation can help in the face of extremely bad luck, or (in the religious categories of tragedy) adverse divine will, as the ancient Greeks were aware. A recurrent topic in their discussion of counsel is the relationship between deliberation and chance or luck. When the Thucydidean Nicias tries to restrain the enthusiasm of the Assembly for war in Sicily, he stresses that, although it is incumbent upon his audience to deliberate extensively (*polla* [...] *bouleusasthai*), it is more important that they enjoy good luck (*eutuchesai*, Th. 6.23.3). The poet Theognis contrasts mentally inferior people who enjoy good luck with competent deliberators whose bad luck means that they reap no rewards for their efforts (Thgn. 160–3 Young). The fourth-century rhetorician Isocrates insists that true courage is tested during deliberations (*bouleumata*) in the Assembly rather than in the face of the dangers of war, since "what takes place on the field of battle is due to fortune (*tuche*), but what is decided here is an indication of our intellectual power (*dianoia*)" (Isoc. 6.92). Herodotus believes people should be commended who have failed but who had nevertheless, prior to failure, deliberated well: he makes Artabanus insist that, even if a competently deliberated plan does not succeed, it is important, in hindsight, to recognize that it was chance and not lack of deliberative effort that caused the problem (Hdt. 7.10).

Even some studies dedicated to knowledge and understanding in Sophocles do not include any treatment of words with *boul-* stems (e.g. Coray 1993). Yet I am confident that in using such terms Sophocles is revealing his audience to be capable of recognizing signals that they are to be asked to assess the competence of deliberation. The use of such language is connected with tragedy's status as a form of collective thinking done by the Athenian democracy, where the citizen audience of drama was also the community's executive body. There have, of course, been some challenges published recently to the idea that tragedy was anything fundamentally "democratic," since it originated in Athens before the democracy was established, and since many of the political concepts it examines are also pertinent to other, undemocratic, city states (see especially Rhodes 2003). But the focus on deliberation, entailing audience scrutiny of – and identification with – characters who are deliberating about action, constitutes an important way in which Athenian tragedy certainly was "to do with" the democracy: in the sixth century BCE, in the tyrant Peisistratus' day, when tragedy was invented, its characters may indeed have deliberated, but the audience that watched them was not the body with decision-making and executive powers – that was Peisistratus himself.

The Athenians heard detailed debates in the Assembly about the expediency of their policies before they voted to act on them. But the Athenian officials charged with

deliberating at length over the city's policies were the members of the "Council" (*Boule*), since it was the place where deliberation took place. At the time of the drama competitions, these *bouleutai*, "councillors" or "deliberators," were symbolically privileged as thought-leaders of the city, since they sat together in seats of honor at the front of the theater. The importance of the *Boule* in the Athenian democracy is underlined by the haste with which the oligarchs who took power in 411 BCE ousted the democratically elected *bouleutai* and took over their official seat, the *bouleterion*, as their own center of power (Th. 8.69–70.1; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 32.3; see Shear 2007: 102–3). The *Boule* required no fewer than five hundred citizens to serve it; these were proportionately selected from each of the 139 districts of Attica (*demes*) and they were replaced every year by lot (at least from the mid-fifth century on); the Council "could thus have contained a fair cross-section of the citizen body" (Rhodes 1985: 4). One scholiast on Aeschines 3.4 described it indeed as a "mini-polis" (*mikra polis*). Since no man could serve more than twice in his life ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 62.3), the chance was high that any citizen who had reached the qualifying age would serve at some point, especially after pay was instituted in the later fifth century, apparently to encourage poorer citizens to serve. There is evidence that originally only the top three property classes could serve, to the exclusion of the *thetes*, but this restriction seems to have been dropped in the later fifth century, or at any rate not rigidly enforced (Rhodes 1985: 2–3). The Council met almost every day (X. *Hell.* 2.3.11) and considered matters relating not only to the state's finances and the scrutiny of magistrates, but all its cults and festivals, its navy, its building program, and care for the sick, the disabled, and the orphaned. To serve as a councilor required accumulating information, assessing past actions, and deliberating about future ones *virtually all day, every day, for a whole year*. The "quality of attention" required seems breathtaking compared with what is required of politicians, let alone ordinary citizens, today. When Sophocles served as treasurer, general, and later on, after the Athenian disaster in Sicily in 413 BCE, as a specially appointed magistrate, he would have had much business to conduct with the Council, and his audience would have been aware of his experience in these capacities. Men had to be past 30 to serve on the council (X. *Mem.* 1.2.35; see Rhodes 1985: 1 and n. 3, and further below), as in practice men over 50 were given precedence by the herald in the queue of citizens wanting to address the Assembly (see e.g. Aeschin. *Tim.* 23, 49). The notion of the value of experience accumulated in a long memory reinforced the association, in Greek minds, between the age of the deliberator and the often stated desirability of considering the events of the past while deliberating about the future (see especially And. 3.2 and 3.29); the topic of age groups and deliberation is developed in Isocrates' *Letter to Archidamus* (Isoc. *Ep.* 9.14).

No amount of good deliberation could have saved Oedipus, the most unlucky of all men, since divine will had ordained his path before he was even born. Yet he took numerous decisions about action before ending up dethroned, blinded, and isolated. Indeed, the audience is repeatedly invited to evaluate how the Thebans are functioning as deliberators in the crisis they face. When the chorus disapproves of Oedipus' decision to blind himself, it therefore joins a large group of voices, belonging both to characters in the play and to scholars, who have judged Oedipus' deliberation skills and choice of actions. The protagonist of *OT* is represented thinking and reacting both in the past (when he left Corinth, went to Delphi, killed Laius, and saved Thebes from the Sphinx), and in the course of the play (responding to the suppliant Thebans led by the priest of Zeus, to Creon, Teiresias, Jocasta, the Corinthian herald, and the Theban shepherd). The scholarly response to this has largely been to "take sides" – one team defending Oedipus' virtues and intelligence (e.g. Gillett and Hankey 2005), the opposing team condemning

his vices and obtuseness (for the sternest judgment, see Ahl 1991: 261–2). But, if the play is experienced as a series of “live” encounters in which Oedipus and the other characters take decisions about how to act in response to disturbing circumstances, it becomes clear that, through this practical case study set in archaic Thebes, the issue of deliberation is explored in detail. In particular, the relationship between the two possible ways to proceed in a crisis – deliberating or trying to get help from the gods – is constantly rearranged (compared, contrasted, synthesized, or juxtaposed) in different voices.

This question is asked at the beginning of the play: Is Oedipus a specially competent deliberator, or has he, in the past, enjoyed some *supra*-human assistance? When he arrives to meet the suppliant Thebans, he stresses that he wanted to hear from their own mouths, rather than from a messenger, what is troubling them (ll. 6–7). The Priest of Zeus raises the question of whether it was through divine intervention or through intellectual acumen that Oedipus saved the city before, from the Sphinx. The Thebans are asking for Oedipus' help not because they think he is equal to a god (ll. 33–4), “but because we consider you pre-eminent amongst men, / Both in life's events and in dealings with divinities.” He freed them from the Sphinx, the Priest continues, without possessing any more knowledge or learning than they had, but with the assistance, as the story goes, of a god (ll. 35–8). Now he begs him for some plan of action (ll. 42–5):

Either some saying of a god you have heard, or from a man,
for it is people with experience of past crises
whom I regard as offering the best deliberations [*bouleumata*]
in respect of present ones.

The Priest is not sure how Oedipus saved the city before – it was not knowledge as such, but some kind of ability at dealing with eventualities, so uncanny as to give rise to the rumor that he was helped by a god. Any suggestion from Oedipus would be welcome, whether prompted by a god or a mortal, because he is specially qualified by past experiences to offer considered advice about the present hazard.

This is an ambiguous picture of Oedipus' qualifications as an advisor and leader. Is he specially clever and talented at strategic thinking, or is he prompted by a god? It is with this question in our minds that we await Oedipus' response. It transpires that he has certainly qualified himself recently as a competent deliberator, at least on the proverbial ground of “thinking at night.” They have not woken him up, he says (ll. 65–70):

You should know that I have both wept many tears
And also wandered far and wide in my thoughts.
There was only one remedy I could find after intense examination [*eu skopon*],
And this I have implemented: I sent my brother-in-law Creon,
Menoceus' son, to Apollo's Pythian shrine
To learn what we can do or say to save this city.

Oedipus has considered the alternatives thoroughly, at length and at night, and has indeed acted insofar as he has initiated a consultation of the Pythian oracle. But he has no other solution – as the chorus soon sings, thought (*phrontis*) has provided no defensive weapon against the plague (ll. 171–2).

When Oedipus is told that there was a witness to the death of Laius, who said that a band of robbers had attacked the Theban vehicle, he does not ask who the witness was, nor does he try to seek further factual information. Instead, he *speculates* about the possibility that the robbers had been bribed by someone inside Thebes (ll. 116–25).

Although I would not go so far as to assert, with one recent moral philosopher, that Sophocles' Oedipus, for all the praise bestowed on his intelligence by himself and by the chorus early in the play, "simply does not act like a man with a rational, quick-witted mind" (Daniels 2006: 565); many scholars commenting on this play have indeed been inclined to exaggerate Oedipus' skill at detective work. It is not true that he is shown "asking an extraordinary number of questions, first about the killing of the previous king, Laius (in fact his father), and then about his own parents" (Gillett and Hankey 2005: 273). After the choral ode, he does not attempt to gain any more information before pronouncing the banishment of Laius' killer, but his hunch that the killing was the result of a conspiracy leads him to make other pronouncements concerning the punishment of anyone who does not come forward with relevant information (see Carawan 1999). He is barking up the wrong tree entirely, especially when the sole piece of information he possesses about the killers is that they were *thought* to be robbers. The chorus offers him advice: Apollo should be the one to identify the killer – which implies that Oedipus should press the Delphic oracle; but he dismisses this suggestion, as if he could be sure (which of course he cannot) that no further information would be forthcoming from the god (ll. 281–2). Yet when the chorus members ask if they can offer him a second suggestion, he welcomes the offer of advice, as any good deliberator would, even saying he would be happy to hear a third suggestion as well – to summon Teiresias – and it turns out that he has already thought of this. On the other hand, when they mention that Laius was said to have been killed by wayfarers, the question is raised again of just how much effort has gone into identifying (let alone finding) the eye-witness: all that Oedipus says is: "Nobody sees the one who saw" (l. 293) – not whether he has made any effort personally to find him.

The Teiresias scene reveals Oedipus' inability to control himself when faced with an uncooperative interlocutor, as even Oedipus' staunchest scholarly defenders concede; within five short exchanges of words, before Teiresias has suggested that Oedipus might himself be the killer, Oedipus denounces the prophet: "Most base of base men – you would make even a rock angry!" (ll. 334–5). When Creon defends himself against Oedipus' precipitate accusations, the question of Oedipus' state of mind is prominent. The chorus suggests that the serious allegation that Oedipus made against Creon "was forced out of him through anger [*orge*] rather than a product of considered judgment" (ll. 523–4). Creon even asks whether Oedipus had spoken in his right mind (l. 528). The chorus members prevaricate, and well they might; for, when Oedipus enters, he launches into a blazing denunciation of Creon, calling him "the manifest murderer" and a "patent thief of my kingdom" (ll. 534–5). In the ensuing exchange Creon defines one aspect of deliberation that Oedipus would do well to activate in himself but cannot, because he is hampered by anger: he should listen as much as speak, and then judge for himself *on the basis of information he has learned* (ll. 543–4).

Indeed, Creon actually provides a description of the course of action that a competent deliberator would adopt in Oedipus' position if he were concerned that Creon was plotting against him (ll. 603–8):

To prove this, you should first go to the Pythian oracle
and find out whether what I reported to you was true.
Then, if you have apprehended me planning anything with the soothsayer,
you can take me and kill me, sentenced through two mouths,
my own mouth as well as yours.
But do not assume that I am guilty on unproven inference.

Jocasta breaks up the argument, chastising her husband and brother for their “un-deliberated [*aboulon*] strife of words” (ll. 634–5), and the chorus also tries to make Oedipus take his time to find information before leaping to conclusions, advising him that he “should never use an unproved rumor to cast a dishonoring charge on the friend who has bound himself with a curse” (ll. 656–7). The chorus sounds seasoned in recognizing that failure to act on the strength of true knowledge causes conflict and exacerbates difficult situations: like Socratic interlocutors, it informs Jocasta that the argument between Creon and Oedipus was the result of “ignorant opinion” (*dokeis agnos*) arising out of “talk” (l. 681). Even after Oedipus tells Jocasta about the killings he had committed long ago at the triple crossroads, when the chorus admits that they are alarmed, they still tell him to “have hope, until at least you have gained full knowledge [*ekmatheis*, l. 835] from the one who saw the deed.”

Jocasta is equally clear that it is important to enquire how knowledge has been acquired: she asks Oedipus whether Creon is accusing Oedipus of slaying Laius on the basis of what Creon thinks is true knowledge, or on the basis of what he only knows by hearsay from another (l. 704). Of course, as the audience knows, Creon has never expressed this view at all, so this interchange reveals Oedipus presenting his own paranoid assumption as a statement of fact. Yet Oedipus lurches between incompetence and competence as a deliberator; as he approaches the truth, some of the instincts of a skilled deliberator are indeed reactivated, above all in the desire to find the Theban slave/herdsman in order to find out directly from him, rather than from second-hand report, exactly what happened when Laius died (ll. 835, 860).

After the next chorus, Jocasta appears alone, to pray to Apollo. Her words reveal her *dianoia*, or mental process: she thinks it is a good idea to appeal to the gods, since Oedipus is emotionally disturbed (ll. 915–20):

He is not interpreting new items of information
on the basis of old ones, like a sensible man,
but is at the mercy of the speaker who says frightening things.
So since I can't make any progress by counselling him [*parainousa*],
I have come as a suppliant to you, Lycian Apollo...

Jocasta's position is subtly drawn. Any deliberator should retain older pieces of information in order to keep a sense of perspective when receiving alarming news. Such is the advice she has been giving (*parainousa*) her husband. This woman decided what to do long ago, on the basis of the evidence then at hand, and does not want to be forced to confront new evidence that might throw new light on an old set of actions. All deliberators need to keep a balance between “old” information and the offer of new and assess the competitive plausibility of differing accounts. But the second step in Jocasta's thought processes is equally interesting: she may not think oracles are trustworthy (and indeed she has no reason, on the basis of her own life experiences, to believe them to be so), but she does have the instinct to turn to the gods to ask for help when she finds that she has reached the limits of her own effectiveness of action. She is not able to “make any progress” by continuing to offer Oedipus advice.

With the appearance of the Theban shepherd, events accelerate; in the frantic atmosphere, deliberation of any kind is out of the question. Haste and passion, *tachos* and *orge*, dominate the psychological mood. Oedipus threatens to torture the old man (ll. 1150–3) and indeed to kill him (l. 1166); within three lines of full discovery he

rushes indoors, saying that this is the last time he will “look upon the light” – an ambiguous phrase often used as a euphemism for death (l. 1183), leaving the audience wondering what exactly he will do. The palace Messenger makes the important point that the actions he has just witnessed, unlike all else that Oedipus has suffered, were acts performed intentionally (ll. 1229–30). But the description of Jocasta’s suicide and Oedipus’ self-blinding emphasizes above all the frenzied speed with which the violence erupted: Jocasta, overwhelmed by *orge* (l. 1241), “rushed” to her marriage bed, “tearing” her hair, and “slammed the doors violently” behind her (ll. 1242–4). Oedipus “burst in shrieking” and “charged around” (ll. 1252–5); in his “frenzy” he forced the doors open, forcing the metal bolts out of their sockets (ll. 1261–2). After taking Jocasta down from her noose, he “tore” the brooches from her clothing and “struck his eyes with raised hand not once but over and over again”; even the blood did not drip slowly, but gushed forth explosively like a shower of hail (ll. 1269–80).

It is in the painful dialogue between the chorus and Oedipus, when he emerges with bleeding eye sockets from the palace, that the lines with which this chapter began are exchanged. The chorus does not think that Oedipus deliberated well, since it would be better to have been dead than alive and blind. But the Messenger’s description of the immediate aftermath of Oedipus’ self-recognition makes the suggestion that deliberation had anything to do with Oedipus’ self-mutilation sound almost absurd. The Messenger implies that some supernatural power led Oedipus to his mother/wife (*daimonon deiknusi tis*, l. 1258); the chorus asks which divinity (*tis [...] daimonon*) urged him to blind himself (l. 1328); Oedipus is clear that it was Apollo (l. 1329). When Creon enters, the chorus say that he has arrived opportunely, as the only individual who can now take care of Thebes, “to act and determine” (*bouleuein*) what must now be done (l. 1417). The chorus here uses *bouleuein* in the active voice rather than the middle voice with its collaborative or dialectical implications, thus implying a process not of consultative deliberation but of unilateral determination (ll. 700–1; there is also some interplay in *OT* between the idea of deliberation and another meaning of *bouleuein* in the active voice, “plot against,” e.g. ll. 606, 619). Yet the choice of diction shows that, even in this unprecedented crisis, the issue of how decisions should be made remains high on their agenda. Typically, Oedipus wants Creon to cast him out “with all speed” (l. 1436), while Creon more cautiously wants to consult Apollo again (ll. 1438–9, 1442–3). The play concludes with Oedipus’ immediate future as yet undecided.

Lattimore argued that the question addressed in *OT* “is not the individual intelligence of Oedipus but the efficacy of all human understanding. Ultimately limited to testing facts, judging the new by the old, arguing from probability, this faculty is not likely to cope successfully with fantastic coincidences, or to see through false but completely justified assumptions” (Lattimore 1975: 10). Yet, as we have seen, Oedipus’ quest for understanding is not supported by competent deliberation. Many of his assumptions are far from being “completely justified,” and little sustained deliberation takes place. If the text is scrutinized, it can even be plausibly argued, as Sandor Goodhart did, influentially (1978), that the play never proves Oedipus’ guilt at all – indeed, it can be read as showing how one arbitrary narrative version of events can assume the status of canonical master-narrative, to the exclusion of any variants and erasure of inconsistencies. Yet the chorus’ repeated comments on how decisions are being (and should be) taken reveals that Oedipus’ tragedy unfolds in a community where there *is* a strong sense of the relationship between the undoubted utility of deliberation and the need to cultivate and consult the gods. Nearly all the characters, as well as the chorus, raise the issue of the interconnectedness of

deliberation and divinity, even though in this particular instance no amount of deliberation could have saved Oedipus from being who he was; it could only have altered, as the chorus is dimly aware, the way he reacted to the situation. Oedipus already knows that he has been singled out by the gods for some strange destiny, although he does not know what it is; his exceptionally bad luck, which was invulnerable to well-considered action, is directly connected to the mysterious future which the gods have in mind for him.

In *Oedipus at Colonus*, however, the relationship between counsel and the divine is different, since competent deliberation contributes constructively to the fulfillment of divine will. This play enacts an aetiology, or a mythical explanation, for the foundation of the historically attested cult of Oedipus in the sacred grove of Colonus. But, in order for this cult to be established, several people must make pressing decisions about action, including the men of Colonus, Theseus, and Oedipus himself. These actions are themselves often conditioned by previous decisions, made prior to the action of the play, and discussed in detail. Some have been, or are, calmly deliberated; others are emotional and precipitate. But the balance in this play between the two sorts of decision differs from that presented in *OT*. Even the old man himself has learned, in certain circumstances, to exercise patience and self-control.

There is much exemplary behavior in *Oedipus at Colonus*. The man of Colonus, shocked to discover Oedipus sitting on inviolable ground in the sanctuary, responds with the same good sense shown by all the Athenian characters in the play; before he takes any further action, he says, he will ascertain how his fellow demesmen view the situation (ll. 47–8, 77–80). It is true that, when the chorus of Athenian citizens enters, they are appalled to discover Oedipus' identity, and at first they precipitately command that he leave. But, after they hear both Antigone's appeals and his own, they decide to refer the decision up the chain of command to the "rulers of our country" (ll. 294–5), to whom word of Oedipus' arrival has already been sent. In the Athenian world, where this play is set, decisions are taken neither in haste nor without proper consultative procedure.

The focus on the issue of deliberation and decision-taking is sharp in the scene when Ismene arrives. She reveals that her brothers Eteocles and Polyneices did consider courses of action other than laying claims to the throne of Thebes. Initially they chose a very different path (ll. 367–70):

At first it was their desire to leave the throne to Creon, and thus
avoid polluting the city, because they took rationally into consideration [*logoi skopousi*]
the ancient blight on their family line,
which had kept their household down in such misery.

What had prevented them from continuing to act on this rational decision, taken in order to protect their own city, was strife induced by "some god or wickedness of mind" (l. 371). Divinity, or immorality, has destroyed the results of competent deliberation. The sense that there are always choices to be made, even in the face of oracular predictions, is further consolidated by Oedipus' response to the new information brought by Ismene. She tells him that both her brothers are aware of the Delphic announcement stressing to them the importance of the venue of Oedipus' grave. Oedipus wonders, in reply, why they still put their desire for the Theban throne above their desire to recall him (ll. 418–19). There was another direction, he implies, in which the relationship with his sons could even recently have developed: they could have recalled him to Thebes at any point during his long exile.

Oedipus now speaks of the way in which circumstances evolved at Thebes after the crisis portrayed in *OT*, yet again showing that alternative courses of action were always available. At first, when his heart “boiled,” he only wanted death (ll. 437–44),

But after a time, as my suffering lost its edge,
and I began to feel that my fury had made my
self-punishment exceed my former crimes,
it was then that the city set about driving me out forcibly from
its territory, after all that time. And my sons, who had the capacity
to help me – me, their own father! – declined to do so. For lack of one
small word from them I was cast out, a vagrant and beggar for all time.

These lines compress a long period of time in Thebes during which choices were made in the aftermath of the discovery of Oedipus’ true identity. Oedipus acknowledges that time softens anguish and that his self-chastisement, done in the heat of the moment, was excessive. His sons, meanwhile, did have the capacity to help him stay in Thebes, and yet they *chose* not to. The Theban family could not avoid what happened to them, but they could have reacted to the discoveries with more humanity and solidarity.

There follows a scene in which the men of the chorus ask if they can advise Oedipus (*parainesai*, l. 464) to offer a libation to the local divinities in propitiation for trespassing on their inviolable ground. Oedipus readily assents to this sensible advice, sending Ismene to perform the ritual, because his mobility is compromised. Theseus arrives and provides an exemplary model of the civic leader in deliberative action. He expresses compassion for Oedipus, asks him to clarify his petition, and states that, as someone who has suffered exile himself, he will never refuse to help an outcast (ll. 557–65). That is, he clarifies the formal basis of the provisional relationship between the Athenians and the suppliant, so that further dialogue can be safely conducted before a more permanent settlement of the situation is reached. Theseus then requires full information from the suppliant and stresses that he has come personally to hear it from the suppliant’s own lips rather than by hearsay. There follows a revealing interchange in which both heroes – the former king, now outcast, and the former outcast, now king – develop this favorite Sophoclean theme of the correct way to take decisions about action during a crisis. Theseus has just asked whether the difficulty Oedipus envisages with respect to his own burial is one that concerns Theseus or Oedipus’ sons, on whom responsibility for Oedipus’ funeral rites would formally devolve (ll. 589–94):

OEDIPUS They will require to take me to Thebes, my Lord.
THESEUS Well, if you are prepared to go, then it is not appropriate to avoid doing so.
OEDIPUS But when I did want that, they did not permit it.
THESEUS Foolish man, it is not helpful to be angry when you are facing adversity.
OEDIPUS When you have heard my story, then rebuke me – but not until then.
THESEUS Tell me, for I should not speak without being informed.

Theseus here articulates important principles of deliberation. Anger (*thumos*, l. 592) is not a useful basis for action, especially for someone in difficulties. But Theseus does acknowledge that he should himself refrain from offering advice before becoming fully informed about the details of the situation. He will not be able to act, or to give advice on action, until he has heard Oedipus’ full story.

A model process of consultation now ensues. The fundamental information which Theseus needs to hear concerns the Delphic oracle that has told the Thebans that

Oedipus' corpse will one day "drink their blood" (ll. 603–4, 622–3). The chorus now adds the important information that Oedipus has made a consistent case ever since his arrival (ll. 629–30) – important eye-witness verification of the plausibility of Oedipus' case, since Theseus has not been present from the beginning of the crisis. Theseus then makes a speech of a kind that is rare in tragedy: he explains the precise grounds on which he is taking a decision about an action of which his audience inevitably approves. The proposed action of welcoming Oedipus to settle in Athenian territory (this is certainly the import of Theseus' words, even though it is not clear from the diction whether he is offering Oedipus a status equivalent to full citizenship) does indeed lead to a positive rather than a tragic outcome for both Theseus and Oedipus, as well as for the Athenian community represented by the chorus. The decision is properly deliberated upon at the human intellectual level and complements rather than conflicts with divine will. Theseus will accept the benefaction offered by Oedipus on three grounds: he is a guest-friend, a suppliant, and one who offers to confer an advantage on Athens. The first two grounds are a matter of ancient ethical imperatives, overseen by Zeus in his capacities as protector of vulnerable strangers and of suppliants; the third ground – national expediency – is one of which Oedipus has had to persuade Theseus, but he has done so through his consistency and honesty. His corpse will prove advantageous to Athens.

In helping Athens Oedipus must harm Thebes; and Oedipus retains his familiar swift temper when it comes to his compatriots. After the Creon scene and the battle, Theseus returns on stage to ask Oedipus to advise him (*sumbalou gnomen*, l. 1151) on a new development. Oedipus agrees to discuss the matter, but as soon as he infers (correctly) that the newly arrived suppliant is his son Polyneices (l. 1179), he angrily refuses to meet him. Now it is Antigone who presents herself as counselor to her father, offering reasons why he should at least hear what his son has to say. "Father, do what I say; I may be young, but I shall offer you counsel" (*paraineso*, l. 1181). In arguing with him that he should let Polyneices address him, she says that "other men too with difficult offspring have a sharp temper, but they allow themselves to be advised [*nouthetoumenoī*] and charmed out of their bad mood by the gentle spells of friends" (ll. 1193–5). As a result, Oedipus does hear Polyneices' plea that his father support his cause as the Seven attack Thebes with the intention of deposing Eteocles and of restoring Polyneices to the throne. But Oedipus' response is an implacable refusal to forgive Polyneices for his central role in having him, Oedipus, exiled, when he was in charge of Thebes as Oedipus' first-born son.

In the terrible curse that Oedipus calls down upon Polyneices, the entire premise of *Antigone* becomes (almost) inevitable. Haste and passion are still creating tragedy for the Thebans, even as calm deliberation is creating advantages for Athens. Oedipus first warns Polyneices that "the divinity" is watching him and that this god will regard Polyneices in an even worse light "if indeed those armies of yours are moving against Thebes" (ll. 1370–2). No less a divinity than Zeus himself is implicated, along with Justice, since Oedipus has been dishonored by his own kin (ll. 1382–3). There is a suggestion that Polyneices, although he has left it too late to be forgiven by his father for exiling him, still has time to change his mind and to call off the intended siege. But Oedipus continues to deliver his curse, which does not appear to be conditional (ll. 1385–8):

May you never conquer your native land
and may you never return to the vale of Argos,
but may you die at the hand of the kinsman whom
you kill, and who has made you an outcast.

The curse is supported by appeals to several gods and concludes with Oedipus explicitly claiming the role of agent of Zeus' justice in his own sons' mutual destruction – a punishment due to the fact that they failed to observe the fundamental imperative that parents must be respected: he scathingly instructs Polyneices to tell all the Cadmean people, as well as his non-Theban allies, that “such is the privilege which Oedipus has allotted to his sons” (ll. 1395–6). Antigone tries to intervene in order to prevent further tragedy unfolding in her family, making the case to Polyneices that he could still abandon his military ambition and put a halt to his attempt to take Thebes (ll. 1414–46). But she fails. Polyneices is as stubborn as his father.

In *OC*, then, the implementation of divine plans for Oedipus and his future assistance as a cult hero to the Athenians is facilitated through correct deliberation done by the men of Colonus and by Theseus; when it comes to the Theban royal family, however, despite Antigone's attempts to offer rational advice, it is anger (although supported by, and in alignment with, Zeus' justice) that makes Oedipus curse his sons, creating the tragic battle outcome that opens *Antigone*. But in this third play the recipe – the balance between the contribution made to the action by human and by divine decisions – is different again. Here an almost total *absence* of deliberation leads directly to great offense being taken by the gods, since Creon has

cast below one who belongs to the world above,
ignominiously lodging a living soul in a tomb,
and confined here a corpse which belongs to the underworld gods,
unburied, unlamented, profane. (ll. 1068–71)

It is only when correct deliberation occurs and is acted upon that the gods are appeased. But, in the meantime, incompetent deliberation has caused unnecessary chaos, several deaths in addition to those of Polyneices and Eteocles, and desperate suffering. There is no consolation for the tragedy in the form of a beneficial new cult, as in *OC*. There is simply a mess, and it has been caused not by Apollo's mysterious and unavoidable agenda, but by the wholly avoidable decisions made by a single fool.

Creon himself likes to throw around “deliberation” terms, especially the noun *bouleumata* (“deliberations,” l. 179), but it is not clear that any deliberation or consultation has preceded his decree (*kerugma*) prohibiting the burial of the dead. Ismene implies that it is the will of the citizens (l. 79), but there is no other evidence that the proclamation was not entirely Creon's own idea. Creon's “inauguration” speech says that he has issued the decree on two grounds, the first of which is that “anyone who while guiding the whole city fails to set his hand to the best counsels” (*bouleumatōn*, 179) is the worst of men. But in the event Creon is enraged when he does hear wise counsel from the chorus, after the guard has described the dust that has covered Polyneices' body: the chorus believes that that the matter has to do with the gods (ll. 278–9).

When Creon hears Antigone defend the covering of her brother's corpse, his fury produces the first of his precipitate decisions. Without even consulting his citizens, he suddenly decides that, regardless of her family ties to him, “she and her sister shall not escape a dreadful death” (ll. 488–9 – although he revokes the sentence on Ismene, equally suddenly, at l. 771). Creon fails to benefit from several potentially helpful

consultants because, as Haemon says, he never takes up opportunities to foresee what people might say, do, or criticize. The reason for this is that nobody dares to help him deliberate, since his face becomes so frightening to look at when he hears things he does not want to hear (ll. 688–91). Haemon does not use the word “advise” (*boulenesthai*) in relation to his father, perhaps on account of a widespread feeling in Greek culture that it was inappropriate for the young to *boulenesthai* with their elders (see above); instead he concludes with a statement, in (arguably) milder language, that, since nobody can have complete understanding of every matter, “it is also good to learn from those who speak well” (*kai ton legonton eu kalon to manthanein*, l. 723). The chorus hastily tries to moderate even this, by saying that both Creon *and* Haemon should learn from each other; but Creon demands to know why he, at his age, “should be taught” (*didaxomestha*) by one so young (l. 727).

Teiresias has another statement to make about advice-taking: good advice has a long shelf-life, and even a man who has made a mistake can sometimes rectify it if he acts, however late, to correct it (in other words he need remain “neither un-counseled nor unhappy,” *aboulos oud' anolbos*, l. 1026). The importance of this concept to the play emerges again in Teiresias' retort to Creon's savage attack on his character – why don't people realize that *the most potent of assets is good advice and deliberation* (*euboulia*, l. 1050). Exactly the same term is used shortly after by the chorus, now brave enough to speak out, *euboulia dei, pai Menoikeos, labein* (“you should accept good advice, child of Menoecus”: l. 1098, unfortunately textually corrupt at the end): the chorus members then tell him to release Antigone immediately. He obeys, but far too late. Creon himself acknowledges in the final scene that it his own poor decisions (*bouleumatōn*, l. 1265) that caused Haemon's death; this event was the result of his own bad judgment and botched deliberations (*dusbouliais*, l. 1269).

Creon's incompetence as a deliberator receives uniquely explicit comment, which may be one reason why *Antigone* was so admired from a political perspective in antiquity and so intimately connected with the perception that Sophocles won high esteem as a statesman himself. Each of the three Theban plays, as we have seen, dramatizes a different interaction between human deliberation and divinely willed eventualities: *OT* has the attempts at good deliberation frustrated by Oedipus' haste and passion, but a “bad luck” situation in which deliberation would have proved fruitless anyway; *OC* portrays both good deliberation and “righteous wrath,” in synergy with divine will; *Antigone* presents an incompetent deliberator offending the gods and thus creating avoidable tragedy. But, despite these important differences between the individual ethical and metaphysical situations, the double imperative conveyed by Sophoclean tragedy as a whole is consistent: good deliberation is essential, but so is the acknowledgment that even a well-considered decision can fail to help you in the face of forces more powerful than human intellectual effort. One thing that Oedipus did know all along is what he says to the chorus soon after his banishment speech: no *man* can force *gods* to do what they don't want to do (ll. 281–2). There is one man who knows better than any other that no amount of deliberation can prevent human suffering if the latter is determined by a superhuman power, and that man is Teiresias. But, in the face of this metaphysical predicament, Teiresias does not advocate any other policy than to carry on deliberating. It is after all the same Teiresias who can say to Creon in *Antigone*, with full conviction, that, for humans in difficult situations, *Good counsel is the most potent of assets* (l. 1050).

Guide to Further Reading

Sophocles' interest in intellectual processes has been documented and discussed by numerous scholars, including Ehrenberg (1954), Knox (1957), Coray (1993), and Segal (2001). The different responses to Oedipus' intellectual acumen, both in scholarship and in performance, are well outlined in Segal (2001) and in Macintosh (2009), respectively. The interest of all three tragedians in deliberation has, however, been strangely neglected, despite Bernard Williams' discussion, in *Moral Luck* (1981), of the place of luck in the making of ethical judgments. This discussion, however, led Martha Nussbaum (1986), when focusing attention on practical deliberation in classical Greek Ethics, to stress how important it was to Greek tragedy. Both Goldhill (2009) and Hall (2009) go some way towards developing a case for Sophocles' interest in the process of decision-making, especially in *Electra* and *Trachiniae*; the topic is approached from a different but fascinating angle, which incorporates the idea of inherited guilt, in Sewall-Rutter (2007). General discussions of deliberation in ancient sources are collected in Stevens (1933). For a transhistorical range of philosophical views on deliberation, see Arkes and Hammond (1986) and Tiberius (2000). The superb study by Peter Rhodes (1985) remains the most important single publication on the Athenian *Boule*. On the ancient tradition that Sophocles' public political career was intertwined with the sentiments expressed in his *Antigone*, see Hall (2011). For some contributions to the now longstanding debate over the extent to which Athenian tragedy reflects Athenian democracy, see Foley (1995), Hesk (2000), Rhodes (2003), Carter (2004), and Hall (2006: 187–90).

Note

- 1 By characterization through watching the sort of choices that individuals make in particular circumstances and with particular interlocutors I mean something similar to what Easterling (1977: 124) describes as Sophocles' creation of the "impression of individuality" through his ability "to seize on significant detail."

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Heroic Pharmacology: Sophocles and the Metaphors of Greek Medical Thought

Robin Mitchell-Boyask

I Introduction

Sophoclean heroes almost invariably have health problems that extend to the metaphorical, but Sophoclean heroines do not. Why Oedipus, Heracles, Philoctetes, and Ajax should ail meaningfully, but Antigone, Deianeira, and Electra do not will be the focus of this chapter. I shall suggest that the linkage between the hero's body and the body politic precludes a feminine sickness with a more metaphorical potential. In those rare cases where the language of disease attaches itself to women, illness is very real and death is imminent, if not immediate. To understand this dynamic, however, we must step back and consider the larger picture of the relationship between Sophocles and early medicine; for the language of Greek medical writings is fundamental to the metaphorical systems of Sophoclean drama.

As early as in the ancient biographical tradition, Sophocles was associated with Greek medical thought (Knox 1957: 139–47; Biggs 1966) and, as a result, he was believed to have had something to do with the introduction to Athens of the cult of Asclepius, the mythical originator of medicine, a few years after the great plague of the early 420s BCE. The ancient *Life* claims that Sophocles served as a priest of Asclepius and even received the god's avatar, his snake, into his own home until 420 BCE, when the temple of Asclepius – the Asclepieion, adjacent to the Theater of Dionysus on the south slope of the Acropolis – was ready. But the story of a great poet involving himself in such a medico-religious event may have arisen from associations between poetry and healing that were as old as Greek poetry itself (Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 8–17).

The “official” biographies of Greek poets must always be regarded with at least caution, if not skepticism. Mary Lefkowitz (1981) has shown how such biographies developed in the Hellenistic era, either from misinterpreted information in the poets' works or from

jokes made by comic writers like Aristophanes, however improbable they might have been. As these traditions developed, scholars would turn to Aristophanes' comedies, in a bit of circular argumentation to support the biography. Thus, Euripides was a misogynist, as we can see from the wanton women in his plays and from what Aristophanes says; Sophocles was pious, because he depicted pious people. One anecdote reports that Sophocles "gave hospitality to Asclepius" by receiving him in his house (T67 = *Life of Sophocles* 11), and thus later on Sophocles was worshipped as *dexion*, "receiver." Moreover, Sophocles composed a paean to Asclepius. This all appears reasonable, but, as Lefkowitz observes, the latter story too strongly resembles other misattributions based on personal information that derives from some ode like Pindar's *Hymn to Demeter*, and the former anecdote seems more than anything else inspired by the plot of the *Oedipus at Colonus*, where Oedipus receives a hero's grave (Lefkowitz 1981: 84). Moreover, tradition may have made Sophocles Asclepius' patron because of the prominence of disease throughout almost all of his extant works, and because two of his dramas, *Philoctetes* and the now lost *Phineus*, alter traditional myth so as to incorporate Asclepius (Vojatzki 1982: 80–2; Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 153–82). While such mythological innovations strengthen the connections between Sophocles and Asclepius, recent reconsiderations of the ancient evidence have concluded that Sophocles certainly was not heroized before the 330s BCE and that the story of his reception of Asclepius was surely a Hellenistic invention (Connolly 1998; see also Garland 1992: 125 and Parker 1996: 184–5).

Despite such doubts, it is entirely possible, indeed it is very plausible – given that Sophocles' plays clearly demonstrate his interest in illness and cure, and considering his long record of civic service, too – that he participated in some way in the beginnings of the Asclepius cult in Athens, even if the traditional story need not be taken at face value. Indeed, Sophocles' engagement with the Asclepius cult seems complex. Commenting on the "extraordinary 'friendliness to man'" of Asclepius, Robert Parker further observes that, although Euripides was charged with destroying the spirit of tragedy, it would actually have been Sophocles who did so, because he "received this harbinger of the Hellenistic age into his house" (Parker 1996: 184–5). Moreover, the epigraphic record shows that a certain Telemachus founded the city Asclepieion, whose construction of a dedicatory monument with his own name may have been prompted by the popularity of the posthumous attribution of the Asclepieion to the tragic poet (Aleshire 1989: 9–11). Finally, given the proximity of the Asclepieion to the Theater of Dionysus and the sense of loss in Athens after the deaths of Sophocles and Euripides, so palpable in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, it seems natural that some Athenians would have wanted Sophocles to have some large role in the cult that was becoming so important in the city, even if that role was fictive. Nonetheless, the persistent deployment in Sophoclean drama of disease as a physical experience and as a figure of disorder serves as the greatest incentive to link Sophocles to the Asclepius cult. Asclepius heals the Sophoclean Philoctetes upon the latter's return to society, but Sophocles' almost compulsive insistence on sick (male) heroes finds medical procedures that more often resemble social purgation.

2 The Sick Hero and the Male Body Politic

Sophoclean tragedies that are dominated by men most thoroughly integrate medical language into their discourse. Let us thus start with the data for this phenomenon. Of the seven surviving tragedies of Sophocles, four are centered around male characters

(*Ajax*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*), two around females (*Antigone* and *Electra*), and the last, *Trachiniae*, while named after its chorus of young women from Trachis, is split between Deianeira and her husband Heracles. By far the most common word for disease in Greek tragedy is *nosos*, and, among the surviving 33 tragedies traditionally ascribed to Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, Sophocles composed four out of the seven with the highest number of instances of *nosos* (Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 29–30). That group of four is identical with the quartet of male-centered tragedies, save for the substitution of the *Trachiniae* for *Oedipus at Colonus*; but that shift is easily accounted for by the former’s almost absolute focus on the *nosos* of Heracles (and not of Deianeira) and by the latter’s composition at the end of Sophocles’ life, at a time when the metaphorical resonance of *nosos* has lost its immediate vitality.

Much of that figurative power arose from the language of early Greek medical writing, so let us look briefly there before examining how it is mapped on to the bodies of Sophoclean heroes. Scholars have long seen connections between the Hippocratic writings and Greek tragedy (Padel 1992; Kosak 2004). Early in the fifth century, the pre-Hippocratic writer Alcmaeon, whose concepts profoundly influenced the Hippocratic texts, believed that good health arose from the equilibrium of the powers in the body, and he cast this balance in strikingly political language (Ostwald 1969: 97–9; Belfiore 1992: 35; Padel 1992: 58–9; Longrigg 1993: 47–81).

Alcmaeon maintains that the bond of health is the “equal rights” [*isonomia*] of the powers, moist and dry, cold and hot, bitter and sweet, and the rest, but the “monarchy” in them is creative of disease [*nosos*]; for monarchy of either is destructive [...] Health on the other hand is the proportionate admixture of these qualities. (Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 1983: 260, no. 310 = Aetius’ summary)

Health is thus cast as a political struggle between warring factions. Health is *isonomia*, equality of power or rights, one of the hallmark terms of Greek democracy in the fifth century (Vlastos 1947, 1953; Ostwald 1969: 119–20, 137–60; Ober 1989: 74–5). The universe, the *polis*, and the body thus all rely on the same governing principles. Alcmaeon’s theories influenced not just the Hippocratic writers, but also philosophers, beginning with Empedocles, as “political ideas increasingly articulated an image of health in society and government as a balance of inner powers that may be upset, either by the emergence of a single stronger power or by the intrusion of an alien, outside force” (Padel 1992: 57). Historiography also picks up this discourse: for example, Herodotus, while describing the troubles of Miletus, notes that the Milesians for two generations “were very sick with *stasis*” (civil strife; 5.28 – a text that contains the sole figurative use of *nosos* by Herodotus). Thus, throughout classical Greek thought, the idea of a mixed polity, based on the Hippocratic ideals of a balance of physical properties, becomes common (Connor 1984: 228–9). So Plato in the *Republic* (556E) compares the sick body (*soma nosodes*) and the divided city as two entities subject to *stasis*, and in the *Sophist* (228A) the Eleatic Stranger says that *nosos* and *stasis* are the same.

Sophoclean heroes are themselves out of balance internally and they continually threaten to transfer this imbalance to their communities, a situation the tragedies figure as illness. The opening of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, produced some time between 430 and 425 BCE, clearly evokes the Athenian plague (Knox 1956), and disease figures prominently in his penultimate play, produced in 409 BCE – the *Philoctetes*, whose hero suffers exile because of a festering wound. Already in the earlier *Antigone* Sophocles

sporadically associates *nosos* with political turmoil in Thebes (ll. 421, 1015, 1141) and with the conduct of specific characters (l. 732, Creon to Haemon about Antigone; l. 1052, Teiresias about Creon). In the *Trachiniae*, the desire of Heracles is figured as a *nosos*, before disease fatally enters his body through the Centaur's poison. Throughout his career Sophocles took a great interest in characters and communities under the threat of disease, but Sophoclean drama deployed these illnesses not out of any clinical interest; rather, as Biggs observes (1966: 223), "the Sophoclean description of diseases is fully subordinated to their development as dramatic symbols." Their diseases are symptomatic of their problematic relationships with their communities, and the only way to cure the city is to purge it of the infection or to rebalance the city's (or community's) components so as to make them work in greater harmony (Mitchell-Boyask 2008). While the most obvious case in this scenario is Oedipus, a similar dynamic is at work with Ajax, Heracles, and Philoctetes. I shall now sketch out how such matters register in the male protagonists of Sophocles' *Ajax*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Trachiniae* (with comments on the latter two summarizing chapters from my 2008 book), before I turn to the meaning of their absence for Deianeira, Antigone, and Electra. I shall show how medical language is central to each of the tragedies, even when it is relatively absent.

The temporary madness of Ajax, represented repeatedly as a *nosos*, arises from his double disruptions of order, divine and human (Winnington-Ingram 1980: 20–38). After the bitterly contested awarding of Achilles' arms to Odysseus, Ajax's decision to attack fatally his commanders, in vengeance, forces Athena to blind his judgment, so that he slaughters livestock instead, joyously glorying in his "victory." The discord in the army moves inside of Ajax. In addressing Odysseus, Athena terms Ajax's condition as one among the "diseases of insanity" (*maniasin nosois*, l. 59), and she promises that she will "reveal this disease" (*noson*, l. 66). The chorus speculates about the origins of Ajax's "divine illness" (*theia nosos*, l. 186). His return to sanity is the true catastrophe, as Tecmessa is the first human to describe his condition as diseased (ll. 205, 271, 274) and the chorus confirms this diagnosis (*noson*, l. 280); she further stresses she experiences disaster now, even in the absence of sickness in herself (l. 269). As the chorus hears Ajax lament inside his tent, its members wonder whether he is "sick [*nosein*] or suffers from his former illness [*nosemasi*] that remains with him" (ll. 337–8). After Ajax reveals himself sane again, he terms Athena's treatment of him as "a frenzied disease" (*lusode noson*, l. 452). When the chorus sings its belief that Ajax's suicide is inevitable (before the "deception speech"), it insists in particular that his state of mind is an illness. Ajax is "hard to heal" (*dustherapeutos*, l. 609), as he experiences "divine madness" (*theia mania*, l. 611). He is, above all, sick (*nosounta*, l. 625; *noson*, l. 635).

The death of Ajax removes all talk of illness from the drama, as no further instances of *nosos* occur after line 635, a few lines before the hero's "deception speech." That speech itself suggests that Ajax's death will heal him, as he cryptically refers to "purifying" his pollution from the bloodstains of his mad slaughter. Yet his first steps towards death are immediately followed by the Messenger's revelation that the deeper problem with Ajax does not consist of his relationship with other men, but lies in his excessive sense of independence from the gods, as "he does not think appropriate to what a human should" (ll. 761, 777). Ajax had twice scorned the help of the gods; the first time he rejected his father's advice, before sailing for Troy, that he "always be powerful with the help of the gods" (l. 765), claiming that he could gain his glory "apart from them" (l. 769). The second time he baldly spurned the assistance of Athena on the Trojan battlefield, and thus earned her wrath (l. 777). This sense of his own greatness separates him from god

and man, thus making his sense of disgrace at the loss of Achilles' armor and his assault on his own commanders seem almost inevitable. His *nosos* is a symptom of a more fundamentally problematic relationship with his society. Once death cures him of this disease, he can offer protection to his family and be reintegrated productively into society through the institution of hero-cult (Burian 1972; Henrichs 1993).

Disease (*nosos*) figures similarly in the *Trachiniae*, where Heracles resembles other Sophoclean heroes in his illness and its disruptive effects on his relationship with his community. Heracles' *nosos*, like that of Ajax, arises from a refusal to accept human limitations, though here the destabilizing force is not the excessive desire for glory, but excessive desire itself. First Heracles is beset by an extremely large amount of *eros*, as Deianeira describes it (ll. 445, 491, 544); then he has to endure the effects of a poisonous mixture from the Centaur's poison, spread on his clothing, which is narrated in similar language (ll. 784, 852, 981, 1013, 1030, 1084, 1115, 1120, 1230, 1241, 1260). He thus suffers *nosos*, as is typical for Sophoclean heroes, before and during the drama. Yet Heracles' *nosos* during the first half of *Trachiniae* is unique: the disease of *eros*, which he suffers from, is the only one in this group that is purely metaphorical and not literal. The *nosos* of Oedipus aside, this is, moreover, the only illness that endures throughout the whole drama, with no hope of a cure save death. Indeed, the shift here in the nature of disease, from metaphorical to literal, mirrors the movement in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* from metaphorical to actual blindness. The disease of *eros* leads Heracles to destroy a city in order to acquire a new woman – a conquest that starts the chain leading to his death. The excessive desire of the son of Zeus is figured as a *nosos* – a desire that creates the bodily suffering of Heracles, which is described in language evocative of the fate of victims of the Athenian plague of the 420s BCE (Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 75–87). This affinity might indicate that the *Trachiniae* was first performed during this period, near the time of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and not a decade or two earlier, as many scholars have believed. Heracles' imbalance destroys the only community he has, his family; and yet, as with Ajax, the future hero-cult that the play's last scene signals will help another community (Holt 1989; Finkelberg 1996), perhaps even the one that watched the play's first production.

Because of the plague that drives the plot right from the opening lines, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* has been the Athenian tragedy most closely associated with illness and Greek medical thought (Knox 1956; Knox 1957: 139–47; Biggs 1966; Segal 1993: 73–7). Knox's 1957 study demonstrated that Oedipus the "empiricist" is depicted as a physician to the sick city of Thebes and the procedures he is using to cure it are cast in the language of the Hippocratic medical treatises. Indeed, in the opening scenes Sophocles uses words that are common in these works but rare in Greek tragedy. Here I shall focus on how the deployment of *nosos* throughout the dramatic text is central to its meaning. The forms this *nosos* takes and how it is cured are paramount.

The circulation of disease language throughout the text shows the rich Sophoclean mixture of the literal and the metaphorical and meaningfully joins together seemingly disparate elements. Before focusing on *nosos* I turn to the verb *phthinein*, which denotes passive destruction: to waste away, to wane, to pine or perish. It occurs six times in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, initially to describe the plague's effect on Thebes. In the Priest's long speech, Sophocles begins consecutive lines (ll. 25–6) with identical forms of this verb – which is unusual – in order to depict the blight fallen on the land of Thebes, which thus heightens the sense of religious doom. Then, as Oedipus' investigation into the cause of the plague unexpectedly raises doubts about the continuing power of the gods, the

chorus, after expressing doubts about the need to continue the sacred dance, breaks into a lament for “the ancient prophecies of Laius, which are wasting away” (*phthintonta*, ll. 906–7), implying that the plague is affecting the gods and their words. A few lines later Oedipus, reacting to news of the death of Polybus, observes: “The wretch, as it appears, wasted away with disease” (*epthhito*, l. 962). This verb, *phthinein*, circulates through a small but significant network. First, Thebes wastes away with plague, then the oracles concerning Oedipus’ father Laius; then plague finally settles, verbally and indirectly, on the man whom Oedipus supposed, wrongly, to be his father.

The other two uses of this verb are quite odd, but (I think) meaningfully so. Both are remarkable in the context of their prominent use to describe the blight during the plague, in that they convert this usually passive verb into an actively destructive one, which is rarely seen in tragedy. First, as Knox noted (1956: 138–40), the chorus closes its singular prayer for help against “raging Ares” (l. 190) with a plea: “O father Zeus, destroy him under your thunderbolt” (*phthison*, l. 202). Second, at a later stage the chorus laments the fallen Oedipus as the one who “destroyed [*phthisas*] the maiden with the crooked talons who sang oracles” (ll. 1198–200). The chorus’ prayer against Ares would thus suggest a desire that the thunderbolt of Zeus bring plague against Ares – a somewhat startling idea, but one that is supported by “the suppressed image” of Zeus’ thunderbolt in the verb (*skepsas*, l. 28) in the Priest’s earlier lament of the plague (Parry 1969: 114). When the chorus transfers this unusual active use of the verb to its own recollection, just before the Messenger speech, of Oedipus’ defeat of the Sphinx, this alludes to Oedipus’ earlier salvation of Thebes – an episode in which he acted like a god, but which also triggered the sequence of events that would eventually bring plague onto Thebes.

Let us now focus on our main medical term, *nosos*. There is a total of 14 instances of it (three times in ll. 60–1, and then in ll. 150, 169, 217, 303, 307, 636, 960, 962, 1054, 1293, 1455). These uses are distributed unevenly – 9 in the first half of the play, 5 in the second; indeed 8 out of the 14 are clustered in the drama’s first 307 lines. Those first 9 occurrences denote literal sickness, while the later 5 are rather metaphorical, though not entirely so. This compression, however, becomes even more pronounced in the light of the gradual concentration of the Theban crisis over the first few dozen lines, beginning with the scene of supplication that Oedipus first describes. The Priest then further depicts the nature of the suppliant crowd before the palace doors and the blight afflicting Thebes. The speech thus carefully builds toward the climactic revelation of what is occurring: *loimos echthistos*, “a most abominable plague” (l. 28). *Loimos* is an extremely rare word in the fifth century, and poets, especially after 430 BCE, avoid it to such an extent that one must conclude there is some form of superstition behind its absence (Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 23–8). With the Athenian plague still going on or recently ended, the effect of this word, spoken by a religious authority, after Sophocles has so carefully built towards it, must have been quite shattering. Having made his point, Sophocles puts *loimos* away and returns to the more customary, more flexible, and safer *nosos*.

Oedipus utters this word eight times, more than any other character (ll. 60–1, 217, 303, 307, 960, 962). His increasing concern with himself, despite the plague’s threat, is marked by Jocasta’s first words, wherein she asks Creon and Oedipus: “Aren’t you ashamed for stirring private problems when the land is so sick?” (*nosouses*, ll. 635–6). As the conversation between Jocasta and Oedipus suddenly turns to matters in the distant past, the language of disease naturally submerges for 324 lines; then, somewhat surprisingly, it returns when Oedipus discusses the death of Polybus. When the Messenger

from Corinth reports Polybus' death, Oedipus' questions show the lingering effects both of his suspicions about a plot between Teiresias and Creon and of the plague, *nosos*, that he is attempting to stop (ll. 960–3):

OEDIPUS	Was it by treachery, or in contact with some disease [<i>nosou</i>].
CORINTHIAN	A slight tip to the scales brings old bodies to their beds.
OEDIPUS	The wretch, as it seems, wasted away with disease [<i>nosois</i>].
CORINTHIAN	And because he'd met the measure of his old age.

This simple exchange is more complex than it appears at first, but it is most important that its language returns to the plague even as it narrates events in Corinth. Oedipus' insistence on the role of *nosos* – a word Sophocles does not have to use here – connects the death of Polybus and the plague (Peradotto 1992). Oedipus asks about *nosos* and the Corinthian stresses old age. Oedipus then ignores the Corinthian's response and insists, doubly, on *nosos*. That this insistence is a bit odd is marked by the Corinthian's return to old age as the primary cause of death. The strong echoes, at the beginning of this scene, of the opening tableau of the prologue in Jocasta's supplication of Apollo's altar prepare the re-emergence of language from that earlier scene (Segal 1981: 236).

Jocasta speaks twice of disease, once about the Theban plague and the second time in reference to herself; the plague seems to enter her as she realizes the truth about her second husband. In both places, Jocasta intervenes to stop Oedipus from taking a course of action: first, his violent quarrel with Creon (a passage already cited) and, second, his desire to interrogate the one person who might reveal his parents' identity (ll. 1060–1):

By the gods, don't seek this, if you care at all
About your own life; I am sick [*nosous*'] enough already.

That last line reaches back to earlier key instances of *nosos* in the text. Jocasta's declaration "I am sick enough already" surely echoes Oedipus' early assertion, so pregnant with dramatic irony: "For I know well that you are all sick, and, although you are sick, none of you is as sick as I" (59–61). The plague has moved fatally from the Theban populace to the king of Corinth, and now back to the Theban queen (Rehm 1992: 117; Segal 1993: 127).

The plague will finally rest fully in Oedipus himself. While the Priest had articulated the plague, uniquely, as *loimos*, disease (*nosos*) entered the drama's discourse – first through the words of Oedipus, as quoted in the previous paragraph. Oedipus clearly does not believe he himself has the plague, yet he uses the language of such disease to describe his own grief, thus initiating the blurring of literal and figurative disease. Oedipus believes his emotions are an effect of the plague, just as Jocasta does at line 1054, but really he himself is its cause. Thus, the Messenger prepares his audiences, both those in the orchestra and those in the theater, for the entrance of the blinded, bloody Oedipus in the climactic line that fulfills the patterns of the drama: "his disease [*nosema*] is greater than he can bear" (l. 1293). Here Sophocles seems to insist on the plague's transformation into Oedipus' personal catastrophe; the plague does not disappear late in the drama, as some commentators suggest, but it moves into the body of Oedipus, mutating – to use the language of modern medicine.

Yet Oedipus rejects the judgment of the Messenger – not the judgment that he is sick, but the judgment that he is incapable of bearing the severity of his ailment. His long

speech after the *kommos* with the chorus climaxes almost exuberantly with his claim: “There is nobody among mortals except me who is able to bear my troubles” (ll. 1414–15). The assertion that he can bear (*pherein*) his troubles echoes, and rebuts, the Messenger’s claim that Oedipus cannot bear (*pherein*) his illness (l. 1293). Oedipus further glosses on these two passages in his speech to Creon when, after requesting that he be led off to die on Mt. Cithaeron, he adds with sudden prophetic intuition that he is not destined to die now (ll. 1455–6): “And yet I know this, that neither disease [*noson*] nor any thing else could ever destroy me.” This is the 14th and final instance of *nosos* in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and its 13 predecessors load a fairly simple statement with much more complex resonance than it would have in isolation. Oedipus imagines only things – not humans, animals, or gods – threatening his life, and the only thing he specifies is *nosos*. Since he has already survived the great Theban *nosos* in all of its forms, he cannot suffer it again. One is reminded here of Thucydides’ observation (2.50.6) that the plague did not attack the same person twice with a fatal result. Thucydides here gropes in the direction of a concept of acquired immunity, and it would be foolish to see a direct connection between these two passages. And yet they resonate in each other. Oedipus cannot imagine meeting a greater *nosos* than the one he has just survived, and Sophocles hence closes the verbal path of the plague in his drama about Oedipus with a sickness that cannot kill. Oedipus has saved Thebes from the plague by verbally transferring it to his body, removing plague from the city just as the scapegoats (*pharmakoi*) annually took away the threat of plague and famine by letting themselves be chased from Athens during the festival of Thargelia, sacred to Apollo (Vernant 1988; Foley 1993).

3 Disease in the “Apolitical” Female Body

While Sophoclean heroes suffer from disease, this experience occurs in a strangely limited manner for their female counterparts. Such language applies to secondary characters such as Deianeira and Jocasta only once or twice, in dramas where the bodily suffering of their husbands dominates the action, while Antigone and Electra in their two eponymous tragedies are never cast in such language directly, whether in terms of real or metaphorical *nosos*. Since the men function metonymically for their cities and communities, and the heroes’ sick bodies represent the ailing body politic, metaphorical illness in female characters, who would not be citizens, has a sharply reduced scale. I shall now briefly examine this matter according to the chronology of the dramas’ productions.

One would think that, given the Greek predilection for associating women with anarchy (a tendency given voice to by Creon), in a drama such as *Antigone*, where *nosos* is a significant theme, *nosos* would at some point attach itself to Antigone herself; but *nosos* winds up characterizing Creon instead and becomes part of the play’s reversals toward the end (Goheen 1951; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 114–16). During the first *stasimon*, the chorus shapes subsequent resonances of *nosos* in its celebration of man’s triumphs over nature, which climaxes in the assertion that man has found “escapes from untreatable diseases” (*noson amechanon*, l. 363). In the subsequent scene, the sentry’s report of Antigone’s capture immediately suggests that a different kind of *nosos* will now afflict Thebes, as he describes the dust storm that obscures Antigone’s action as “a divine plague” (*theian noson*, l. 421 – a phrase that Griffith’s commentary on these lines calls metaphorical); subsequent events will cast Creon’s actions in such language. The two

next instances where the text seems to link Antigone to real or figurative disease turn out to be oblique and misdirected. First, Creon asks Haemon whether “this woman has not been seized by the disease” of being bad (l. 732), a possibility that events have already refuted (or at least questioned thoroughly) and that Haemon immediately rebuts: “The people of this same city of Thebes disagree.” Second, the chorus laments that Antigone, sentenced to death, will die “not struck by wasting sickness” (l. 819). The slippages, here and throughout Greek tragedy, between real and metaphorical disease lend to this line a sense that the *polis* is exonerated from catching disease from its women too, since they are not depicted as diseased.

Indeed, the remainder of the play shows it is the male, King Creon, who has been “seized by disease” and spreads it disastrously throughout Thebes, bringing the play’s language full circle from the celebrations of the first *stasimon*. Teiresias chastises Creon that “the city is sick [*nosei polis*, l. 1015] because of your intentions,” and then he accuses Creon of being “full of this disease” of foolishness (*tautes [...] tes nosou pleres*, l. 1052), echoing, and thus linking this folly to, his account of the altars polluted because they are “full” (*plereis*, l. 1017) of the exposed flesh of Polyneices. The chorus, then, in the brief final ode, prays to Dionysus to come and save his home city of Thebes, because “the entire city is gripped by a violent disease” (*biaias [...] nosou*, ll. 114–41; see Scullion 1998). As Jebb (1981) observes in his commentary (*ad loc.*): “The *nosos* is the divine anger which Thebes has incurred.” The chorus, having launched the theme of man’s greatness in overcoming disease in the first *stasimon*, now closes and reverses that theme in the last one, as metaphorical disease has overwhelmed the city as a result of Creon’s actions. Antigone is now fully excluded from this discourse of civic illness.

Similar patterns are at work in the *Trachiniae*, even though this is certainly not an overtly political drama. As indicated earlier, *nosos* is much more of a prevalent word and dominant theme in the *Trachiniae* than in the *Antigone*, yet here too one finds the same aversion to feminine disease, both real and metaphorical. However, the two occasions where the *nosos* of Heracles echoes in Deianeira become magnified in importance. After finally hearing the truth about Heracles and Iole from Lichas, Deianeira immediately describes her current marital situation as *nosos* (l. 491), just as she had termed her husband’s difficulty in controlling his bodily desires (l. 445); this word now begins to dominate the play’s language. At the start of the same antistrophe, which closes when the chorus recognizes the play’s events as the workings of “unspeaking Aphrodite,” the chorus laments the *nosos* that is “poured over” Heracles (l. 852). Then, a few moments later, the chorus reacts in horror to the announcement of Deianeira’s suicide, which has occurred while the chorus was singing of Heracles’ *nosos* – it reacts, namely, by asking the Nurse what “passion” (*thumos*), what “illness” (in the plural: *tines nosoi*, l. 882) drove Deianeira to such an act. Deianeira, they imply, has lost control of her *thumos*, the seat of her emotions – just as happened to Heracles. But this language only attaches itself to Deianeira as a consequence of her marriage to Heracles, not because of any action performed by her or because of any of her innate qualities. The illness of Heracles has passed on to his wife at her death, but the same linguistic “contagion” occurs at a roughly similar moment in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, when Jocasta responds to her realization of the truth with a plea that Oedipus cease from his inquiry, since “I am sick enough already (*halis nosous’ ego*, l. 1061). As with Antigone, *nosos* for Deianeira is a thing – a noun – not an experience or an activity – a verb. In contrast, forms of the verb *nosein* are applied eight times to Heracles (ll. 543, 784, 1013, 1115, 1120, 1230, 1235, 1241). Indeed, the only Sophoclean female said through a verbal expression

to ail is Jocasta – a singularity even more strongly marked by the emphatically redundant (in Greek) first-person pronoun.

Of all the surviving Sophoclean dramas, the *Electra* is both the one most strongly dominated by women and the one with the fewest instances of *nosos*, a combination that does not seem coincidental, given the patterns I have sketched here. Electra's anomalous situation (and madness) and Clytemnestra's marital conduct surely are cases to which Sophocles would apply the disease metaphor in other plays, yet here he withholds it. In the entire play there is only one single instance of *nosos*: it occurs when, following the bitter clash between Electra and Chrysothemis, the chorus laments "the affairs of the house are sick" (*ta men ek domon nosei*, l. 1070). Not the women, not their actions, but the house to which they belong is diseased. In the larger context of Sophoclean drama, this transfer of the metaphor from humans to the house seems odd.

Moreover, vocabulary that is part of the same thematic verbal cluster in other plays appears prominently here. ("Clustering" is a term I borrow from Kallet's 1999 analysis of similar medical word groups in Thucydides.) The verb *phthinein* (to waste away) plays a role, as it did in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In the *Electra* the chorus, upon hearing the dying cries of Clytemnestra, exclaims: "O city, o wretched race, your daily lot [*moira*] wastes away, wastes away [*phthinei phthinei*]" (l. 1414). This answers Electra's earlier lament that she sees her enemies' affairs flourishing rather than wasting away (*kataphthinonta*, l. 260), as well as her comment to the chorus that it can never be noble to neglect "the dead" (*tois phthimenois*, l. 237). Similarly, *Electra* deploys language related to healing, such as *amechanos* – which can mean, generally, "to be at a loss," but originally signified "to lack healing," a meaning that appears a number of times in Greek tragedy (Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 132–4, 152). The chorus refers to Electra's "unhealable pain" (*amechanon algos*, 140–1) early in the play; Jebb's (1894) commentary on these lines compares this usage to *Antigone* 363, where the chorus celebrates the new ability of humans to treat "unhealable diseases" (*noson amechanon*). Electra's incurable pain is then answered by Orestes, when he acknowledges that the woman to whom he has handed the deceitful urn is in fact his sister Electra. Orestes asks: "Where in my words can I go, being *amechanon*?" While the participle translated as "being *amechanon*" could signify simply being in a state of perplexity, the earlier adjective, together with the immediate context, shade it with a sense taken from medical therapy: being without healing. He continues with a reference to the failure of his tongue's physical strength, and Electra asks: "What pain [*algos*] do you have?" (1174–6). The clustering of *amechanon* and *algos* in these lines clearly echoes lines 140–1, where the combination unambiguously signifies pain that cannot be healed. There is certainly no ambiguity in Electra's use of the technical term for healing, *iasis* (l. 876) for her woes when Chrysothemis informs her that she believes Orestes has returned.

The almost total absence of *nosos* in the *Electra*, which is unique, combined with the relative abundance of forms of *algos* (nine occurrences), suggests that here Sophocles substitutes *algos* for *nosos*. In the *Philoctetes* Neoptolemus confirms this link when he tells his new friend: "You are sick [*noseis*] with respect to this pain [*algos*]" (l. 1326) – making an association that he will repeat a few lines later (l. 1379). Pain is thus equated with illness; and it is pain, not disease, that must be healed. All the conspirators against Clytemnestra come to experience pain. Chrysothemis tells her sister "I feel pain [*algo*] at the present situation" (333), while Electra's skepticism about the genuineness of Clytemnestra's reaction to the story about Orestes' death focuses on whether or not "she truly felt pain [*algousa*, l. 804] and lamented [...] that her son was dead." Electra's

attempt to persuade Chrysothemis to help her with the revenge when she believes Orestes to be dead stresses the pain (*algein*, l. 960) she must feel at her unmarried state. Before revealing his true identity to Electra, Orestes himself tries to establish an emotional bond with her by emphasizing that he sees her “conspicuous in her pains” (*algesin*, l. 1187), and, in response to her claim that he alone has pitied her, he says: “Alone I have come feeling pain [*algon*] at your equal sufferings” (l. 1201). Pain spreads among these characters on contact, almost like a disease, and the only cure for it, they conclude, is the death of Agamemnon’s murderers. As soon as Orestes reveals himself to Electra, the language of pain, *algos*, ceases, just as the language of disease stops in *Ajax* once Telamon’s son sets out on the path to suicide.

Despite the clustering of medical vocabulary in *Electra* and its insistence on representing emotional anguish as bodily pain, Sophocles here removes a fairly rich term from his typical verbal palette. The contrast with the *Ajax*, *Trachiniae*, and *Oedipus Tyrannus* is striking; but even more so is the contrast with the surviving play closest in date to the *Electra*, the *Philoctetes*, produced in 409 BCE. The date of the *Electra* is unknown, but most scholars assign its first production to a date within four years of the *Philoctetes*, possibly as late as 410 (Owen 1936; March 2001). A production date of 410 BCE, one year after the oligarchic coup, would lend the play’s situation and action overtones of the brutal regime of the Four Hundred, as well as of its overthrow (Konstan 2008), the aftermath of which resonated in the *Philoctetes* (Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 153–82). The *Electra* has one single occurrence of *nosos*, while the *Philoctetes* has 26 – the second highest number in all of surviving Greek tragedy (the highest record is scored by Euripides’ *Orestes*, a play produced in the next year) – almost twice as many as the 14 in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. If 410 BCE was the production date of the *Electra*, then Sophocles went in a single year from his least to his most “nosological” drama. The combined facts that *nosos* is a basic part of the Sophoclean vocabulary and that elsewhere Sophocles does not apply such language to his female characters lead me to conclude that the gender of its protagonist has something to do with this shift, and, as has been newly emphasized by Wheeler (2003), the significance of Electra’s gender has often been overlooked. *Electra* is the least nosological and arguably the most female-dominated Sophoclean drama, while *Philoctetes* is the most nosological and the most male-dominated – it is the only surviving Athenian tragedy whose cast is entirely male. In the *Electra*, Electra, pained but not diseased, survives. The play obliquely evokes the language of illness and cure for both individual and community, and, while the language of pain does recede once Orestes embarks on the final murders, so too does the discourse of cure (though not totally). The deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus may be emotionally satisfying for Electra, but they seem to produce little in the way of social or political healing. Nor is Electra reintegrated into society the way *Philoctetes* will be.

These departures from typical Sophoclean discourse may help explain the darkness that many modern critics have felt enveloping the play’s world, as has been well summarized by Matthew Wright (2005). Electra’s final lines, hectoring Orestes to finish the murders as quickly as possible, out of sight, with the corpse of Aegisthus denied burial, close by expressing her fervent belief that this death alone (*monon*, and not Clytemnestra’s?) will bring “a release [*luterion*] from the troubles of long ago” (l. 1490). Electra’s final words in this drama turn against her, as they had been part of her scornful rebuke to Chrysothemis for participating in Clytemnestra’s libations at Agamemnon’s tomb, so that their mother be “released” or absolved of murder (l. 447). Moreover, the prayer of Clytemnestra herself to Apollo, for release (*luterious*, l. 635) from fears, echoes

Electra's sarcasm and anticipates Electra's conclusion. Orestes may have disposed of his mother, but her language lives in her daughter.

Electra's final word, the adjective *luterios*, warrants further scrutiny; first, because it is relatively rare, second, because it does have medical overtones that also shade into political metaphors, and, third, because it figures meaningfully into the *Oresteia*. *Luterios* only occurs one other time in Sophoclean drama (*Trachiniae*, 554) and a single time in the whole of Euripides (*Alcesteis*, 224). In the *Alcesteis* passage we find *luterios* clustered with other medical language as the chorus, upset by the imminent demise of Alcesteis, calls upon Apollo in his cult title as Healer (Paian, l. 220), asking him to find some healing (*mechane*, l. 221) for the troubles of Admetus and to "become a liberator [*luterios*] from death" (l. 224). The Hippocratic *Prognosticon* unequivocally deploys this adjective to denote the releasing of the body from suffering, as it discusses "signs of healing" (*semneion luterion*, *Prog.* 24). The richest senses of *luterios*, and the ones most fertile for considering the *Electra* passage, are found in Aeschylus. In the *Seven against Thebes*, the sense of *luterios* as "liberating" seems purely political, as the chorus prays to the city's gods: "Having surrounded the city as liberators [*luterioi*], show your love for it" (ll. 175–6). On the other hand, in the *Suppliants*, *luterios* is, again, twice clustered with medical and political language and thus retains elements of each. First, Pelasgus tells the story of how Apis, the healer son of Apollo, killed monsters that the earth had sent from below, in anger at the pollution from human bloodshed. Apis "made surgical and liberating cures [*luteria ake*] for the Argive land" (l. 268). Second, the chorus closes the drama with the prayer that the gods provide "means of deliverance" (perhaps "healing means of deliverance," *luterious mechaniais*, ll. 1071–2).

Most significantly, *luterios* appears three times in the drama that had the greatest influence on the *Electra*: Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. This has implications for how we understand the word in Sophocles. In the *Libation Bearers*, the chorus' final song before Orestes kills Aegisthus and Clytemnestra casts this action as "a sailing that liberates the house" (*domaton luterion*, l. 820) – precisely the same language as in Sophocles. In the *Eumenides*, *luterios* appears twice, as Orestes grapples with the consequences of the matricide. His prayer to Athena, begging her to appear as quickly as possible, closes with the plea that she "become my liberator from these troubles" – which, in its phrasing *genoito tonde moi luterios* (l. 298), seems clearly echoed by Electra's final line in Sophocles' play, *genoito ton palai luterion* (l. 1490), especially as this adjective is the last word in both lines. The final *Oresteian* instance of *luterios* underscores its medical overtones, as it is clustered, once again, with references to cure and healing. Apollo, in arguing with the Furies about what conditions are irremediable, points out that being fettered is, unlike death, an affliction "for which there is a cure [*akos*] and many a liberating healing device [*mechane luterios*]" (l. 646).

So, when Electra finishes speaking, in Sophocles' play, with the opinion that "for me at least this would be a release from the troubles of long ago," her words resonate with the *Oresteia* and with Greek medical language. But to what end? Sophocles' *Electra* neglects the *polis*, and strangely so (Segal 1981: 251; Finglass 2005) and focuses on the family, or house. Despite its clearly dysfunctional family and community, the play also seems to go out of its way to avoid a word, *nosos*, that denotes sickness and connotes disorder prevalently in the other surviving dramas of Sophocles, especially in contrast with the *Philoctetes*, which Sophocles may have produced only a year later. If Sophocles did compose his *Electra* some time between the disaster of the Sicilian expedition of 413 BCE and the *Philoctetes* of 409 BCE, as seems likely, then we must take into account

the intervening events: his own service as one of the ten elder *probouloi*, who were appointed to put the Athenian government on a more even keel; the sudden seizure of power by oligarchs under their stewardship in 411 BCE; that regime's rapid demise late in the same year; and its sudden replacement by the more moderate rule of the Five Thousand, who controlled Athens until June 410 BCE – possibly two months after *Electra's* performance. The brutality of that short period and its civil strife surely must be seen as reflected in the harsh, bitter tone of Sophocles' tragic drama, with sister opposing sister, children opposing their mother, lies and deception all around. If the play's staging of the overthrow of an illegitimate regime does allude to the end of the Four Hundred (Konstan 2008), then we still must account, in this context, for the lack of a feeling of celebration, the striking darkness at the tragedy's close, or at least the ambivalence about what has transpired. Perhaps the *polis* in the *Electra* becomes almost completely elided because the Athenian *polis* that Sophocles had known had come to be so much in doubt; the situation at *Electra's* end is as unsure and uneasy as that in Athens itself. The chorus closes the drama with an evocation of political freedom, *eleutheria* (l. 1509): a very rare word in Athenian tragedy, but one that does figure in the *Philoctetes* (Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 177–82); and that is a play where the language of disease returns, stronger than ever, and where the city of Athens looms in the background.

Electra's last word, *luterion*, which evokes a release from disease, points towards that celebration of freedom; but it is couched in purely personal terms. She begins expressing her hope for final release with the qualification *emoi*, which means “to me” or “in my eyes.” These murders are to solve personal cravings, not to purge a metaphorical sickness or to establish a new order. The word's allusion to the *Orestia's* enactment of the same events thus undermines the dual metaphor of political and medical healing, a metaphor already short-circuited by *Electra's* status as a woman and thus falling outside of the political order. Sophocles' *Electra*, as it were, lacks a heroic pharmacology.

Guide to Further Reading

Sophoclean drama uneasily straddles the line between traditional Greek religion and advances in medicine during the fifth century. A good starting place for the influence of early Greek attempts to conceptualize disease is Lloyd (2003). Connolly (1998) examines thoroughly and skeptically the evidence for Sophocles' participation in the introduction of the Asclepius cult to Athens. Kosak (2004) offers a rich overview of the language of Hippocratic medicine in Greek tragedy, with a focus on Euripides. Padel (1992) studies madness in Greek tragedy, making many interesting comments on Hippocratic medicine and Sophocles. Knox (1957) remains seminal on all the aspects of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, not least in its extensive discussion of Oedipus as a physician and of the play's specific medical vocabulary. Knox's (1956) article on why we should accept the years of the Athenian plague as the time of the production of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* has yet to be conclusively refuted and has been reprinted in Knox (1979). Biggs (1966) is a brief but fundamental examination of disease imagery in Sophocles. Winnington-Ingram (1980) briefly touches on disease in several Sophoclean tragedies, in particular the *Ajax* (20–38). My own book (Mitchell-Boyask 2008) is not so much interested in Hippocratic medicine as a source of Greek tragic language as in the deployment of words for illness, such as *nosos* and *loimos*, in the context of the great plague's aftermath; as such it has chapters on the *Trachiniae*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and *Philoctetes*.

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Sophocles and Hero Cult

Bruno Currie

I General Considerations

Sophocles and hero cult qualifies for treatment in its own right if there is a consistent depiction of hero cult within Sophocles' oeuvre and if it is distinct from that of Aeschylus or Euripides. This seems to be the case. First, there is remarkable consistency of themes arguably pertaining to hero cult in *Ajax*, *Trachiniae*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*. The explicitness of *OC* about a prospective cult of Oedipus may authorize the interpretation of the less explicit *Ajax* and *Trachiniae* along similar lines, as hinting at the heroizations of Ajax and Heracles, respectively (Goward 2004: 41–2). Hero cult in Sophocles thus implicates one in discussion of “intertextual” relationships between the plays.

Second, there appears to be a valid contrast between Sophocles, on the one hand, and Aeschylus and Euripides, on the other. Sophocles is distinctively concerned with heroization as a *process* of transformation (Bowra 1944: 309–10). Heroic cults of Oedipus in *OC*, Ajax in *Ajax*, and Heracles in *Trachiniae* are shown “in the making” (Holt 1989: 76; Henrichs 1993: 165, 176; Fowler 1999: 167). A corollary is that the protagonist's posthumous supernatural state develops organically out of his life among men (*OC* 389–90); tragic hero and cultic hero emerge as two sides of the same coin. The characterization of the Sophoclean hero owes something to the conception of the cult hero (Knox 1964: 57–8, 174–5). We may speak of “proleptic characterization”: Oedipus in *OC* is, in terms of character, “already the chthonic hero he will become” (Edmunds 1981: 229; Bowra 1944: 322). In Euripidean tragedy heroization tends to be more explicitly heralded in the text and less prepared for by what we have seen of the character on stage (*Hipp.* 1423–30; *Med.* 1378–83; *Hel.* 1666–9; *Heracl.* 1030–6; *Andr.* 1253–8; *Ba.* 1338–9). These differences can be related to differences in characterization and handling of tragic form by the tragedians (Gould 2001: 94–103). The topic of Sophocles and hero cult impinges on Sophoclean ethics as well as characterization; the imperative of helping friends and

harming enemies powerfully motivates the Sophoclean tragic hero as it does heroes of cult (Hester 1977: 33; Blundell 1989: 254, 258; Henrichs 1993: 167).

Study of Sophocles and hero cult illuminates themes in hero cult as well as in Sophoclean drama. Scholarship on hero cult has emphasized the separateness of a person's life before and after heroization (Boehringer 1996: 48). But there are arguments for a more gradual evolutionary conception, whereby the cult could be anticipated in a person's lifetime (Currie 2005: 7–9, 191–3, 406–7). Sophocles' plays lend support to that view, as Linforth notes about the *Oedipus at Colonus*: “Most unusual is the fact that [Oedipus'] future state as hero is determined while he is still alive. This is not unparalleled, but almost always it is only after death that a man is recognized as a hero” (Linforth 1951: 98).

Sophocles was allegedly implicated in two historical hero cults, his own and Asclepius' (*FGrH* 334 F38; *Etymologicum magnum*, s.v. “Dexion”). These stories are of interest for hero cult as a historical phenomenon (Connolly 1998; Clay 2004: 78–9, 151–2), and arguably for the plays' ancient reception (Edmunds 1996: 163–8); but Sophocles' biography, even if securely known, sheds only dubious light on the plays. *OC* presents a possible exception: scholars have frequently seen cross-fertilization between the play and the poet's biography, the heroized Oedipus evoking Sophocles, a demesman of Colonus (Segal 1981: 407–8; Edmunds 1996: 165; Calame 1998: 355–6). Conceivably this play offers obliquely, through its title-character, a metapoetic retrospective on the poet's career; certainly *OC* engages intertextually with other Sophoclean plays (see below).

Hero cult also impinges on politics. It has been seen as having a “social function” through promoting social cohesion within the city state, the interests of the powerful individual being transformed in hero cult into those of the city state (Seaford 1994a: 106–23, 123–39). The “social function” of hero cult arguably comes to the fore in *Ajax* (Seaford 1994a: 129–30, 399–400; Hesk 2003: 20–4, 88, 119). The argument presupposes, first, that tragedy in general has a “social function” (but see Griffin 1998; Heath 2006; Carter 2007: 64–89); second, that *Ajax* probes the tension between individual and collective (but see Friedrich 1996: 264–8; Griffin 1999a: 87–8). The balance of power between collective and individual in Athenian society is unclear. Even here where the *demos* was sovereign the collective could see its successes or failures as depending on a few “great personalities” (Griffith 1995: 120–2, 164–71; Griffin 1998: 58). In *OC* it is an issue who will have power over whom: the prospective hero (Oedipus) over the prospective worshipping community (Thebes or Athens) or vice-versa (*OC* 390, 399–400, 404–5, 408, 576–7, 646; Guidorizzi 2008: 260). It is not evident that the play depicts Oedipus as undergoing a “translation from private individual to public property” (Kelly 2009: 84). Like *Ajax* (*Aj.* 835–44, 1395), Oedipus retains in death, and thus for ever, his old personal animosities, preserves a fierce independence (ll. 621–2, 1370–96), remains his own man (l. 405). The view that heroization is about subordinating individual to collective, arguable for *Ajax* and *OC*, hardly finds any purchase at all with Heracles in *Trachiniae* (Griffin 1999a: 82–3) or Philoctetes in *Philoctetes* (Griffin 1998: 53 n. 51). This is not an easily generalizable account of heroization, for either Athenian society or tragedy.

The debate over collective versus individual mirrors a debate over “objective” versus “subjective” perspectives in hero cult: whether heroization answers more to the needs of the worshipping community or the individual worshipped (Kearns 1989: 5–6; Currie 2005: 6–8; generally, Harrison 2007: 382–3). It is said that in tragedy “heroization

benefits not the hero but the society” (Mikalson 1991: 41; Linforth 1951: 100–1; Hester 1977: 23). But tragedy does pay *some* attention to heroization’s subjective aspects, although the benefits to the hero are not trumpeted, presumably not to compromise “tragic effect” (see below). Heracles draws attention to the felicity of his posthumous existence in *Philoctetes* (ll. 1413–14, 1420), and Philoctetes may be encouraged to hope for something similar (ll. 1421–2). In *OC* the audience is given faint hints as to what Oedipus’ heroization may mean for him (see below). Harder to evaluate are claims that hero cult taps into eschatological themes associated with some “mystery cults” (a term of convenience that can mask important differences between distinct cults): this has been argued for *Ajax* (Seaford 1994a: 398–9, 1994b: 282–8; Krummen 1998: 308–13) and *OC* (Calame 1998: 352; Ferrari 2003; Markantonatos 2007: 135–40).

Another reason not to see heroization solely in terms of benefit to human society is the plays’ conspicuous interest in the hero’s relationship with a different society: the Olympian gods. The gods’ involvement raises issues not simply translatable into benefit for human society. Many Sophoclean heroes trace a painful progression from being hateful to the gods (*theomises*) to being dear to the gods (*theophiles*): so especially Ajax (*Aj.* 457–8, 589–90) and Oedipus (*OC* 394; Seidensticker 1972: 259; Mikalson 1991: 28). The process of becoming agreeable to the gods is not the process by which the hero becomes conformable to human society. There are, irreducibly, two dimensions in play. The elevation of the tragic hero to a cult hero is a matter between the hero and the gods before it is a matter between the hero and (human) society.

2 *Ajax*

By the fifth century Ajax was one of ten Attic tribal heroes, and Eurysaces a hero of the Salaminii *genos* (Parker 1996: 118–19, 311). The question is whether and how this extra-dramatic situation impinges on the play. The play is frequently held to intimate Ajax’s hero cult (Jebb 1896: xxx–xxxii; Burian 1972; Henrichs 1993; Seaford 1994a: 129–30; Garvie 1998: 6, 231; Krummen 1998; Hesk 2003: 20–2). This view, if correct, is not clear-cut; discussion has revolved around three passages in particular.

But I shall go to my ablutions and the coastal
meadows that I might purify my stains
and escape the heavy wrath of the goddess;
and I shall go to what untrodden place I shall find
and I shall bury this sword of mine, most hateful of weapons,
digging a place in the ground where none shall see it;
but let Night and Hades preserve it down below. (ll. 654–60)

The purificatory ritual Ajax envisages is ambiguous: λουτρά may be a “bath” or “libations” in a funerary or cultic context (*Aj.* 1405; Krummen 1998: 307–8). In a parallel scene of *OC*, Oedipus’ “ablutions” (λουτρά) are funerary (*OC* 1597–9; cf. *Ant.* 900–2; Easterling 2006: 142–3). Through the ambiguous language Ajax intimates his intention to purify himself by suicide. Normal purificatory ritual would involve an animal victim (cf. ll. 711–12; *A. Eu.* 448–52, Heraclit. 22 B5 D–K, *A.R. Arg.* 4.700–17). Here the intended victim is the sacrificer himself.

Ajax's speech misleads Tecmessa and the chorus. Yet Ajax has no motive to mislead and deception is not in his manner. The "deception" should be differently understood: Ajax, it seems, has achieved a new level of understanding of his situation, and his oracular language conveys a truth most readily conveyed in those terms (Taplin 1979: 128–9; Seaford 1994a: 395–6, 1994b: 282; Krummen 1998: 314). From lines 646ff. Ajax acts with a clairvoyant purposefulness, like Heracles (*Tr.* 1143ff., esp. 1150, 1164; Silk 1985: 9; Holt 1989: 76) and Oedipus (*OC* 1516–17; cf. 46ff., 1457ff.; Goward 2004: 42). Ajax hitherto has understood his suicide as an act of desperation, the only course left to one who has become hateful to the gods (*Aj.* 473–80). Now suicide is understood as a saving act for Ajax and his dependants (Taplin 1979: 125–6). There is a shift from a backward-looking conception of suicide ("because of") to a forward-looking one ("in order to": Seidensticker 1983: 121). The words "meadows" (l. 655) and "saved" (l. 692) have also been argued to evoke the positive eschatological ideals of mystery cults (Seaford 1994b: 284; Krummen 1998: 308–10).

Whether Ajax can be considered reconciled to the gods (especially Athena) after his suicide depends partly on the implications of the Messenger's report of Calchas' words (ll. 752–7). As reported, these implied a disjunction: *either* Athena's wrath will bring about Ajax's death on this day *or*, if Ajax survives this day, he will no longer be pursued by her anger. Perhaps the disjunction ought to have been a conjunction: Ajax will *both* die on this day *and* his death will dispel the goddess' anger for the future. In *Trachiniae*, Heracles received a prophecy from Dodona that his present labor would *either* bring about his death *or* if accomplished would secure him a blessed life for the future (*Tr.* 1169–72); but "only after the catastrophe does it become clear that the two 'alternatives' are different formulations of the same prediction" (Easterling 1982: 82; see below). One might suppose that Athena's anger is dispelled precisely *because* Ajax kills himself on this day: Ajax's self-sacrifice is the *only* way he can "escape the heavy wrath of the goddess" (p. 656).

The course of events after the suicide probably implies that Ajax is conciliated to the gods. If the gods are understood always to be directing affairs (ll. 950, 1036–7; Rohde 1925, vol. 2: 236), it is significant that Ajax's corpse is found first by Teucer (discounting Tecmessa and the chorus), not by Ajax's enemies: the gods appear to have answered his prayers (ll. 826–30, 998–9; Jebb 1896: 152; Garvie 1998: 219). A symbiosis of Athena and Ajax in cultic reality (Athena worshipped under the epiclesis "of Ajax" at Megara: Paus. 1.42.4) may perhaps encourage one, if it is permitted to import matter from outside the play, to understand an implied posthumous reconciliation of goddess and hero (Seaford 1994a: 130 n. 121; Garvie 1998: 6).

None of this warrants talk of hero cult, directly. We are dealing with a nexus of related themes: the fluctuating relationship of the hero with the gods, the hero's self-sacrifice, and shared patterns with other Sophoclean plays where the heroization of the hero is possible or probable.

But making speed as far as you can, Teucer,
hasten to look for some hollow shaft-grave
for this man, that he may there possess the
dank grave eternally remembered by mortals. (*Aj.* 1164–7)

The passage is frequently argued to reflect Ajax's cult (Blundell 1989: 93; Henrichs 1993; Garvie 1998: 230–1). The use of καθέξει, "possess" a grave (l. 1167), is not quite

probative of hero cult (Aesch. *Supp.* 25, *Ag.* 454; Henrichs 1993: 171, 173–5). The “grave eternally remembered by mortals” (l. 1167) smacks of aetiology (Henrichs 1993: 170; Cairns 2006: 118); but any aetiology discernible by the audience must be lost on the chorus (Easterling 1988: 92; Henrichs 1993: 175), and we must ask first what the chorus take themselves to be saying. Line 1166 is not a confident prediction, “*where* he *will* possess,” but a final clause, “*that* he *may there* possess” (compare l. 659). The definite article, “*the* [...] grave eternally remembered by mortals” (ll. 1166–7; cf. *OC* 1545–6) may be generalizing, if it may be taken to be a generic characteristic of graves to be “eternally remembered.” If the article is particularizing, and if Ajax’s grave at Rhoeteum in the Troad (Str. 13.1.30 595) was already well known in the fifth century, and if Ajax already received cult there, then an audience might hear allusion to that cult. But having one’s grave remembered is not the same as receiving cult (*Il.* 7.86–91; Henrichs 1993: 171–2), and the text emphasizes memorialization, not cult.

The passage *may* be understood against the backdrop of Ajax’s hero cult, but if so the text does not give that cult prominence. There may have been an “Athenianization” of Ajax, both in history and in the play (esp. ll. 859–61, 1220–2; Kowalzig 2006: 85–91; Scodel 2006: 65–7), but any tomb and cult envisaged here will be in the Troad, not Attica or Salamis (Scullion 1994: 127 n. 139; Carter 2007: 53). The passage certainly points outside of the drama, but to the *Iliad* rather than to cultic reality (l. 1165 evokes *Il.* 24.797, as ll. 485ff. evoke *Il.* 6.407ff.; Easterling 1988: 97). Iliadic intertexts do not encourage thoughts of hero cult, given that poem’s suppression of hero cult (Currie 2005: 47–57).

Child, come here and taking your stand close by
 take hold as a suppliant of the father who sired you.
 Be seated as a suppliant holding in your hands
 hairs of mine, of hers, and thirdly of yourself,
 a suppliant’s treasure. Should anyone from the army
 forcibly drag you from this dead body,
 may he be exiled from the land in as mean a way as he is mean
 himself – unburied,
 mown down from the root of his whole family,
 in just the same way as I cut this lock.
 Hold him, child, and guard him, and don’t let
 anyone move you, but fall down and hold on. (*Aj.* 1176–81)

Here is “an [...] interweaving of three separate acts” (Burian 1972: 152): supplication; cutting of hair of Teucer, Tecmessa, and Eurysaces; sympathetic magic (a *similia similibus* imprecation: cf. *Il.* 3.299–300; Meiggs–Lewis no. 5.40–51; Eidinow 2007: 150–1). Supplication (asylum) occurred at hero shrines, and the scene has been interpreted as indicating that Ajax is becoming a cult hero (Burian 1972: esp. 154; Taplin 1978: 108–9, but see 189 n. 4; Easterling 1988: 93–4; Henrichs 1993; Krummen 1998: 314). *Phulassein* can mean “cling to” in the context of asylum (*A. Eu.* 439–40; *Eur. HF* 51). But here φύλασσε (l. 1180) does not imply that Eurysaces is to cling to Ajax’s body as if to a divine statue or altar which confers protection on the suppliant as long as contact is maintained. Rather, the verb means “guard,” not “cling to”: the paradox that the suppliant Eurysaces is also protecting Ajax is crucial (Burian 1972: 154; Carter 2007: 167 n. 46; differently, Henrichs 1993: 166–7), and the violence feared in the play is primarily to Ajax’s body, secondarily to Ajax’s dependants (ll. 985–7). In a parallel scene in *OC* (see below), Ismene

says to Antigone: “guard [φύλασσε] our father here” (l. 508). The object of the imperatives “hold” and “guard,” αὐτόν (l. 1180), ought to be Ajax or his corpse (l. 1176, νεκροῦ), not Teucer’s lock (l. 1179, πλόκον) (differently, Henrichs 1993: 167 n. 7): Ajax, or his body, is plainly the object of προσπεσῶν ἔχου (“fall down and hold on,” l. 1181).

Hair can be an offering to the dead, even a means of invoking the help of the dead from beyond the grave (S. *El.* 449–51; Jebb 1896: 176; Henrichs 1993: 166). But Eurysaces holds the locks in his hands (l. 1173) rather than placing them on the dead body (cf. A. *Cho.* 7, 168; S. *El.* 52, 449–51). These locks, a “suppliant’s treasure” (l. 1175), replace the branches bound with wool employed in supplication (Eitrem 1915: 414–15; Burian 1972: 153 and n. 7). These were laid at the altar or at the foot of the person supplicated, a visible reproach to that person until the supplication was granted and the branches could be removed (Collard 1975, vol. 2: 107; Blech 1982: 291–2). The locks held by Eurysaces may serve as a reproach to the Greeks until such time as Ajax should be granted proper burial and the locks could be placed where they belong: on his tomb. This improvised (and dramaturgically effective) ritual does not unequivocally cast Ajax as a cult hero in the making.

In orchestrating this scene of supplication Teucer perhaps means to bolster, through visual symbolism, Ajax’s moral claims to burial (rather than exploiting any “supernatural power” supposedly invested in Ajax’s corpse). For a Greek now to dishonor the corpse would mean dragging Eurysaces away and doing visible violence to the ethical and religious claims for Ajax’s burial. These claims are put into words at lines 1332–57 (ironically, by Odysseus) and ultimately prevail in securing Ajax’s burial (Winnington-Ingram 1980: 66–7; Easterling 1988: 94; Griffin 1999a: 87–8 n. 49).

If the scene does not illustrate Ajax as cult hero *in statu nascendi*, it remains important that Ajax dead exercises a kind of power that Ajax alive would not have had. Alive he lacked power to defend himself or his dependants against the Greek army (ll. 254–6, 408–9, 496–9; see Taplin 1979: 125); dead he paradoxically does have that power (despite Menelaus at ll. 1067–9). Ajax himself appears to have anticipated this (ll. 691–2). But Ajax’s “power” is not a supernatural one. His death by suicide has brought about above all a shift in the balance of moral claims (Ajax no longer deserves punishment, but proper respect from the Greeks) and in relations with the gods. This may vaguely connote the posthumous power a cult hero has. In that weakened sense the scene might be said to intimate Ajax’s heroization, but very indirectly and symbolically (compare and contrast Burian 1972: 151, 155).

What perhaps most of all argues an incipient hero cult of Ajax at *Ajax* 1171–84 are the extensive points of comparison with *OC* (discussed below). It is possible to suggest that Sophocles dramatized Oedipus’ death and heroization in ways that pointedly recall his earlier dramatization of Ajax’s death and burial precisely because the heroization of the hero was an implicit theme of the earlier play as well. But it is hard to prove that Sophocles was thinking in terms of a comparison between the two plays (Henrichs 1993: 176–8; Seaford 1994a: 398) rather than a contrast (Bowra 1944: 308–9; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 58 n. 2).

3 *Trachiniae*

Heracles’ apotheosis is well attested in archaic and classical poetic tradition (*Od.* 11.602–4; Hes. *Th.* 954–5; Pi. *N.* 1.69–72; E. *Heracl.* 871–2, 910–16). He enjoyed cult throughout Attica and the Greek world (Woodford 1971; Burkert 1985: 210–11). This does not mean

that the *Trachiniae* must presuppose Heracles' apotheosis (Linforth 1952: 266; Stinton 1990: 479–90; Buxton 1995: 33; Conacher 1997: 33 n. 26). But the current consensus is that it does (Easterling 1981: 64–8; Kane 1988: 208–10; Holt 1989; Segal 1995: 53–4; Finkelberg 1996; Fowler 1999: 167 n. 14; Goward 2004: 40–4). It is hard to see why there should be such pointed reference in the play to Mt. Oeta and its pyre if the intention was to exclude thoughts of apotheosis (for the pyre and the apotheosis, see *S. Ph.* 727–9 and *E. Heraclid.* 910–16). This would make this a play with an unusually open ending (Seidensticker 1972: 259–60; Roberts 1988; Holt 1989; Halleran 1997: 155–8).

Crucial to the question what fate awaits Heracles after death is the meaning of the prophecy received by Heracles at Dodona (*Tr.* 79–81, 166–8; cf. 824–30, 1169–72). This prophecy is quoted as a disjunction: the current labor will bring him *either* death in the attempt *or* a happy life if accomplished. The prophecy is understood initially by Deianeira and Heracles to betoken happy retirement after the destruction of Oechalia. Once Heracles' death is sealed it is understood by the chorus and Heracles to have meant death *whether* he accomplishes the labor *or not* (ll. 828–30, 1173). This revised interpretation is not necessarily correct. The hindsight achieved by Heracles and the chorus within the play is only partial; an audience apprised of the tradition of Heracles' apotheosis has greater hindsight. Such an audience can interpret the oracle conjunctively rather than disjunctively: this labor will bring him *both* death *and* a happy life for the rest of time: a happy life after death (Easterling 1982: 82; Kane 1988: 209; Finkelberg 1996: 141; Fowler 1999: 163; Goward 2004: 36, 43; differently Jebb 1892: xxxv). Where the chorus and Heracles at the peak of despair may surmise that the promised “life without toil” was just death, a mythologically informed audience may refer the “happy rest of life” (ll. 81, 168) to the eternal bliss Heracles was known to enjoy on Olympus (*Ph.* 1413–14, 1418–20; cf. *Hes. Th.* 954–5 and, especially, *Pi. N.* 1.69–72). Similarly, in *Philoctetes* a prophecy receives successive re-interpretation: it first appears that only the bow is needed to sack Troy (ll. 68–9, 1055–6), subsequently that bow and Philoctetes and Neoptolemus are needed (ll. 611–13, 839–42, 1434–7; Easterling 1978: 27–8).

The view that Heracles' heroization is intimated in *Trachiniae* is encouraged by parallels with other plays. Heracles will go to Mt. Oeta, foretold as the fated place of his death, where lightning will accompany his end (*Ph.* 728; cf. *D.S.* 4.38.4), and he enjoins on Hyllus a special ceremony with restrictions on mourning (*Tr.* 1191–200; Easterling 1982: 8). Likewise, Oedipus arrives at Colonus, foretold as the fated place of his death (*OC* 84–101), lightning signals the end of his life (ll. 95, 1460–1, 1514–15, 1606), and mourning is curbed (ll. 1751–3; cf. ll. 1663, 1720–3, 1777–9). Heracles' sudden access of knowledge about his situation and his issuing of instructions to Hyllus (*Tr.* 1146ff.) resemble Oedipus' sudden knowledge and instructions to Theseus (*OC* 1518ff.; Fowler 1999b: 165). Heracles acts in the knowledge that he is fulfilling some divine purpose without that purpose becoming perspicuous; he does not doubt that he will die and will reside below the earth, and is ignorant of any translation to Olympus (*Tr.* 1172, 1201–2; Linforth 1952: 265). Here, too, there are comparisons with Oedipus in *OC* (Bowra 1944: 313, 322; see below). The heroes' own knowledge remains partial.

4 *Oedipus at Colonus*

There were cults of Oedipus, attested later than Sophocles' play, in the Attic deme of Colonus, at the Athenian Areopagus (Kearns 1989: 208–9), and at Eteonus in Boeotia

(Schachter 1986: 192). The relevance of Oedipus' hero cult to the *OC* is widely admitted (Bowra 1944: 309; Burian 1974; Calame 1998); this is the most explicit of Sophocles' plays about the heroization of its hero. But this very explicitness raises problems. If there was in general an aesthetic inhibition about alluding too explicitly to hero cult (Hutchinson 1999: 61 n. 20), what enabled it to be lifted in this case?

Oedipus at Colonus has clear links with other Sophoclean plays, most obviously *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*, but most important for the interpretation of hero cult are links with *Trachiniae* (Fowler 1999: 166–7, 167–8) and *Ajax* (Seaford 1994a: 136, 397–8; Markantonatos 2007: 200–1; Carey 2009: 122–3). Ajax and Oedipus are both Attic cult heroes, and the affinities between their plays are suggestive. Both have in the back story to their plays demonstrated superhuman excellence, in qualities of body and mind, respectively (*Aj.* 758–77, *OT* 33–9), and both boast achievements without divine assistance (*Aj.* 774–5, *OT* 396–8). Both start as *theomises*, persecuted by a deity (Athena: *Aj.* 401–3, 450–3; Apollo: *OT* 1329–30); both pray to deities for a reversal of fortune with their death (*Aj.* 823ff., *OC* 101ff.); both finally are apparently conciliated with the divine. Both seek a suitable place to die (*Aj.* 657, *OC* 1520, 1540); they perform “ablutions” (λουτρά: *Aj.* 654, 1405, *OC* 1599, 1602); and there is a propitiatory ritual to appease an angered godhead (*Aj.* 654–60, *OC* 465ff.). Prophecies mid-play assert the need for Ajax's *philoî* to confine him at home (*Aj.* 719ff. esp. 749–55) and for the Thebans to recover Oedipus (*OC* 387ff.). Enemies wish to control the burial of each, against their wishes (*Aj.* 1047ff., *OC* 399–400). In scenes of supplication, the dead Ajax is left with his son guarding him (*Aj.* 1168–84, esp. 1180), the nearly dead Oedipus (*OC* 109–10, 393) with his daughter guarding him (*OC* 495–509, esp. 508). During the supplication Teucer leaves to ready the burial (*Aj.* 1183), Ismene to perform propitiatory sacrifice (*OC* 503); speed is crucial (*Aj.* 985, 1164, *OC* 500). Burial of Ajax *tout court* is opposed, unsuccessfully, by Menelaus and then Agamemnon; burial of Oedipus at Colonus is opposed, unsuccessfully, by Creon and then Polyneices.

Extensive similarities of this kind cannot be the result of stock scenes being combined in coincidentally similar ways. There seems to be a conscious echoing of the earlier work in the later, an “intertextual” relationship between the plays. *OC* is “densely intertextual” (Edmunds 1996: 112); there is “Sophoclean self-quotation” of *Ajax* (*OC* 607–23, *Aj.* 646–9, 669–83; Easterling 1999: 101 n. 9; Seaford 1994a: 397–8; Kelly 2009: 125) and *OT* (Seidensticker 1972). An intertextual relationship between *OC* and *Ajax* is naturally explained by their having common thematic preoccupations, including the protagonist's burial with honor. Hero cult could be a point of comparison or contrast between the plays; I incline to the former view, but I see no way to prove it.

We must consider also how *OC* relates to religious realities. The play has been seen as evoking real hero cult so faithfully as to be called “a most valuable source for ancient hero cult and hero worship” (Mikalson 1991: 32), “the fullest account of the beliefs surrounding the last moments of a hero's life that has come down to us” (Garland 1985: 88). Several motifs surrounding Oedipus' death are paralleled. Theseus' shielding his eyes at the moment of Oedipus' transformation (*OC* 1648–52) suggests blinding at heroic epiphanies (Hdt. 6.117.2; Philostr. *Her.* 4.2 de Lannoy). Oedipus' end is marked by lightning (*OC* 95, 1456, 1460–1, 1462–71, 1477–85, 1502, 1514, 1606; but note 1658–9), as with other heroized dead (Rohde 1925, vol. 1: 320–2), especially Heracles on Mt. Oeta (*S. Ph.* 728, D.S. 4.38.4). Oedipus is summoned by a spontaneous divine voice (*OC* 1623–8) and subsequently disappears (ll. 1649, 1681–2); so in one version does Empedocles (Heraclid. Pont. fr. 83 Wehrli: not obviously derivative on *OC*, *pace*

Bolton 1962: 166). The disappearance of the body is itself a typical motif of heroization (Currie 2002: 41 n. 172). Sophocles appears to have drawn on a rich complex of themes of heroization for this dramatization of Oedipus' end.

OC is forthcoming on "thick" description of Oedipus' heroization (what it meant to the parties concerned), but reticent on "thin" description (the external trappings of the cult). Oedipus' corpse "drinking the blood" of his enemies (ll. 621–2) has been seen as alluding to the blood offerings made to a cult hero (Pi. *O.1.90*; Bowra 1944: 312–13; Henrichs 1983: 94 and 29), but could be just a figurative expression of hatred (Thgn. 349; Dorati 1993). The reference to Oedipus as "sober" (l. 100) has been taken as a "poetic prolepsis" of Oedipus' receiving wineless libations as a cult hero (Henrichs 1983: 95, 100). This would be in keeping with Sophocles' "proleptic characterization" of the tragic hero as a cultic hero (see above). The secrecy surrounding Oedipus' burial and cult (ll. 1522–3, 1526–32) has been argued to indicate that the cult at Colonus had no (well-known) existence at Sophocles' time outside the play (Mikalson 1991: 41; Edmunds 1996: 97–8; Griffin 1998: 52 and n. 49; Scullion 1999: 231; Scodel 2006: 73). Secrecy entails that the cult was not publicly celebrated, but not that it is a fiction: secret graves are attested in hero cults (E. fr. 370.87–9 *TrGF* 5.1; Plu. *De gen. Socr.* 578b–c; Eumelus fr. 24 West; Kearns 1989: 52; Edmunds 1996: 97; Calame 1998: 345).

If Sophocles invented Oedipus' cult at Colonus then other allusions to the cult (especially E. *Ph.* 1703–7; the oracle in the *scholion* to S. *OC* 57; and Androtion in *FGrH* 324 F62) would have to be inspired, directly or indirectly, by *OC*. Each of these assumptions is problematic individually and they are the more so in their accumulation (Kearns 1989: 209; Mastronarde 1994: 627; Edmunds 1996: 96; Markantonatos 2007: 150). It seems preferable to allow the cult a historical footing independently of Sophocles' play. Oedipus confidently predicts he will get his retribution against the Thebans at Colonus (ll. 605, 621–2, 644–6). This is an unusually specific prediction (contrast A. *Eu.* 767–71, with Sommerstein 1989: 236; and E. *Heracl.* 1032–5, with Allan 2001: 55–6) that suggests a *post eventum* prophecy in the wake of a historical Theban discomfiture at Colonus (see schol. in Aristid. *Or.* 3.188 Lenz-Behr: Dindorf 1829, vol. 3: 560.18–24; and cf. schol. in *OC* 57). That Theban defeat is not necessarily identical with any known incursions into Attica (Lardinois 1992: 324), although identifications have frequently been made (e.g. with those by the Spartan kings Kleomenes in 506 BCE and Agis in 408/7 BCE). Sophocles' text does not require us to think of a *cavalry* engagement between Athens and the Boeotians (see ll. 1524–5). The likelihood is that Sophocles' dramatization of Oedipus' heroization at Colonus draws on an existing association of Oedipus as cult hero with Colonus, much as it draws on an existing nexus of beliefs about heroization.

Turning to the "thick description" of heroization, it is striking that *OC* dramatizes what Oedipus' heroization meant from a plethora of contrasting perspectives: what it meant to the prospective hero himself, to his family, to two competing communities of worshippers, and, more obliquely, to the gods.

Most obvious is what Oedipus as cult hero will mean for the community. Oedipus is to be a "savior," "ally," one who confers "profit," "benefit," "safety," "power," "protection," "boon," "favor" (ll. 72, 92–3, 287–8, 390, 392, 401, 450, 452, 459–60, 463, 578–9, 626–7, 647, 1489, 1498, 1524, 1533). What needs emphasizing is that it is not (in the first instance, but see 462–4) for the benefits he offers that the Athenians assume the tutelage of Oedipus. Theseus and the Colonians are moved by personal sympathy for Oedipus (ll. 461–2, 556–68), moral rectitude (the duty owed a suppliant: ll. 631–7), and piety (ll. 490–2, 665, 1006–13, 1124–7). The contrast with the Thebans (Creon) is

clear: these are motivated by self-interest in blatant disregard of any personal concern for Oedipus, morality, or the gods (ll. 389–405, 450–6, 589, 652–6, 814–83, 919–23). The Athenians will indeed be benefitted by Oedipus as a cult hero, but the cult is efficacious precisely because the Athenians were not bent on securing those benefits for themselves.

The gods' interest in Oedipus' heroization is also clear. Oedipus is summoned by the gods (ll. 1626–9) in one of the most direct divine interventions in Sophocles (Parker 1999: 12; cf. D.L. 1.115, Hdt. 8.37.2, 8.84.3, E. *Ba.* 1079–80). The intimacy of the address, “you there, you there” (l. 1627; Reinhardt 1979: 223; Easterling 2006: 135; differently, Jebb 1900: 251), combined with the sympathetic first-person plural, “why do we hesitate to go?” (ll. 1627–8), suggest an Olympian willingness to admit Oedipus as “one of them,” the “Stronger Ones” (Burkert 1985: 205). The Messenger supposes (ll. 1661–2) either that Oedipus had a divine escort convey him from human sight (to Olympus, perhaps, like Heracles in vase-painting: see Beazley, *ARV*: 1186.30; differently, Bowra 1944: 341–2), or that the earth “split with goodwill” to receive him. There is no doubting that Oedipus is now *theophiles*.

It is said that heroization means little to Oedipus: “his state as a hero is important only to Athens and her enemies” (Linforth 1951: 100). The question of what it means for him depends on whether eschatological notions from the mysteries are admitted, which is doubtful, and on our interpretation of a vexed passage, lines 1583–4:

CHORUS Has the poor man perished, then?

MESSENGER Know that he has left [*λελοιπότεα*, mss] the life that is lived from moment to moment.

[OR:]

Know that he has obtained [*λελογχότεα*, conj. Mudge] the life that is forever.

The problem with the former reading is extracting the sense “has left the life that is lived from moment to moment” from the Greek. The translation is not eased by the paraphrases offered (Hermann: “the life he always led, i.e. his continually wretched life”; Burkert: “his life, whatever it was, good and bad, up and down”) or the parallels adduced (S. *Ph.* 131, E. *Med.* 670; see Kamerbeek 1984: 216; Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990a: 261; Easterling 2006: 139; Burkert 2007: 83).

The phrase τὸν αἰεὶ βίον ought to mean “the life that is forever,” alongside τὸν αἰὲν ὕπνον, “the sleep that is forever” (l. 1578) and τὸν αἰεὶ [...] σκότον, “the darkness that is forever” (l. 1701). That seems to require Mudge's emendation *λελογχότεα* (Kamerbeek 1984: 216; Dawe 1996: 80; Avezzi and Guidorizzi 2008: 176). The Messenger will now modify, not confirm, the chorus' assumption: he has not so much died as obtained eternal life, through heroization (U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1917: 366–7; Renehan 1976: 54–5; Calame 1998: 351 and n. 39; Guidorizzi 2008: 372). To this it has been objected that “eternal life for a human being was not a concept that [Sophocles] could have entertained” (Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990a: 261). But the heroized dead of mythical and historical times could, like mystic initiates, be said in the fifth century and earlier to enjoy “(eternal) life” after death (Hes. *Op.* 167–73; E. *Ba.* 1338–9; Pi. *O.* 2.29–30, *N.* 1.69–72; Orphic lamella 2.11; Graf and Johnston 2007; S. fr. 837 *TrGF* 4; Pi. *O.* 2.63; Isoc. 4.28; Renehan 1976: 54–5; Krummen 1998: 313 and n. 47). In *Trachiniae* the “happy life” (l. 81, βίον, l. 168, βίω) promised Heracles by the oracle can be understood as a happy *afterlife* (see above); similarly, perhaps, the “glorious life” (βίον) that Heracles promises Philoctetes after his toils (*Ph.* 1422; S. J. Harrison 1989: 174). More awkward is whether the Messenger is the appropriate person to declare that

Oedipus has obtained immortal life (Easterling 2006: 139–40), and his declaration makes little impression on the chorus, who ask blithely: “How [did he die]? By a god-sent and painless chance, poor soul?” (l. 1585; Burkert 2007: 83). It must also be considered whether Oedipus’ coming into “eternal life” would be compatible with “tragic effect” (see below).

“The life that is forever” could be understood in a weaker sense, without direct eschatological implications, as a simple euphemism for death (*S. Ant.* 74–6; *E. Med.* 1039; Mastrorarde 2002: 336). But even so eschatological ideas might still be admitted, more indirectly. We would have three metaphors for Oedipus’ death: “the sleep that is forever” (l. 1578), “the life that is forever” (l. 1584), “the darkness that is forever” (l. 1701). The interplay between these may occasion the audience, if not the characters, to reflect on Oedipus’ actual condition (for Oedipus’ corpse as “sleeping,” cf. l. 621; sleep and the heroized dead: Gow and Page 1965: 196; Albinus 2000: 92–3).

There is no reference to Oedipus having anything other than power from beyond the grave to help his Athenian friends and harm his Theban enemies. “There is some comfort, some mysterious recompense, but it does not seem to lie in any hope of an afterlife” (Hester 1977: 23; Linforth 1951: 99–101; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 255; Mikalson 1991: 39–40; Kelly 2009: 75, 82). But the text leaves us guessing whether he has gone up to heaven in a kind of Olympian apotheosis or below in a chthonian heroization (Calame 1998: 345). The Messenger describes Theseus “prostrating himself simultaneously to the earth and to the Olympus of the gods” (ll. 1654–5). He speculates: “either some escort from the gods or the darksome fundament of the earth, realm of the nether powers, splitting with goodwill [made away with Oedipus]” (ll. 1661–2). There are numerous references to Oedipus being below the earth (ll. 621–2, 1701, 1706–8, 1726, 1775), but none of these, not even the first (made by Oedipus himself), clinches his posthumous location. “Of the manner of his passing and the nature of his after-life [Oedipus] seems to know next to nothing” (Bowra 1944: 313). In *Trachiniae* Heracles likewise speaks of being below the earth (ll. 1201–2) and of dying (ll. 1143–6, 1172–3, 1222, 1256), but we should not infer that *Trachiniae* excludes apotheosis for Heracles. In Euripides’ *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, Iphigeneia is said (by the same speaker!) to have “flown to the gods” (l. 1608) and “disappeared into the earth” (l. 1583). Contradictions in imaginings of the afterlife are frequent. A dual posthumous existence is made explicit with the statements that Heracles’ *eidolon* resides in Hades, he himself in Olympus (*Od.* 11.601–4), or that the aether received the souls, the earth the bodies of Athenians who fell in battle (*CEG* i.10.(iii).5–6). A kind of duality is perhaps suggested by *OC* 787–8: an ἀλάστωρ, “avenging spirit,” of Oedipus will reside in Thebes, the hero himself in Colonus (Guidorizzi 2008: 304–5). A third hypostasis of Oedipus among the Olympians is perhaps not unthinkable. The text of *OC*, like *Trachiniae*, keeps us guessing. It neither excludes a blessed afterlife for Oedipus nor does more than the minimum necessary to include that possibility.

Finally, the critical problem of how heroization (or apotheosis) may be compatible with “tragic effect.” This is sometimes treated as equivalent to the question whether pessimism, agnosticism, or optimism should preponderate in our response to Oedipus’ death. P. E. Easterling writes:

the end is understood by all the characters in the play as death, not as apotheosis or some kind of “mystic” salvation [...] [T]his reading [...] is liable to point to a more “transfiguring” end for Oedipus than seems warranted by the action of the play [...] Oedipus’ passing may

indeed have been marked by special divine favour, but he continues to be a tragic figure [...] The play would cease to be a tragedy if we knew anything certain about what ultimately happened to Oedipus, just as it would if he became superhuman before our eyes, as critics used to suggest that he did. (Easterling 2006: 138, 140; cf. Buxton 1995: 30)

Similar problems arise in *Ajax* and *Trachiniae*. R. L. Fowler's comments on *Trachiniae* may be set alongside Easterling's:

An argument advanced from time to time is that any hint of Heracles' coming immortality ruins the tragic effect. The difficulty with this argument is that it presumes to tell Sophocles what the "tragic effect" should be [...] [I]t is probably wrong altogether to think of death and transfiguration as alternative readings of the scene. Rather, knowledge of the coming transformation is exactly what puts the scene in perspective. It raises disturbing questions and emotions in the audience as they watch Heracles' agony [...] Is this the price to be paid for heroization? (Fowler 1999: 173–4)

Clearly heroization *simpliciter* of the tragic hero is compatible with tragic effect, given the frequency of its occurrence in tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides; the question is which conceptions of heroization are compatible with tragic effect. The lost *Hippolytus Veiled* of Euripides apparently ended with a very "transfiguring" conception of Hippolytus as cult hero, stressing the benefits for the hero himself (fr. 446, *TrGF* 5.1). In general, however, the implied cost–benefit analysis of heroization in tragedy is more ambivalent and uncertain. If heroization or apotheosis are seen as a transition from one state to another, then they can still be seen as traumatic even when the new state is objectively desirable (compare the transition from *parthenos* to *gune*). There may be nagging doubts about personal identity or continuity of existence. Callimachus' *Lock of Berenice*, a decidedly non-tragic poem, makes the point: Berenice's severed lock experiences its apotheosis–catasterism as traumatic and laments its severance from its past (Call. fr. 110 Pfeiffer [= Cat. 66], ll. 69–78). This kind of ambivalent conception of heroization, translated to the appropriate register, can be relevant to tragedy. If it is true that in real life fifth-century Greeks "could take an active interest in their own posthumous heroization" and that "heroization [...] appears as a culmination of designs that were already in evidence in [their] lifetime" (Currie 2005: 7), then it is notable that the interest and designs that are fulfilled in heroization in Sophoclean tragedy are seldom those of the tragic hero, as opposed to the gods. "There is no hint that Oedipus regards the heroic state as something desirable in itself, or that he looks forward to the conscious enjoyment of worship and power" (Linforth 1951: 99). This was not inevitably the case, even in tragedy: Aeschylus' Amphiaraus could say presciently of his own hero cult, "I anticipate an end not without honor" (*Th.* 589).

Heroization can be conceived as a mixed blessing for the person concerned, or not (explicitly) perceived by them as a blessing at all; such conceptions are congenial to tragedy. More than that: it can be experienced as outright catastrophe by the family. Antigone and Ismene experience Oedipus' passing as unmitigated loss, his heroic transformation being harder for them to bear than a natural death (*OC* 1713–14, 1724–32, 1754–8). This is plainly a tragic perspective: in real life it was natural to emphasize the palpable benefits that accrued to the family of a heroized person (Currie 2005: 5 and n. 18, 154 and n. 197). A familial perspective of alienation and loss pervades the Sophoclean plays dealing with heroization: Antigone and Ismene in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Deianeira and Hyllus in *Trachiniae* (Fowler 1999: 164–5), Tecmessa and Eurysaces in *Ajax*.

If heroization brings the hero and the community or the hero and the gods closer, it creates distance, a gulf in understanding and experience, between the hero and his family, and hence arguably between the hero and ourselves, the audience (Fowler 1999: 164–5). Theseus' prohibition of mourning for Oedipus (*OC* 1751–3; compare the chorus at ll. 1720–3, 1777–9; the Messenger at ll. 1663–4) evokes civic prohibitions of mourning for the heroized dead as inappropriate for those who have been gloriously transfigured (Parker 1983: 42–3 and n. 42; compare and contrast Seaford 1994a: 139 n. 152). But it is crucial to the effect that *OC* nevertheless gives 80 lines of airtime to familial grief in a *kommos* (*OC* 1670–750). A revealing contrast is provided by the *epitaphios*, a contemporary public Athenian genre that treated of the heroized war dead according to its own requirements, and airbrushed familial grief out (Loraux 1986: 44–5; Fowler 1999: 172 n. 24). The polyphony characteristic of tragedy can thus still be heard even where heroization is at issue; the various tragic “further voices” (to borrow from Lyne 1987) need not be drowned out in the gush of the hero's transformation (contrast Bowra 1944: 345–6). Sophocles' refusal to reveal unambiguously what was the posthumous fate of his heroes meant that the same uncertainties that affected fifth-century Athenians' thinking about life after death in real life (Mikalson 1983: 74; Rudhardt 1992: 122) were at liberty to infect their response to the plays too. Such uncertainties *could* have been removed by an epilogue-speech delivered by a deity (as *E. Hel.* 1666–9), but that route is not taken in extant Sophocles (the end of *Philoctetes*, which declares clearly the posthumous fate only of Heracles, not Philoctetes, is only a partial exception).

The plays are not like medieval saints' plays (Jebb 1896: xxxii) in the sense that the overriding theme is the hero's heroization (Bowra 1944: 307–8) or that the play's issues find a tidy *dénouement* in the hero's heroization. Heroization typically leaves a moral and emotional residue; ethical and theological issues remain unresolved, anger remains problematically unappeased: Ajax's toward Odysseus, Heracles' toward Deianeira, Oedipus' toward Polyneices (Winnington-Ingram 1980: 258, 277–8, 326). To accord prominence to heroization in one's interpretation of the plays does not commit one to seeing at the heart of the drama either a harmonious accommodation between the hero and the gods, the hero and the world (Bowra 1944: 355, critiqued by Winnington-Ingram 1980: 254–5; Buxton 1995: 30) or a complete conversion of the hero to “something useful and socially beneficial” (Kelly 2009: 84). Elements of harmony there are, but there is also a messy remainder that we should not seek to eliminate.

It was a strategic decision by Sophocles to include hero cult in his heroic biographies. Homer's *Iliad*, tragedy *avant la lettre* (Rutherford 1982) and furnishing in Achilles a crucial model for Sophocles' conception of heroic character (Knox 1964: 50–2; Rutherford 1982: 146), expelled hero cult from its heroic biographies to intensify the “tragic effect” of its heroes' mortality (Griffin 1977: 42–3; Schein 1984: 48). Sophocles' older contemporary Pindar, on the other hand, regularly included hero cult in heroic biographies (*O.* 1.90–6, *O.* 7.77–80, *N.* 1.69–72, *I.* 4.65–6, *N.* 7.34–47); but he was not aiming at any such tragic effect. Sophocles rose more to the challenge of incorporating hero cult within a tragic vision of a hero's life than Aeschylus or Euripides, in whose plays hero cult, where it occurs, is a much less organic part of the hero's life.

A final qualification concerns gender. The Sophoclean heroines Antigone and Electra, no less than the heroes Ajax, Oedipus (in two plays), Heracles, and Philoctetes, conform to the consistent Sophoclean pattern of heroic character portrayal (Knox 1964: 9–27); but *Antigone* and *Electra*, alone of the surviving plays, contain no intimation of the heroization of the hero(ine). The profile of cult heroines (Larson 1995; Lyons 1997) is

different from that of cult heroes, and perhaps neither Antigone nor Electra were in fact figures of cult. It would be easy to conclude that hero cult in Sophocles was a distinctively male phenomenon. But it is impossible to say how representative the extant plays are: we can do no more than guess whether cults of the title heroines figured, and how they may have been presented, in the lost *Erigone*, *Iphigenia*, *Creusa*, *Niobe*, *Procris*, and *Phaedra*.

Guide to Further Reading

Hero cult is studied in individual plays by Burian (1972), Burian (1974), Edmunds (1981), Holt (1989), Henrichs (1993), Calame (1998), Krummen (1998: *Ajax*), Fowler (1999: *Trachiniae*), Easterling (2006: *OC*). On hero cults in tragedy, see Mikalson (1991), Seaford (1994a), Kowalzig (2006); on hero cults in Attica, Kearns (1989); on heroization in the fifth century, Currie (2005).

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PART V

Gender and Sexuality

Cutting to the Bone: Recalcitrant Bodies in Sophocles

Nancy Worman

1 Introduction

In her famously piquant reading of Sophocles' *Electra*, which dominates the first half of "On Not Knowing Greek," Virginia Woolf emphasizes the physical substance of the characters on stage, their feet and robes, the sunlight striking their faces. Conflating the text's mimesis with the moment of performance, she imagines the open-air theater, the breezes lifting the actors' clothes and the shadows crossing their faces, as well as the active bodies of the audience members, with their open eyes and ears and cramping muscles. She conjoins this visceral embodiment with the force of Sophocles' words, which, she says, "would cut each stroke to the bone, would stamp each fingerprint in marble" (Woolf 1953: 25).

While Woolf is relatively sanguine about the extent to which Sophocles' characters are full-blown, weighty representatives of their ancient setting, she makes no claims about his attitudes toward women or gender roles more generally. This has been the work of the last four decades or so, a period that has witnessed scholarship on the powerful female characters of tragedy that runs the gamut from overtly feminist readings (e.g. Pomeroy 1975; also Rabinowitz 1993) to more nuanced interpretations of tragedy's gender dynamics (e.g. Zeitlin 1996a; Griffith 2001). Other earlier studies emphasized usefully the gap between reality and representation, cautioning against reading tragedy as a portrayal of ancient Greek women per se (e.g. Foley 1981a; Wiersma 1984).

Tragedy, for all its politically and socially charged representations of female figures, does not center on female characters in any straightforward sense (see Griffith 2001). Rather, tragic drama stages pointedly gendered counterpoint perspectives (or, more precisely, subject positions) as dialogic and existential crises, crises in which the breakdown of language both follows on and precipitates a breakdown in social order. What we can say, on the other hand, is that it is more than incidental when tragedy, and perhaps particularly Sophoclean tragedy, highlights characters in relation to a feature that is

deeply theatrical and that Woolf, for one, presses upon: their bodies. While dramatic character may be essentially a constellation of attributes rather than an actual, lived personality (Goldhill 1990) – and, insofar as this is the case, “female” may be merely one of these attributes – “manly” or feminized bodies on the tragic stage do not only happen to be so. Rather, Greek tragedy, somewhat like Homeric epic and Attic comedy but to a different extent and for a different purpose, often foregrounds visible, public bodies as masculine; but when these are vulnerable and/or weightily in stasis they may be marked in certain regards as feminine (Ormand 1999: 58–9, 147–52; Ormand 2003; also, if unpersuasively, Cawthorn 2008).

Feminist theorists such as Julia Kristeva (1984: 25–35), Luce Irigaray (1985: 243–344), and Judith Butler (1993: 31–55) have maintained that, from antiquity on, writers have conceived of the very notion of embodiment as feminine, which for these theorists also guarantees the misrepresentation and erasure of “the feminine” as such. Although they tend to attribute such deformations primarily to Plato and Aristotle, this gendered physicality is clearly indicated by early Greek cosmogonies (Zeitlin 1996a: ch. 2). Zeitlin and others have highlighted the ways in which ancient dramas associate the body with feminine traits, especially when it is threatened or weakened (Zeitlin 1996b; also Loraux 1981; Wohl 1998; Holmes 2010: 260–4). Both Froma Zeitlin and Nicole Loraux have also detailed the ways in which tragedy resolves the body, and perhaps above all the female body, into its parts through violence (Loraux 1987; Zeitlin 1991, 1996a).

Despite the remarkable insights into ancient gender dynamics that such readings represent, I would urge a greater recognition of the extent to which Sophocles treats tragic embodiment as a cipher of recalcitrance, the gender inflections of which are deeply ambiguous, but perhaps more strongly registered as male than female. Scholars have offered productive readings of how gender operates in Sophocles’ plays in regard to certain themes and imagery, as well as social roles and dynamics; but, when it comes to his theatrical demarcation of bodies, other distinctions are more prominent. Most tellingly, the resistant, sullied body in Sophocles is usually a function more of abjection than of associations with the feminine, and male characters are more susceptible to this eerie state than female.

In addition, when female characters are emphatically embodied – noisily, inconveniently present, like Electra, or stubbornly itinerant, like Antigone – they occupy roles similar to those of male Sophoclean heroes, and not just in relation to their elevated agency (see Foley 2001: chs. III.2 and III.3). Theatrical bodies may be extremely varied in their impact and bodies in tragedy may often be threatened or dead, but Sophocles’ loudly contrary heroes, who mostly impede more “practical,” community-sanctioned action, embody enigmatic center points. They anchor the dramatic action in modes that are neither wholly male nor wholly female; they are unreadable and intractable, slumped in isolation or stalking outside of the community and of communal norms – including those that aim to enforce clearly defined gender roles.

In saying this I am not so much making a claim about the state of gender politics in fifth-century Athens as highlighting (along with Woolf) the peculiarly concrete performative aspects of tragedy (see Griffith 2001 and Ormand 2003; also Seale 1982). This medium, unlike epic and to a different effect from that of comedy, utilizes a cast of male actors to stage heroic and predominantly high-status bodies (male or female, young or old) in radically compromised positions. As Mark Griffith has emphasized, the very fact that Athenian tragedy involved female impersonation calls attention to the extent to

which these dramatic characters are performative. That is, they are *played as* queen, warrior, and so on, by Athenian men well trained in physical practices (including, for instance, choral and athletic rituals) to occupy roles that are demarcated by socially distinct behaviors, deportments, and verbal modes. These project a composite figure that may – or, as is more often the case on the tragic stage, may not – conform to conventional expectations (Griffith 2001: 118–22; see also Butler 1990, 1993).

In Sophocles' dramas in particular, the heroic bodies that occupy center stage either disrupt clear gender demarcations or look elsewhere (e.g. to non-human comparisons) to delimit their statuses and statures, while diegetic representation of the more conventionally female characters calls attention to bodily features only in death (e.g. *OT* 1243, 1260–4, *Tr.* 923–31; on Deianira's invisibility, see Wohl 1998: 52–6). The heroes (including Electra and Antigone) are physically distinctive but difficult to place, and only rarely (as with Antigone and, belatedly, with Heracles) is this inscrutability articulated in gendered terms. If we dispense with vague notions of what might be deemed, for instance, “deeply feminine” (see Segal 1966: 539, on Electra; cf. Foley 2001: 159–60) and recognize that to isolate bodies among theatrical elements would also require taking account of proxemics and voice, then what remains for us, in semiotic terms, is spaces (e.g. margins vs. center stage/city, or inside the *skene* (palace, tent, cave, or grove) vs. outside or on the margins), labels (rigid vs. flexible, isolated vs. connective, masculine vs. feminine), and modes (keening or screaming, immobilized or roaming). Emphasizing theater semiotics and social “performativity” should help to render conventional distinctions based on gender, class, and so on at least more obviously artificial. If one considers the extent to which tragedy is rooted in this performative male ritual, Sophocles' tendency to demarcate noble but debased bodies primarily as harsh and “raw,” only sometimes underscoring them as male or female, may seem less surprising.

Thus, in most if not all of Sophocles' plays a savage, resistant, and/or inscrutable hero comes to furnish the play's dramatic center point as an insurmountable entity that defies conventional discriminations. The implacably loud presence of Electra, who almost never leaves the stage in Sophocles' play, and also the staunchly defiant body of Antigone, which initially roams where it ought not and then must be controlled by a tomb, constitute versions of theatrical embodiment in very stubborn forms. This appears to be a necessary characteristic of Sophocles' heroic bodies. Think of Ajax's entrapped, immobile position before, or just within, the central *skene* door and his later isolated stalking of death at the margins, or the wounded Philoctetes, marooned center stage in conversation with the lonely hills, also the perforated Heracles on his funeral byre, the debilitated Oedipus on his rock in the grove at Colonus (see Edmunds 1996; Worman 2001).

Such examples would seem to indicate that, at least in Sophocles' dramas, heroic stature itself effects this terrible stasis and vulnerability. Again, scholars have demonstrated the extent to which Greek literature depicts wounded or otherwise compromised bodies as being in some way feminized (see Hom. *Il.* 4.141–7, 11.267–72), even when what compromises bodily integrity is its owner's own incontinence (e.g. at Ar. *Nu.* 961–1104 or *Th.* 52–200; see Worman 2008: 96–110). But the bodies foregrounded as such on the Sophoclean stage are usually heroic and male. And, while some of these bodies in extremis may be inflected in passing as feminine, they are so to a more limited extent than in Euripides' plays. Such limited demarcations also largely lack the sexual tensions of Aeschylus' gendering of theatrical bodies, which are frequently brutal in their implications (see e.g. Orestes' entangled relations with Clytemnestra in *Libation Bearers*). That said, female characters often have to do with bodies, usually in their traditional roles as mourners

(Zeitlin 1996a: 352; cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1989; Foley 2001: 179–80). And indeed Sophocles' extant plays do offer up plenty of dying and dead bodies for the tending. But when female characters come themselves to occupy the hero's role, they share features, in dramatic terms, with the central, implacable tragic body of the outcast male.

Electra (and secondarily Antigone), on the one hand, and Philoctetes (and secondarily Ajax), on the other, chart an array of features that include noisy, stubbornly present bodies as well as bodies that are vulnerable and immobilized. I thus focus primarily on *Electra* and *Philoctetes*, with *Antigone* and *Ajax* as their most adjacent counterparts. Of all Sophoclean female characters, Electra has the most enduring presence on stage; she shares this feature with Philoctetes, who, like her, also keens and carries on excessively. While they are physically distinct, they bring together crucial features of the recalcitrant embodiment that I am emphasizing as peculiarly Sophoclean. It is a visceral affair, as Woolf sensed; and the tactile effects of its presence do indeed cut right to the bone.

2 Refusing to Move or Shut Up: Electra, Philoctetes

Unlike *Antigone* and *Ajax*, the plays that feature Electra and Philoctetes belong to the later period of Sophocles' dramatic career. *Electra* was most likely produced around 415 BCE, while *Philoctetes*, one of the dramatist's last plays, was produced in 409 BCE. Scholars have noted that the later plays tend to center emphatically around a very present protagonist, a strategy that these dramas share with another late play, *Oedipus at Colonus*. Electra is on stage for almost the entire action; Philoctetes is not quite so steadily present, but once he arrives on stage he is largely there to stay – and, like Electra, noisily so. On the other hand, Philoctetes and Ajax, the protagonist of a much earlier play (stylistic features suggest that the *Ajax* should be dated, like the *Antigone*, to the 440s BCE), share what scholars of theater semiotics term “dramatic proxemics” – that is, blocking or “nearness” demarcations (Elam 1980; Issacharoff 1989). Both take up a fixed position at center stage for much of the early action, serving as unmovable and profoundly resistant counterpoints to the plots that Odysseus, the dissembling, mobile henchman of kings, has a central hand in orchestrating (see Worman 2000, 2001).

Electra

Sophocles' version of the Electra story, which may be chronologically the last of the three extant plays featuring the avenging of Agamemnon's murder, portrays a character in ceaseless mourning for her dead father and absent brother. She is loud and insulting, especially to her mother, the craven and defensive Clytemnestra, and dismissive of her sister Chrysothemis, who is far more timid in her convictions. Orestes and his Tutor lurk in the background of the first half of the play, coming on stage midway through, to trick Electra and the other family members into thinking him dead, killed violently in a chariot-racing accident. Electra mourns him pitifully and he finally reveals himself to her, at which point they plot to kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. The drama ends with the fulfillment of this revenge.

In a distinct departure from Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* and Euripides' *Electra*, in Sophocles' play Electra enters directly after the prologue (l. 86) and remains on stage for the rest of the play, minus a brief choral interlude of 13 lines (1384–97). Her keening precedes her, and Orestes, unrevealed as yet to his mournful sibling, exclaims to his

servant: “Is this indeed the wretched Electra? Shall we stay and listen to her lamentations?” (ἄρ’ ἔστιν ἡ δύστηνος Ἡλέκτρα; θέλεις/μείνωμεν αὐτοῦ κάπακούσωμεν γόων; ll. 80–1). While male relatives of the dead may have supervised traditional lamentation (Sourvinou-Inwood 1989; Foley 2001: 178–80), Orestes turns his back on his mourning sibling. She emerges alone and, in an unusual gesture that secures her prominence in the framing of the action, she sings a *kommos* in concert with the chorus, so that the next two hundred lines are consumed with her lamentations. Her extended dirge centers on the act of mourning itself (“lamenting many lamentations,” l. 88; see also ll. 94, 104) and on her own body’s existential adjacency to the corpse she mourns: she remarks on her breast, blood-scored in her violent vigils for her father’s death (l. 90), on the “moldering” tears (δάκρυσι μυδαλέα, l. 166) that run down her wretched virgin’s body, and on the “unseemly dress” (ἄεικεῖ [...] στολᾶ, l. 191) that covers it. She cries out repeatedly that she will never cease her lamentation (ll. 104, 231), comparing herself to a nightingale bereft of (or destroying) its young:

ἀλλ’ οὐ μὲν δὴ
 λήξω θρήνων συγγερῶν τε γόων
 ἔστ’ ἂν παμφεγγεῖς ἄστρων
 ῥίπας, λεύσσω δὲ τόδ’ ἡμαρ,
 μὴ οὐ τεκνολέτειρ’ ὥς τις ἀηδῶν
 ἐπὶ κωκυτῷ τῶνδε πατρῶων
 πρὸ θυρῶν ἤχῳ πᾶσι προφωνεῖν.

But now never
 shall I cease from mourning and hateful groans,
 in the stars’ bright glitterings
 and when I look upon the day,
 nor like some young-deprived nightingale,
 in distress before these paternal doors
 from crying out like an echo to all. (*S. El.* 103–9)

Electra’s weighty detailing of her corpse-like physical state, in combination with the image of this bereaved nightingale, delimits her disposition and unhappy lot, tracing an ominous emotional shape. Since the nightingale is the paradigmatic figure of mourning in tragedy, Electra’s citing of it is hardly revealing. In fact, when she marks her lament as “what the nightingale sings,” she thereby identifies her act with the birdsong that, in tragedy, functions as the central metonym for grieving communication between the human and the divine (Chandler 1935; Loraux 1991; Suksi 2001). But then, what kind of “nightingale” is Electra? A ragged, harsh-voiced one, it seems, stubbornly public in her grieving, violently pitched at the humans who oppress her. She describes her own sound as “wings of sharp-toned laments” (πτέρυγας ὄξυτόνων γόων, ll. 242–3; cf. l. 1077). She often seems just on the verge of madness, close to the Erinyes; the nightingale simile leads directly to an invocation of Hades, Persephone, Ara (Curse), and the Erinyes (ll. 110–12).

She is, then, a singularly raucous bird, one rejecting all conventional “feminine” restraint and marked by a physical proximity to death. The episodes reveal that, like Antigone, Electra is brutally dismissive of her sister’s more cautious responses to familial disintegration. While she acknowledges to the chorus and to her mother that she understands well that her behavior is unseemly (*El.* 617–18; cf. ll. 254–7), she sustains a

noisy, open-air display of resistance. Thus, Electra may deem herself a nightingale, but her mother repeatedly accuses her of a different mode: loud slander (ll. 641, 798, 802–3). Like Philoctetes, her harsh voice and her resistant, debased body are effectively all she has, and she deploys them with a perseverance that some of her fellow players find tedious in the extreme. Her unwavering fury at her mother's domestic tyranny (ll. 597–8) and at her sister Chrysothemis' self-serving conventionality stands in ambiguous contrast to the mournful faith she keeps with her absent male relatives, shaping a heroic stance not quite cut in the traditional mold.

Unlike Antigone, Electra does not confront male characters in public or proceed in one day to defy them, to announce that she has done so, and to march off to her death. By the time the drama begins, Electra has brooded for a long time on her sad fate; she spends much of her time noisily refusing consolation from the chorus and reviling her female relatives; and she appears to hand over authority to Orestes once he reveals himself to her (Kitzinger 1991; contrast Nooter 2011, forthcoming). Where Antigone may function for some readers as a representative of “transhistorical feminism,” Electra would seem to be a much more conventional type. But, even though Sophocles does not inflect the role of Electra with the strongly gendered language that surrounds Antigone, Chrysothemis finds it necessary to remind her sister that she was born a woman (l. 997), just as Ismene reminds Antigone (*Ant.* 61–2). Chrysothemis also informs Electra that her defiant vocalizing has led Clytemnestra and Aegisthus to threaten imprisonment in a dungeon (*El.* 382), a warning that recalls Antigone's fate. In fact, Electra has an “Ares” within, as Orestes remarks later with some apprehension (l. 1243). He does not even know how right he is: before his arrival she had planned to murder Aegisthus (if not her mother) herself (ll. 954–7, 1019–20; see King's chapter in this volume). Nor will she be silenced, even when Orestes repeatedly tries to quell her cries of joy and vaunting (ll. 1238, 1259, 1288–92, 1322, 1372).

Readers of the play have found Electra's moral profile brutal, even repugnant, particularly at the moment of murder, when she screams out her bloody encouragement and effectively drives the sword home. Others have worried over the play's morality as a whole, regarding Electra as either a victim or brave motivator of its harsh mandate (see Foley 2001: 146–7, with bibliography). Woolf, in contrast, regards Electra's ruthlessness as being in keeping with figures that starkly embody values such as heroism and fidelity, so that their characters are shaped by a purity of emotion aroused in the violence of betrayal and death. She quotes the second half of line 1415 – “Strike, if you have the strength, a second time” (παῖσον, εἰ σθένεις διπλῆν) – deeming Electra's “words in crisis” as “bare” and as having the “power to cut and wound and excite” (1953: 26). The moment is indeed a brutal one, but it conforms to the loud, blunt urgency that has marked her character up to this moment. In addition, insofar as Electra serves as the dramatic focal point, the visible on-stage counterpart to Orestes' off-stage act, her harsh vocalizing supports the sense that her role is ambiguous in relation to traditional categories.

While we may, in our postmodern moment, question the assumption that Electra's character can be so simply couched in terms such as a faithful and therefore ruthless daughter, Woolf's sensitivity to the visceral directness of Sophocles' depiction captures something essential about Electra and heroes like her. They seem “shamelessly” to forgo conventional adherence to socially determined roles. Indeed, early on in the play Clytemnestra calls attention to the indecency of Electra's public bruiting (ll. 518, 522, 612–15, 622); and Electra, for her part, merely offers her mother more labels for her own offensive vocality (“either babbling or full of shamelessness,” εἴτε στόμαργον εἴτ'

ἀναιδείας πλέαν, l. 607). She depicts her behavior as “unsuited to herself” (κοῦκ ἔμοι προσεϊκότα, l. 618), claiming that her mother’s actions call out for such noisy objections (ll. 624–5). She is, to paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir, as force of circumstance would have her.

Like the apoplectic Philoctetes (*Ph.* 731), the “naked” Ajax (*Aj.* 464), and the cadaver-fixed Antigone (*Ant.* 74), Electra, in her raucous, anguished, perverse physicality, occupies a realm close to death. Akin to the glorious corpses they mourn or are about to become, their bodies register ambiguously, suspended between one role and another. Electra, as she addresses the urn that she supposes to hold her brother’s ashes, puts it thus: “Our father is gone; I am dead because of you; you yourself are dead and gone” (οἷχεται πατήρ-/τέθνηκ’ ἐγὼ σοί· φροῦδος αὐτὸς εἶ θανών·, ll. 1151–2). She even wishes to entomb herself with these ashes, “this [female] nothing with that nothing” (τὴν μηδὲν ἐς τὸ μηδὲν, ll. 1165–7). Antigone articulates this adjacence more provocatively: “I shall lie with [Polyneices], [female] loved one with [male], criminally fulfilling sacred rites” (φίλη μετ’ αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα/ῶσια πανουργήσασ’, ll. 73–4). Rather than identifying with conventional female or male roles, these characters identify with corpses, with the dead male bodies – bodies that they yearn both to tend, and to join.

Philoctetes

The drama that features the most physically repulsive Sophoclean hero takes place on the island of Lemnos, to which Philoctetes has been exiled because of a bite from the nymph Chryse’s guardian serpent, which has rendered him apparently useless to the Greek army at Troy. Neoptolemus, supervised by a devious, stage-managing Odysseus, plots to seize the famous bow of Philoctetes, a gift from the deified Heracles, which, it has been prophesied, will help the Greek army win the war. Neoptolemus eventually regrets his role in Odysseus’ plot and reveals it to Philoctetes, at which point the bitter hero retreats into extended lamentation. Only the appearance of Heracles as a *deus ex machina* changes his mind and convinces him to return with the army to Troy.

The suppurating foot that has rendered Philoctetes an outcast functions as a much more extreme index of heroic debility than the debasement to which Electra draws attention in her lamentations. She may envision herself as nearly a corpse, in close existential proximity to those she mourns, but the body (and especially the foot) of Philoctetes really is an abject entity, a thing “dripping with a ravaging disease” (νόσῳ καταστάζοντα διαβόρῳ πόδα, l. 7), so revolting that Odysseus credits it with Philoctetes’ abandonment on the deserted island. The wound is painful enough to make him cry out repeatedly; he disrupted the army camp in this way (l. 11), and the language of the drama itself reflects this “infection” (Worman 2000).

Early on in the play Philoctetes’ isolation is delimited in a manner that effectively maps his verbal type onto far-flung topographies (see also Easterling 1977: 127–8; Schein 2003: 110–12). Neoptolemus offers the chorus a look at the “borderland space” (τόπον ἔσχατιᾶς, l. 144) in which the outcast dwells, referring to him as a “fearsome traveler” (δεινὸς ὁδίτης, l. 147). The chorus envisions him crying out in the wilderness, without answer to his call except the “open-mouthed echo” (ἄ δ’ ἀθυρόστομος/ἄχώ), which resounds his bitter lamentations (πικρᾶς/οἰμωγᾶς, ll. 182–90). Somewhat like Electra’s shameless vocalizing but to more pitiful effect, Philoctetes has increasing difficulty holding on to calm interchanges with Neoptolemus and the chorus. From the outset he tends toward the exclamatory (see ll. 219, 234, 242, 254, etc.); and the ways in which the

chorus tries to situate him reflect an anomalous verbal profile. As he approaches his cave he can be heard groaning heavily from afar (ll. 208–9); the chorus of sailors tries to place him, remarking that his calls are not those of one piping a song like a country shepherd (in other words not an identifiable rustic mode, ll. 213–14). Rather, he sounds more like a victim of shipwreck who “cries out something fearsome” (προβοᾷ γὰρ τι δεινόν, l. 218).

As the action progresses, Philoctetes – ragged, exclamatory outcast though he may be – does at first forge a bond with Neoptolemus in his false guise as friend and helping hand. The hero then suffers an apoplectic fit when the flux of pain takes over, which further impedes his ability to communicate normally (ll. 730–826). His interchanges with Neoptolemus become increasingly punctuated by non-verbal howls and screams (ἄ ἄ ἄ ἄ, ll. 732, 739; παππαπαππαπαῖ, ll. 754, 785–6; ἄταταῖ, l. 790); we can compare here the perforated body of Heracles at the end of the *Trachiniae* (ll. 986, 1084). The chorus regards Philoctetes’ isolated endurance with wonder, remarking on how he “kept hold on a life so full of tears” (ll. 690–1), which it likens to that of a beast or a child (ll. 698, 703). In his sympathizing distress, Neoptolemus calls attention to the visible marks of Philoctetes’ condition, as the latter lies collapsed in an exhausted sleep at the end of the scene. He points out the drooping of the hero’s head (l. 822) and the leakage at his foot’s tip, highlighting its bloody eruption (“a black, blood-filled vein has burst at the tip of his foot,” μέλαινά τ’ ἄκρου τις παρέρρωγεν ποδός/αίμορραγῆς φλέψ, ll. 824–5; cf. ll. 783–4).

The hero’s physical volatility is compounded when the young man regrets his deceptive, Odyssean ways and reveals the plot to the anguished hero. Philoctetes then reverts to a mode that clearly resembles the “borderlands” voice the chorus identified at the outset, apostrophizing the features that form his rustic setting and casting himself as non-human. He deems himself “a corpse, or a shadow of smoke, a mere phantom” (νεκρόν, ἢ καπνοῦ σκιάν,/εἶδωλον ἄλλως, ll. 946–7), “nothing” (οὐδέν, l. 951; cf. l. 1217), “naked” (lit. “bald,” ψιλός, l. 953), and food for the beasts he once hunted (ll. 957–8).

Philoctetes’ body, then, is one deeply unheroic in the traditional Homeric sense. Pustulating, twitching, emitting groans and screams, covered in rags, it is much closer to being a “nothing” in relation to heroic stature and status than most theatrical bodies. Moreover, as an entity that is marked repeatedly as abject, most notably by the hero himself, it is indeed what Julia Kristeva termed “what [one] permanently thrust[s] aside in order to live” (Kristeva 1982: 3; see also Worman 2000: 13–15). For all its associations with the bestial and the inanimate, this body is not so much inhuman as impossibly other, elsewhere, and yet familiar. This is the definition of the abject – it is incomprehensible, difficult even to apprehend without an instinctive flinching at it as a tortured reminder of life’s limits, where suffering lives. This “elsewhere” is reflected in Philoctetes’ sustained focus on his lonely setting, as it is in Neoptolemus’ somewhat timid attempts to comprehend the hero and his pain. Odysseus’ plot interrupts this, so that Philoctetes repeatedly ricochets between the possibility of human bonding and the solitary lament he conducts with the rocks and hills.

When Odysseus appears again on the scene, Philoctetes becomes increasingly recalcitrant and extreme, calling his hands that once held the famous bow “hunted” (l. 1005) and charging his enemy with attempting to capture the wild thing he created, the man he “threw out friendless, deserted, city-less, a corpse among the living” (προυβάλου/ἄφιλον ἐρήμιον ἄπολιν ἐν ζῶσιν νεκρόν, ll. 1017–18; cf. l. 1030). Philoctetes retreats more and more from reasoned exchange with his interlocutors, rejecting almost any conversation except for that with the island and its equally wild denizens (see Nooter forthcoming). As he repeatedly labels himself a thing other than human, his voice

becomes increasingly inhibiting and resistant, blocking – like his stinking, repulsive body – forward movement in the plot. He thus devolves into *kommos*, lamenting together with the chorus, and, like Electra, he barely responds to its members' attempts to mitigate his intransigent mode of interaction. At the end of his song he threatens suicide (ll. 1207–8), the logical extension of his status as a “nothing” and of his retreat from human interchange.

There is a curious quality to this keening over a near-dead self with a chorus, insofar as tragedy usually demarcates such lamentation as the practice of female characters (see e.g. Electra in Sophocles' and Euripides' plays, or Hecuba in Euripides' *Trojan Women*). The lonely threnodies of Antigone and Electra notwithstanding, female mourners usually invoke their own diminished status as a side note in their lamentations for others; dirges that center on oneself are unconventional, to say the least. And, while Sophocles appears in later plays to increase instances of this shared keening between chorus and protagonist, it seems fair to question whether Philoctetes' verbal behavior inflects his character as female. In fact, one might be inclined to claim that the combination of the hero's vulnerable body, penetrated and suppurating as it is, and his marked tendency to scream, sing, and engage in pastoral apostrophe (despite the chorus' early doubts) lends his role a feminizing coloration. There are no female characters in the play; might Philoctetes' emotionalism and vulnerability fulfill the dramatic need for the “softening” counterpoint they provide?

The play nowhere signals this, unlike the belated feminizing of Heracles in the *Trachiniae* (θήλυς, ll. 1062, 1075; πάρθενος, l. 1071), and even in that of Ajax – although more narrowly, since Ajax only claims that he “has been feminized in his mouth” (ἐθηλύνθην στόμα, *Aj.* 652). Philoctetes is likened, and likens himself, to all manner of non-human states; but the language of the drama only invokes maleness in contrast to corpses or shadows, as when he states that Odysseus thinks that he will “seize him as a man with strength” (ἄνδρ' ἐλών μ' ἰσχυρόν), but instead will find “a corpse, or a shadow of smoke, a mere phantom,” (νεκρόν, ἢ καπνοῦ σκιάν, / εἶδωλον ἄλλως) (ll. 945–7). Femaleness appears even more faintly, in the setting's local nymphs, for instance, whose watery meadows constitute a necessary reference point for framing a space as remote or pastoral (e.g. l. 1454). While it is true that the nymph Chryse is responsible for Philoctetes' suffering, since her guardian serpent bit him while he was trespassing in her precinct (ll. 192–4, 1326–8), the drama does not highlight this narrative, for all the sexual tensions and gender inversions it could catalyze. And yet the fact remains that Philoctetes' body and voice share features with those conventionally marked as feminine and that, without his physical and verbal otherness, the tragedy would lack the visceral frictions that shape its dense ethical and aesthetic conflicts.

3 Headed for the Tomb: Ajax, Antigone

The body of Oedipus presents something of a challenge to the thesis developed here. As king, his high status and impressive stature (*OT* 40, 46) wane incrementally, but, like Heracles in the *Trachiniae*, the drama does not center on his form until late in the action. He slowly devolves into the “wretched body” (ἄθλιον δέμας, *OT* 1388; cf. *OC* 576, *Tr.* 1079) offered to view near the drama's end, a thing that shocks Creon by its “uncovered” (ἀκάλυπτον, l. 1427; cf. καλύψατ', 1411) condition – as if its owner were a bride, perhaps, or, more fittingly, a corpse (cf. *Aj.* 916, 1003, *Ant.* 28, *Tr.* 1078; and see

Ormand 2003). Similarly, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, the hero's dilapidated, weakened state may seem similar to that of Philoctetes in particular. And yet his aged, fatherly status and carefully handled body (especially by Antigone, who remains proximate through much of the action) render him more integrated and "placeable" within the civic scheme (Worman forthcoming). He may be on his way to the tomb and thus exist in an intermediate realm, but his path there is clear and expected (Edmunds 1996; also Murnaghan 1988).

The recalcitrant figures of Ajax and Antigone, in some contrast, present nothing but enigmatic conflict and tension from the moment they appear (or, in the case of Ajax, are referred to) on stage. Like Electra, Antigone emphasizes not only that she keeps faith with the dead but also that she is nearly dead herself (ll. 559–60; cf. 73–5). She is, like Philoctetes and Ajax, bent on death, ready to offer herself up, and indeed ultimately a suicide. This marginal status conforms to the fact that, like Ajax, she appears "raw" to the chorus (ὠμόν, 471–2; cf. ὠμόθυμον, *Aj.* 885, ὠμόφρων, *Aj.* 930, *Tr.* 975; also *OC* 345–52) and that, to Creon, her mind seems "hardened" (τὰ σκληρὰ φρονήματα, l. 473; cf. *Ant.* 475, *Aj.* 649, *Tr.* 1260). It is these wild, inflexible characteristics, I think, that lead Creon to turn repeatedly to the anxiously gendered language (ll. 484, 525, 680, 740) that has garnered so much attention from scholars (see esp. Griffith 2001). As the figure of Ajax, the most notoriously inflexible of heroes, indicates, in Sophocles' social scheme hard, fierce characters are intensely present and masculine (whether or not they are male), while softening, yielding factors or characters are relegated more to the background and are often associated with the feminine (see *Aj.* 594, 651–2; *Ant.* 781; and cf. *Tr.* 1082 with 1062, 1075).

Ajax

Once again, Odysseus operates largely behind the scenes, as a would-be orchestrator of the tragic plot; but in this case the furious hero thinks that the henchman of kings has more to do with his predicament than he actually does. Odysseus appears only briefly at the outset of the play and again at its end, when he protects the body of the dead hero from defilement. Ajax's physical debasement and distress hold center stage for the first part of the play; and after he leaves to commit suicide his corpse anchors the imagery of the second half, which revolves around a dispute over what to do with his body.

The physical status and mental state of this intransigent hero are shrouded in mystery at the beginning of the drama. Maddened by Athena, whom he has offended by his boastful solitude as a fighter, he appears to be a thing hunted (ll. 5–8, 20, 58–60), even though he himself is also a prowling slaughterer of beasts. When Odysseus views Ajax still caught in his mania, he pities him, remarking philosophically (and very tellingly, given the familiarity of the language for us), "I see that we are nothing other than ghosts, however many of us are living, or a weightless shadow" (ὁρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν/εἶδωλ' ὄσοιπερ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν, ll. 125–6). From the outset Ajax is also alone (μόνος, 13 times), his motives a cipher, and his stature ambiguous between the hardened fighter he used to be and the palpably sullied body he presents on stage.

Again, Ajax is famously tough and inflexible, his giant body and shield underscoring his stalwart but rigid character. Such a profile might encourage one to argue that Sophocles depicts the hero as very "manly"; and he may well be the most masculine of all Sophocles' heroes, with his tough warrior's reputation, forceful demeanor, and overtly sexist attitude (e.g. *Aj.* 293, 527–8). That said, in the Sophoclean plot his stature is

radically threatened and brought low – a physical reduction to which he himself calls repeated attention. Once Tecmessa opens the door of his tent (in other words reveals him to the audience at the *skene* door, or possibly by means of the extruding platform called the *ekkyklema*), he deems himself “naked” (γυμνόν, l. 464), stripped as he has been of honor and arms. This he compares to the visible stature that his father’s feats of bravery earned him, which the son terms his father’s “great crown of reputation” (στέφανον εὐκλείας μέγαν, l. 465). Ajax, in contrast, spends at least half of his time alive on stage (or, again, in the *skene* door) slumped in the midst of a bloody swath of animal carcasses (ll. 351–2), himself soaked in blood (ll. 308–10, 374–6) and uncharacteristically keening (ll. 316–17, 348–429). This activity, Tecmessa remarks, Ajax used to regard as the province of the craven and heavy-hearted man (κακοῦ τε καὶ βαρυψύχου, l. 319). He is as one near dead, pitched at suicide, calling on darkness and the underworld to receive him (ll. 394–7; see Nooter forthcoming).

For all this slippage of stature, however, Ajax’s character sustains its legendary rigidity and its resistance to softening feminine influences. To Tecmessa’s legitimate fears and distress he responds harshly, disdaining her tears as due to her sex’s fondness for lamentation (l. 580) and cautioning her against seeking to “school his character” (l. 595) when she pleads with him to relent (lit. “soften”: μαλάσσου, l. 594) in his fierce race toward death. Later, when the sailors come upon Tecmessa hovering mournfully over his dead body, they term him “inflexible” (δυστράπελος, l. 914). And even Ajax’s notorious “lying speech,” in which he claims that his mouth has been feminized (ἔθελόνθην στόμα, l. 651) by Tecmessa’s pleading, begins with a reference to his native hardness (περισκελεῖς φρένες, l. 649).

This hardness is in the end what carries him through to the act of suicide, to fixing (ll. 819, 821) the deadly sword in the earth. Ajax is unyielding, as his resistant physicality indicates throughout the drama – from his slumped immobility earlier on to his giant corpse that lies on stage through to the end of the action. His suicide itself displays his defiance, both of the social and familial claims on him and of more conventional gender roles, given that in tragedy suicide is most typically the feminine solution (Zeitlin 1996b: 350–1). For all that Ajax’s attitude appears so “manly,” then, his stalwart resistance to community apprehension renders him repeatedly unreadable in relation to gender and status distinctions in a manner parallel to that of the noisy Electra, the screaming Philoctetes, and the prowling Antigone.

Antigone

The action of this well-known drama centers, like the others I discuss here, around bodies and what to do with them. Antigone attempts twice to give ritual burial to her brother Polyneices, which Creon, now king of Thebes, has prohibited, deeming him an enemy of the state. Her disobedience leads to her imprisonment by Creon and ultimately, in part because of her stubborn character, to her suicide, which in turn precipitates the suicides of Haemon, Antigone’s betrothed and Creon’s son, and of Creon’s own wife, Eurydice. Creon is left alone at the end, bereft of both his family and his sense of right.

The play that features the most famously resistant figure of my overview is also the one in which gender references are most prominently deployed to delineate the hero’s character. This may well spring from the fact that Antigone is female; but, curiously, the prominence of gender references does not serve to reduce the ambiguities of her status in relation to social categories and to the dead. Rather they magnify the impression of

her isolation and the extent to which she is an enigma to those around her (see Griffith 2001; also Butler 2000). As mentioned above, the characteristics to which others call attention suggest that Antigone is first a hard, “raw” hero and only secondarily female; Helene Foley has pointed out that her virgin status may contribute to the framing of her character as wild and intractable (2001: 199). Thus, the fact that she is a female character and yet only marginally so may generate much of the tension around her actions. It is not merely that she operates outside the norms of ancient gender roles in regard to, say, her commitment to marriage (which is weaker than her commitment to her dead brother) or her public roaming – see Creon’s apprehensive injunction regarding her and Ismene: “It is necessary that women be restrained and not free-ranging” (ἐκδέτους δὲ χρῆ/γυναικας εἶναι μῆδ’ ἀνεμμένας, ll. 578–9). Beyond these obvious social transgressions lies a constellation of features that make her stranger, more inscrutable, and thus more like the other Sophoclean heroes with whom the baffled labels of the chorus and other characters associate her.

While Antigone, unlike Philoctetes and Ajax, is not an immobile presence that impedes the plot from center stage, she resembles the two in her function as a resistant counterpoint to Creon. If, for the other heroes, Odysseus and (secondarily) the sons of Atreus function more remotely, as the faces of power and community authority, Antigone’s confrontations with the angry king emphasize her agency in making of herself an insurmountable obstacle to Creon’s anxious attempts to retain control of the city (see Foley 2001: 172–200). In fact, Antigone’s ranging freely outside of both household and city further marks her as a rebellious, non-feminine character – somewhat like Electra, but to a more extreme degree – and renders it necessary in both social and semiotic terms that she be imprisoned in the tomb. Further confounding traditional categories, this resistance and ranging stand in curious contrast to her suicide method (hanging), which Loraux has identified as conventionally feminine (1987: 9–17). She also notes, however, that Antigone deploys this hanging in an unconventional context, transforming an execution into a suicide and thus polluting her enemy’s mandate (31–2).

If all of the other heroes I discuss here can be said to have inconveniently, disturbingly debased physical presences on stage and to frustrate community expectations and understanding, Antigone is singularly distressing in her mobility and her stubborn proximity to the dead body that serves as the play’s abject center point. Thus, between them Polyneices and Antigone, corpse and corpse-lover, occupy the inscrutable, disruptive non-human interstice that is elsewhere reserved for male outcast heroes and their abject counterparts: Ajax and his bloody carcasses, Philoctetes and his bestial foot, belatedly Heracles and his ravaging poison. Electra, too, while she occupies a more traditionally female space in her strident lamentation and vigilant post at the palace door, is debased physically and disruptive in her insistent adjacency to the dead. These characters are all, however, much more present *in extremis* than Antigone is; and this theatrical puzzle contributes, I think, to the interpretive difficulty she has posed, for ancient and modern audiences alike.

Dramatically speaking, what the Antigone–Polyneices amalgam lacks in mimetic presence it makes up for in the awful details of the off-stage scenes described by the messengers and Teiresias. (That is, the diegesis, as frequently in tragedy, highlights violence to bodies not enacted on stage and thereby supplements the symbolic scheme.) As many scholars have noted, Antigone’s role as young future bride is grimly perverted in her entombment (see esp. Rehm 1994: ch. 4; Ormand 1999: 90–8). Her virgin’s body, intended for the bedchamber (θάλαμον, l. 804), will take up residence in the tomb

(see her apostrophes: “O tomb, o bridal chamber, o hollowed-out dwelling ever guarding,” ὦ τύμβος, ὦ νυμφεῖον, ὦ κατασκαφῆς / οἴκησις αἰείφρουρος, ll. 891–2; and also l. 1205). The body for which she shows the greatest care and to which she has the greatest allegiance is neither her own nor that of her future husband, however. She seeks to lie instead with her dead brother (l. 73; cf. ll. 909–12). In the messenger’s chilling description, she appears out of a gust of wind, screeching at the sight of his uncovered corpse like a bird that has lost its young (ll. 423–5; cf. *El.* 107); she then pours dirt over him once again with her own hand (ll. 429–31). The moldering carcass to which Antigone is so devoted, once hers is entombed and it remains uncovered, will be fed upon by birds and dogs – a fate that threatened the massive corpse of Ajax (ll. 1063–5) and that Philoctetes envisioned for his own stripped and vulnerable form (ll. 952–60, 1153–7).

These inconvenient bodies, which some civic leaders would like to see tossed to the dogs, are tainted by their misplacement in the social scheme and thus become insurmountably, viscerally impeding of normal civic functioning. Flesh torn from Polyneices’ naked corpse soon gluts the throats of the birds of prey to such a gross extent that they cannot cry out, since they are “choked on the bloody fat of the slain man” (ἀνδροφθόρου βεβρωῶτες αἵματος λίπος, l. 1022). Antigone’s noose-strung body is guarded by her “fierce-eyed” betrothed (ἀργίους ὄσσοισι, l. 1231), who then kills himself effectively on her, splattering her white cheeks with drops of his blood (λευκῆ παρειᾶ φοινίῳ σταλάγματος, l. 1239). Teiresias puts this all to Creon succinctly, not only the inter-city miasma that his actions will entail (ll. 1080–6), but the terrible calculus to which his mishandling of bodies must lead (“the repayment will be an exchange of corpse for corpses,” νέκυν νεκρῶν ἀμοιβὸν ἀντιδούς ἔση, l. 1067). The seer cannot stop the catastrophe that this mishandling precipitates, but his precise ordering of bodies and spaces (see esp. ll. 1068–9) leaves little doubt as to its inevitability. In fact, the dramatic and moral mapping of the play appears to promote attention to putting things in their proper places more than it condemns any lack of adherence to, for instance, conventional gender roles.

4 Conclusions

The bodies of Sophoclean heroes that I focus on here are not, of course, unique in their anguish or proximity to death. Indeed, as Zeitlin puts it, “Suffering and death [...] are the usual circumstances in tragedy for spotlighting the corporeal status of the self” (1991: 82; see also Segal 1985). While I follow Zeitlin in insisting on the importance of the body to understanding tragic mimesis, I am arguing that the particular inflections of character that shape Sophocles’ heroes do not owe to gender as much as they owe to other distinctions, namely those that barely edge on the human. When these heroic physical entities confound their interlocutors and inhibit smooth communal functioning, sometimes this frustration and inscrutability arises, at least in part, from an intersection of feminizing demarcations and heroic debility. More often, however, intimations of unknown or unrecognizable combinations of features render Sophocles’ heroes difficult to place within a conventionally gendered scheme. Electra and Philoctetes keen like traditional women, but they are unsupervised (so to speak) and thus frightening and excessive in their grief. Electra is shameless and soon abandons her mourning to display an even more indecent tendency to vaunt and carry on like a frenzied Homeric hero; Philoctetes is in many ways that frenzied Homeric hero, but his mired state lends his

verbal behavior intonations of female grieving without marking it as such. Ajax and Antigone resist attempts by community members to comprehend their actions and thus propel their bodies in constructive directions. Ajax should rise up and renegotiate his role as the army's shield; Antigone should stop patrolling corpses and head to the marriage chamber. Heracles is the only male hero who pointedly encourages an understanding of his perforated carcass by likening it to female bodies; but he does not appear until the end of the action and does not serve the play's action as a sustained inhibiting force.

This comparative absence of gender inflections is quite remarkable, given the prominence of associations, in ancient literature more generally, between permeability or vulnerability and the female body. It is not that perforated, suppurating, or otherwise debased bodies are missing from the Sophoclean stage, but rather that they tend to be strongly marked in other marginalizing terms. Because of this imagistic strategy they remain, perhaps paradoxically, recalcitrant physical entities, irreducible to the social categories that might explain them, and in effect both more and less than human.

Guide to Further Reading

The most important pieces written in English that address gender and the body in tragedy are still Froma Zeitlin's articles "Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama" (1996b) and "Euripides' *Hekabe* and the Somatics of Dionysiac Drama" (1991). Brooke Holmes (2010) also highlights the centrality of the body to tragedy, but she does so in the broader context of how the body's increasing visibility affects subject formation across a number of ancient genres. Nicole Loraux's work (most of which has been translated into English) focuses somewhat less on the body but remains groundbreaking for its emphasis on the concreteness of tragic imagery (e.g. 1981, 1987, 1991). Charles Segal (1985) is less articulate about the precise nature of tragic embodiment but compellingly comparative in outlook. On gendered embodiment in Sophocles, the best piece I know of is by Mark Griffith (2001). Griffith follows Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) work on the body and "performativity." Recent books, focused more on gender dynamics than on bodies, but very useful for their delineating of how tragedy orchestrates female roles, include Victoria Wohl (1998), Kirk Ormand (1999), and Helene P. Foley (2001).

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Staging Mothers in Sophocles’ *Electra* and *Oedipus the King*

Laura McClure

The principal myths around which most Athenian tragedies revolve, according to Aristotle, focus on only a few households, namely those of Alcmaeon, Orestes, Oedipus, Meleager, Thyestes, and Telephus (Arist. *Po.* 1453^a18–22). All of these stories feature recognitions between family members, kin murder, and incest, since the kind of suffering that occurs within the family is most able to arouse the tragic emotions (1453^b14–23). Such plots invariably allot a major role to mothers. As a figure of authority within the house, the mother’s enhanced scope for agency leads to dangerous interventions in male affairs, as well as to the possibility of adultery. She serves as a source of affiliation within her husband’s house and yet stands perpetually outside it – a stranger who maintains a connection to her natal family. As the giver of life, she has both the power to protect and perpetuate the paternal line and the power to obliterate it.

The importance of mothers to the plots of tragic drama in part reflects the changing relationship between the individual family unit and the *polis* during the classical period: instead of strengthening ties between powerful families, mothers became a means of “producing legitimate children to ensure the permanence of the population and the economy of the *polis*” (Sorum 1982: 202). Against this backdrop, the mythological families of tragedy achieved a new significance: as the embodiment of the blood relationship, familial solidarity, and heredity, the tragic mother often represents a symbolic threat to the stability of the community. This chapter begins by establishing a model for Athenian views of motherhood through the analysis of an early representation of a tragic mother, Clytemnestra, and the language and images of maternity surrounding her, in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* trilogy. It then shows how the association of maternity with the claims of blood developed in the trilogy and expressed by the language of childbirth, nurture, and agricultural imagery broadly informs Sophocles’ depiction of motherhood in both *Electra* and *Oedipus the King*. While the *Electra* envisions a paternal household cleansed of the maternal principle and reconstituted through an unmarried virgin daughter, *Oedipus the King* depicts the incestuous crime of mother and son as a dangerous multiplication of familial identities that has fatal consequences for the larger community.

As many scholars have noted, Aeschylus' trilogy *Oresteia* problematizes maternal blood as the determining factor in kinship, and in fact it privileges the father and the city over the maternal bond. The *Agamemnon*, with its recurrent allusions to slain offspring and maternal vengeance, organizes its action around a violation of maternity, while the plots of the other two plays dramatize a negation of that power. In the first play, the loss of young is repeatedly evoked in the chorus' first song: the battle cry of the Greek host is compared to the cry of eagles wheeling above nests empty of children (*A. Ag.* 49–54), even as the image of birds devouring a hare “pregnant with the burden of young” portends the fall of Troy (βοσκομένω λαγίναν ἐρικύμονα φέρματι γένναν, l. 119). The latter violation has offended Artemis, who, as a guardian of the “breast-loving young” (*philomastoi*, l. 142), functions as a maternal deity. The hare image also suggests Thyestes' feast, which Cassandra later conjures in her vision of slaughtered children wailing upon the rooftop (ll. 1096–7), and which has activated a child-avenging Fury within the house (*Menis teknopoínos*, l. 155). The ode thus draws a structural parallel between the maternal wrath of Clytemnestra and that of Artemis, who has demanded the sacrifice of her child. The pairing of maternity and revenge is further developed in Clytemnestra's opening lines, which speak of the dawn as born from mother night (*metros euphrones*, l. 265; cf. l. 279). The phrase links the queen to the Erinyes, the chthonic deities who, in Aeschylus, require retribution for the shedding of kindred blood and hence protect the mother–child bond, a concept expressed through their single-minded repetition of the word “mother,” *meter*, and emphasis on maternal blood throughout the third play (μητρὸς αἷμα φίλτατον: *Eum.* 608; cf. 230, 261, 608, 653). Like Clytemnestra, they invoke a maternal principle, “Mother Night, you who have given birth to me as a retribution” (μᾶτερ ἅ μ' ἔτικτες, ὦ /μᾶτερ Νύξ: *Eum.* 321–2).

Although at first glance it might appear that the *Agamemnon* valorizes the maternal bond, or even matriarchy, as some critics have argued (e.g. Zeitlin 1984), the relative absence of normative terms for mother, such as *meter* and *he tekousa*, would seem to suggest the opposite. Apart from the phrase “Mother Night,” there are only two other uses of *meter* in the play, both of which are negative: Cassandra calls Clytemnestra the “mother of Hades” (*Haidoi metera*, l. 1235) and speaks of a “mother-killing shoot” that will return to avenge Orestes' father's death (μητροκτόνον φίτυμα, ποινάτωρ πατρός, l. 1281). The word *phituma* (“shoot”) denotes a male child and stresses the paternal bond, since the verb *phituo* typically refers to male generation, while the compound adjective *metroktonos* (“mother-killing”) suggests the need to negate the maternal principle. Because she is associated with the male line and paternal generation, in the third play, *Eumenides*, Athena describes herself as the “gardener” of the Athenian *genos*, using a cognate of *phituein* (*phitupoimenos*, 911).

Whereas terms for mother invariably involve a denial of maternity in the *Agamemnon*, stressing paternal generation instead, the queen's emphasis on her physical connection to Iphigenia suggests an overvaluation of motherhood. She refers to her daughter as “my birth pang most beloved” (φιλάτην ἐμοὶ ὠδίνα: *Ag.* 1417–18), and she speaks of the murder of Agamemnon almost as an act of birth:

And as he breathed forth quick spurts of blood,
 he struck me with dark drops of bloody dew,
 while I rejoiced not less than the sown earth [*sporetos*]
 is gladdened in the birth pangs [*locheumasin*] of the flower bud.
 (ll. 1391–2; trans. Lattimore)

In drawing on the metaphor of the sown field, which will be discussed more fully below in connection with *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the passage equates the blood of the murdered king with the life-giving liquid that fertilizes the earth, here associated with Clytemnestra. The imagery suggests both the coupling that gave birth to Iphigeneia and the symbolic retribution for her murder: by depriving Clytemnestra of her “birth pang,” Agamemnon has brought about his own death. The close connection between mother and child is further signified through the queen’s frequent use of the possessive adjective in reference to Iphigeneia: she is “my child” (*tes emes paidos*, l. 1432) and “my branch” (*emon* [...] *ernos*, l. 1525). Through this possessive Clytemnestra assumes for herself the paternal control of children; indeed, the term *pais* (“child”) is typically associated with fathers, and less often with mothers (Lebeck 1971: 125).

In the trilogy, childbirth and female nurture are also negatively linked with the problem of heredity, the breeding of accursed or monstrous offspring. The association explains the metaphorical use of the verb *tiktein* (“to give birth”), in which one negative thing is said to engender another: so *hubris* gives birth to *hubris* (*Ag.* 763–6) and “aged murder” bears offspring in the house (*Ch.* 805). In the *Agamemnon*, the chorus relates a fable about a lion cub “robbed of its mother’s milk and longing for the breast” (*agalakton* [...] *philomaston*: *Ag.* 717–19). Although fawning in infancy “like a newborn child” (*νεοτρόφου τέκνου δίκαν*, ll. 723–4), it soon grows into a ferocious lion that eventually destroys the flocks and the family that had reared it. This traitorous beast prefigures Clytemnestra’s terrible premonition of events to come in her dream of giving birth to a serpent (*τεκεῖν δράκοντ’ ἔδοξεν*: *Ch.* 527). She, too, treats the creature like an infant; but, when she offers it her breast (*maston*, l. 531), the snake draws milk clotted with blood (*ἐν γάλακτι θρόμβον αἵματος*, l. 533). As in the parable of the lion cub, the dream inverts the pervasive image of innocence violated: a seemingly innocuous creature eventually grows up to harm those who reared it. In the earlier story, however, the cub was “milkless,” deprived of maternal nurture; here the serpent drinks blood, a substance connected with the Erinyes and maternal vengeance (cf. ll. 577–8). The mother therefore transmits hereditary crimes through the birth and nurture of like-natured and monstrous children. Electra draws attention to this paradox when she compares her temperament and that of her brother to a wolf whose savage nature they have inherited from their mother (ll. 418–22).

In addition to the problem of maternal heredity, the second play of the *Oresteia* – the *Libation Bearers* (*Choephoroi*) – more fully exposes Clytemnestra’s status as an adulterer. By bringing another man into her bed Clytemnestra has corrupted the conjugal bond between herself and Agamemnon, thus jeopardizing Orestes’ inheritance. In the first *stasimon* the chorus deplors the “ruthless” and “woman-conquering” passions (*pantolmous erotas*, l. 597; *thelukrates eros*, ll. 599–601) that pervert wedded unions. In the Greek view, female adultery posed a threat both to the mother’s legitimate children and to the continuity of the paternal *oikos*. The maternal bond therefore cannot exist apart from the father, as Clytemnestra would have it; rather, the birth and rearing of a male child should solidify the loyalty of the mother to the father. Orestes is thus described in the *Agamemnon* as “the holder of pledges” between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, since the interests of the son and heir protect the bond of loyalty between the parents (*ἐμῶν τε καὶ σῶν κύριος πιστωμάτων*, *A.* *Ag.* 878). By violating this pledge, Clytemnestra has transgressed a fundamental precept of Greek motherhood: the perpetuation and preservation of her husband’s *oikos*.

The *Libation Bearers*, in contrast, downplays both the biological and the affective bond between mother and child through the avoidance of the term *meter* and through

the transposition of maternal affection and duty from Clytemnestra to the nurse. When the disguised Orestes delivers the news of his own death to the queen, he avoids any terms that would suggest kinship with her, “Whether by any chance I speak to those with whom the question rests [*tois kuriosi*] and whose concern it is [*prosekousin*], I know not; but his parent [*ton tekonta*] should know the situation” (ll. 689–90). The fact that the mother does not recognize her son goes against the conventions of tragic recognition, in which those closest to the unknown individual are usually the first to identify him/her. It also serves as a further repudiation of the maternal bond, foreshadowing Apollo’s formulation in *Eumenides* that the mother is truly a stranger to her child (see Lebeck 1971: 125). Only when Clytemnestra realizes that her son intends to kill her does she evoke her status as Orestes’ biological mother, “Respect this breast, my son, at which you, drowsing, suckled the nourishing milk with your gums” (ὦ παῖ, τόνδε δ’ αἶδεσαι, τέκνον, μαστόν, πρὸς ᾧ σὺ πολλά δὴ βρίζων ἄμα/οὔλοισιν ἐξήμελξας εὐτραφὲς γάλα, ll. 896–9). By exposing her breast as the source of sustenance and nurture, Clytemnestra reminds Orestes of the natural tie that has been tainted by the dream of the serpent suckling milk clotted with blood. In fact, the responsibility of rearing Orestes has fallen not to her, as she claims (*ethrepsa*, l. 908), but to the nurse (*exethrepsa*, l. 750). Clytemnestra’s plea nonetheless weakens Orestes’ resolve, and he uses the word *meter* for the first time, turning to Pylades for advice: “What should I do? I am afraid to kill my mother” (Πυλάδη, τί δράσω; μητέρ’ αἰδεσθῶ κτανεῖν, 899). Although Orestes affirms Clytemnestra’s status as his biological mother through the verb *tikto*, “you who have given me birth” (*tekousa me*, 913), he accuses her of failing to act like a mother, since she has cast him out. Clytemnestra’s final words as she receives the fatal blow from her son render a terrible paradox – she has given birth to her own death: “Alas, having given birth to this serpent, I reared him” (οἶ’ γὰρ, τεκοῦσα τόνδ’ ὄφιν ἐθρεψάμην, l. 928).

The genetic bond between mother and child that Orestes repudiates reaches its fullest expression in Apollo’s famous defense of Orestes in the third play of the trilogy, *Eumenides*. The Erinyes have argued that Clytemnestra did not incur their wrath by killing her husband, because husband and wife are not *homaimos*, that is, they do not share the same blood. However, they rightfully pursue Orestes, for he has shed kindred blood in killing his mother (τὸ μητρὸς αἷμ’ ὄμαμον, l. 653). To refute this charge, Apollo asserts that it is the father, not the mother, who is the true parent of the child:

The mother is not the parent [*tokeus*] of that which is called the child, but the nurse [*trophos*] of the newly sown embryo [*kumatos neosporou*]. The one who mounts gives birth [*tikteî*] while she, a *stranger for a stranger* [*xenoi* [...] *xene*] preserves the seed [*ernos*], if some god does not harm it. I will show you proof of this argument. The proof that there could be a father without a mother is Athena, child of Olympian Zeus, for she was not nurtured in the *shadows* of the womb [οὐκ ἐν σκότοισι νηδύος τεθραμμένη]. (*Eu.* 657–65)

Apollo argues that the mother is not genetically related to her child; the repetition of the word *xenos* suggests that she has absolutely no affiliation with it. The view that the seed comes from the male while the female provides the place – a view similar to that of Anaxagoras (Arist. *GA* 763^b31–3) – forces the poet to press the language in odd ways: first, the noun *tokeus*, related to the verb *tikto*, is normally used in the plural only to refer to *parents*; here the poet uses it of the father alone, to link him directly to the principle

of female generation. Moreover, his use of *tikto* itself departs from normal usage, both elsewhere and in the trilogy itself, where it has already occurred eight times, being predicated of the mother (*Ag.* 133, 419, 527, 913, 928; *Eu.* 321, 463, 514) and only once or twice of the father (*Ch.* 690 and possibly 329).

Questions about the strength of the maternal bond and the role of the mother in the paternal *oikos* similarly inform Sophocles' *Electra*, a play centered on Electra's relationship to the events in the Aeschylean story. The claims of family, symbolically expressed by the figure of the mother and the Erinyes in the *Oresteia*, have been all but eradicated in this play, with its focus on the preservation of the paternal *oikos* through the negation of the maternal principle. One tangible sign of this shift is Sophocles' transformation of the Erinyes from deities exclusively concerned with murder of blood-kin (*homaimos*) to punishers of adultery (Winnington-Ingraham 1980: 231–2; see also Ormand 1999: 70). Thus, Electra calls upon them to punish not only her father's murderers, but "those who dishonor the marriage bed" (τοὺς εὐνάς ὑποκλεπτομένους, l. 114). The chorus subsequently reassures her that a bronze-footed Erinys will come to avenge her mother's adultery (ll. 489–91). In this regard they function apart from Clytemnestra, as custodians of the male-governed *oikos*, protective of the bonds of marriage, rather than as enforcers of the claims of blood.

As the play begins, Electra awaits the return of Orestes as a prisoner in her own house, suffering mistreatment at the hands of her mother, unable to act. Her only mode of rebellion is speech, whether verbal abuse of her mother or violent laments (Kitzinger 1991; Ormand 1999). Indeed, a cry of lament from within the house introduces her character and serves as the concrete reminder of her imprisonment (ὠ μοί μοι δύστηνος, l. 77; see Segal 1981: 250). Her unmarried state, barely mentioned in *Libation Bearers* (l. 487), is expressed both by her name – formed from the adjective *alektros*, "without marriage bed" – and by the repeated allusions to her childlessness, which function almost as a refrain: "I waste away without offspring, I have no husband to protect me" (ἄτις ἄνευ τεκέων κατατάκομαι, ἄς φίλος οὐτις ἀνὴρ ὑπερίσταται, ll. 187–8; cf. ll. 164, 165, 962, 1183; and see also Ormand 1999: 63). Unwed, she remains loyal to the paternal household, which she seeks to preserve (*ton patroion oikon*, l. 978), first by awaiting the return of her brother and later by resolving to kill her mother in his stead. In her view, only after she has rescued the paternal *oikos* will she and her sister, Chrysothemis, be eligible for marriage (γάμων ἐπαξιων/τεύξη, ll. 971–2). Because she is not yet married and not yet a mother, she cannot resemble her mother in the ways most important to the Aeschylean story: she cannot commit adultery or kill her husband in defense of the maternal bond.

Electra, therefore, differs from her mother in the crucial respect that she is not a mother and thus can remain indefinitely loyal to her dead father and to the paternal line. Like Apollo, she perceives the bloodline as exclusively paternal, passing through the male side alone; and that line must be rescued from obscurity by avenging her father's death. Aegisthus has already thwarted the sisters' potential for perpetuating the *genos* by not allowing them to marry (ll. 965–6), while the putative death of Orestes will result in its complete destruction, "root and branch" (*prorrizon*, l. 765). The importance of paternal affiliation is further emphasized both through the use of patronymics – Orestes is called "child of Agamemnon" (*Agamemnonos pai*, l. 2) – and through the language of paternity; thus Electra is the "child born of a mortal father" (θνητοῦ πέφυκας πατρός, l. 1171). As in the *Oresteia*, terms such as *phuo* and its cognates stress paternal generation, and so Agamemnon is *ho phusas* (ll. 482–3), "the one who begot you."

The problem of heredity, as transmitted through the mother, devolves upon the figure of Chrysothemis, who is reluctant to participate in matricide. Hailing her entrance, the chorus identifies her as “your blood sister, with respect to her nature, from the same father” (τὴν σὴν ὄμαιμον, ἐκ πατρὸς ταυτοῦ φύσιν, l. 325). However, they hold off until the end of the next line – “and from your mother, too” (ἐκ τε μητρός, l. 326) – to imply her divided loyalty. When Chrysothemis refuses to take a stand against her mother and Aegisthus, Electra rebukes her for forgetting the “father whose child you are by nature” (πατρὸς οὐδὲ παῖς ἔφυς, l. 341), out of concern for “the one giving birth” (τῆς δὲ τικτούσης, l. 342). Failure to defend the paternal *oikos* will brand her sister as base, by affiliating her with their mother: “Now, when it is possible to be called the child of a noble father, you are called the child of your mother” (νῦν δ’ ἐξὸν πατρὸς / πάντων ἀρίστου παῖδα κεκληθῆναι, καλοῦ / τῆς μητρός, ll. 365–7). Electra’s rhetoric in this passage, with its emphasis on nobility and reputation, credits the father with the transmission of good character while attributing baseness and cowardice to the maternal line.

Electra’s loyalty to her father’s *oikos* earns her the epithet *eupatris*, “worthy of her father” (l. 1081). She embodies the dream of the “indefinite prolongation of the paternal line” that bypasses the dangers of the exogamous female, thereby neutralizing male anxiety about the integrity of the *oikos* (Vernant 1983a: 134). Sophocles’ version of Clytemnestra’s dream reinforces this Apollonian ideal of paternity:

There was a story that she saw a second
 encounter with your father and mine
 when he had come back to the light. He took
 the scepter that he used to carry, but now Aegisthus holds,
 and stuck it fast on the hearth. From it sprung forth [*blastein*]
 a luxuriant branch [*bruonta thallon*] which shadowed
 the whole land of Mycenae. (ll. 417–23)

This dream vividly contrasts that of Clytemnestra in *Libation Bearers* in its emphasis not on maternity but on paternity; in the words of Charles Segal, she has “ominous visions of a phallic generative power and its threatening fertility” (1981: 251; cf. Ormand 1999: 70–2). The word *thallos* is reminiscent of the vegetation imagery associated with Clytemnestra’s corrupted maternal power and of that of the Erinyes in the *Oresteia*; here, however, it represents a male-generated birth, as does the verb *blastein* – a word that elsewhere in the play describes both Orestes and Electra as springing forth from their father (l. 590; cf. also l. 1081). Almost like Zeus in the birth of Athena, Agamemnon engenders a male child without a mother by touching the hearth – symbol of the virgin female space that preserves the male line – with his staff – symbol of sovereignty (Hom. *Il.* 2.101–2). By this act the paternal bloodline is symbolically perpetuated through the unmarried Electra as well as through her sister Chrysothemis, who elsewhere swears on her father’s hearth (μὰ τὴν πατρώαν ἔστιαν, l. 881).

In place of the mother–child bond, the primary relationship in the play is one between siblings; they are *homaimoi*, of the same blood, a word typically used only of brothers and sisters in Sophocles. The Tutor refers to Electra as Orestes’ *homaimos* sister in the very first lines of the play, thereby underscoring the importance of consanguinity (*S. El.* l. 12). But the term may also reflect a general ambivalence about this tie, as it suggests, at least in Sophocles, a blood connection through the mother. As discussed earlier, the Erinyes in the *Enumenides* call the relationship between Orestes and Clytemnestra

homaimos, while the chorus in *Electra* applies this epithet to Chrysothemis (l. 325). The blood connection between siblings appears to have been associated with the mother, since in Athenian law a half-brother and half-sister could marry only if they were the children of the same father, but not when they shared the same mother. Antigone in Sophocles' same-name play further supports the primacy of this bond, for she defends her actions by stating that she would not have risked burying a husband or child, but only a brother (*Ant.* 905–7), to whom she refers as “the one from my mother” (τὸν ἐξ ἐμῆς/μητρὸς, *Ant.* 466–7; cf. l. 513). So, whereas the Greeks considered the blood tie between a brother and sister from the same mother as particularly close, the play manages to sidestep the maternal aspect of the bond by repeatedly underscoring the father as the true parent of *Electra* and *Orestes*.

Since the sibling relationship supplants the maternal bond and reconstitutes itself through the father in this play, *Electra* in effect functions as the mother of her brother; “For never were you more loved by your mother than me, nor was anyone in the house ever your nurse except me” (οὐτε γάρ ποτε / μητρὸς σύ γ’ ἦσθα μᾶλλον ἢ κάμου φίλος, / οὐθ’ οἱ κατ’ οἶκον ἦσαν ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ τροφός, ll. 1145–7). *Electra* details her maternal duties in much the same way as the nurse does in *Libation Bearers*, pitying herself and lamenting her wasted labors upon hearing of the putative death of *Orestes*: “Alas for my nurture of you long ago, in vain” (οἴμοι τάλαινα τῆς ἐμῆς πάλαι τροφῆς / ἀνωφελήτου, ll. 1143–4; cf. *Cho.* 743–60). She proves herself to be the true mother by rescuing the infant *Orestes* from death: by entrusting him to the male care of the Tutor she has ensured the continuity of the paternal line (ll. 296–7, 321, 1132–3).

From a ritual perspective as well, *Electra* adopts the role of the mother in her capacity as mourner and custodian of the dead. Believing her brother to be deceased, she worries that she has not been able to perform the proper funerary rituals for him (ll. 1130–40). As noted above, *Electra*'s main form of speech throughout the play is lamentation, beginning with her first mournful interjections (*goon*, l. 81; *threnon*, l. 88). In her lyric monody she summons the image of the nightingale, the chief symbol of lamentation in the Greek poetic tradition: “like a nightingale who has lost her young in mourning” (τεκνολέτειρ’ ὥς τις ἀηδῶν, l. 107). The chorus repeats this image later in the play, when it describes *Electra* lamenting her father's fate “like the ever-grieving nightingale” (ἄ πάνδυρος ἀηδῶν, l. 1077). Allusions to the nightingale recall the myth of Procne, who killed her son, Itys (named at l. 148), to avenge the rape and mutilation of her sister by her brutal husband. The story has several meanings relevant to the play: first, the crimes of the mother, which obliterated Tereus' house, similarly threaten the “paternal gates” of the house of Agamemnon (l. 109). Second, the chorus likens *Electra*'s mourning to that of a mother – an idea further reinforced by the subsequent reference to Niobe, another mythic mother who laments the untimely deaths of her children, slain as they were by the vengeful Artemis and Apollo (l. 150). As a “distraught bird” (*ornis atuzomena*, l. 149), Niobe is also a harbinger of revenge; and so *Electra* calls upon the Erinyes and other infernal deities to punish the murderers of her father (ll. 115–16; cf. 1080–1). Figured through the image of the nightingale as a mourning mother, *Electra*'s laments contrast Clytemnestra's conspicuous absence of grief. She does not lament her son when she learns of his death (ll. 804–6), nor would she leave libations at his tomb (ll. 913–14); but rather she rejoices in his passing (l. 929), much like her Aeschylean counterpart.

By shifting the positive aspects of the maternal role to *Electra*, Sophocles effectively delegitimizes Clytemnestra as a mother, downplaying the physicality of the maternal bond “in favor of somewhat more distanced, less disturbing, less biologically immediate

symbols of the bond between parents and children” (Segal 1985: 19). At the same time Electra shows an almost obsessive preoccupation with the word *meter*, which she uses, almost exclusively, in order to deny Clytemnestra’s maternal status. Clytemnestra is “a mother not a mother” (*meter ametor*, l. 1154) and, although she is called mother, “in no way does she act like a mother” (μητρὶ δ’ οὐδὲν ἐξισοῖ, l. 1194); she is rather more like a despot than like a mother (*despotin*, l. 597; on this subject, see Wheeler 2003: 388). In contrast, Clytemnestra emphasizes her maternity in graphic, physical terms: she refers to Iphigenia as “her who was mine” (*ten g’ emen*, l. 536), and alleges that Agamemnon felt less pain “when he sowed her than I giving birth to her” (ὄτ’ ἔσπειρ’, ὥσπερ ἡ τίκτουσ’ ἐγώ, ll. 533). The verb *tikto*, a word powerfully suggestive of the physical connection between mother and child, as we saw above, is given frequent utterance by Clytemnestra in this play. Upon the news of Orestes’ death she muses: “To give birth is a mysterious power: there is no hatred toward those to whom one has given birth, even when they treat one badly” (δεινὸν τὸ τίκτειν ἐστίν• οὐδὲ γὰρ κακῶς / πάσχοντι μίσος ὧν τέκη προσγίγνεται, ll. 771–2). For Clytemnestra, this potent tie, expressed by the term *deinon*, persists despite Orestes’ rejection of her “breast and nurture” (μαστῶν ἀποστάς και τροφῆς ἐμῆς, l. 776) and despite his stated intention to kill her. Electra, however, represents a larger threat, for she is like a vampire who drinks “the unmixed blood of my soul” (τοῦμόν ἐκπίνουσ’ ἀεὶ / ψυχῆς ἄκρατον αἷμα, ll. 785–6) – a phrase that recalls the serpent dream of the *Libation Bearers*. Even as the children attempt to distance themselves both genetically and emotionally from their mother, Clytemnestra reasserts the language and vocabulary of maternity into the play, to establish the primacy of her maternal status.

As the defender of paternal heredity, Electra rails most against Clytemnestra’s crime of adultery, through which she has transmitted the authority of her house to Aegisthus rather than to Orestes. She refers to him not as a legitimate spouse, but as her mother’s bedmate (*koinoleches*, l. 97). This liaison compromises her maternal status still further, because it disrupts the patrilineal order: “if one must call her a mother, when she sleeps with him” (ll. 273–4; cf. 593–4). Their union is condemned as a coupling most shameful (*aischista*, l. 586), illegitimate (*alektra anumpha*, l. 492), and defiled (*miaiphonon*, l. 492; *ou themis*, l. 494). Just like its counterpart in the *Libation Bearers*, the chorus identifies uncontrolled *eros*, in the form of Clytemnestra’s adultery, as the cause of Agamemnon’s murder (ἔπος ὁ κτείνας, l. 197). But in this play the Erinyes will punish her crime rather than that of matricide (ll. 112, 276, 491). By de-emphasizing the function of the Erinyes as protectors of the bond, the poet diminishes their maternal connection and thus aligns them with those whom they sought to punish in the Aeschylean version of the myth. In other words, instead of avenging matricide, they fully sanction it.

The dramatized hostilities between mother and daughter culminate in the killing of Clytemnestra, a scene that brings together many aspects of motherhood discussed thus far. The climactic moment is attenuated: Electra, as she stands before the palace, mediates her mother’s murder (Segal 1985: 21). As she is about to be killed by Orestes, Clytemnestra cries out, in language similar to her Aeschylean counterpart: “O child, child, take pity on the one who gave birth to you” (ὦ τέκνον τέκνον, / οἴκτιρε τὴν τεκοῦσαν, ll. 1411–12). The triple repetition of the verb *tikto* and its cognates underscores the physical tie between mother and son and represents the culmination of the maternal language used by Clytemnestra throughout the play, hearkening back, as it does, to her gnomic utterance about the compelling power of childbirth. In response to Clytemnestra’s plea for pity, Electra reasserts the primacy of the paternal *oikos*: “But this one did not have pity from you, nor the father who sired him” (ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐκ σέθεν/ὄκτιρεθ’ οὗτος οὐδ’ ὁ γεννήσας

πατήρ, ll. 1412–13). By evoking the male principle of generation through the use of the participle *gennesas*, Electra justifies matricide in the service of preserving the male *genos* (Segal 1981: 255). The de-emphasizing of blood and matricide within the play points to an implicit contradiction: even as Electra embodies the fantasy of perpetuating the family line through herself, the virgin daughter, such a position is untenable; the continuance of the *oikos* requires a mother (Sorum 1982: 210).

Both Aeschylus and Sophocles in their versions of the Orestes myth confront the paradox that the paternal *oikos* can only be preserved through the negation of the mother and of her reproductive power. *Oedipus Tyrannus* also portrays maternity as problematic, here through the crime of maternal incest: the monstrous and deadly potential of the mother to give birth to a son and a father of her children simultaneously produces a harrowing multiplication of identities (see the chapter of Liapis in this volume). The play explores this issue first by portraying a man who has no knowledge of his paternal *genos* or birthplace, even though he mistakenly believes he understands his true origins: “For Oedipus, ‘to know where’ is the fundamental riddle of his life” (Goldhill 2009: 37). Lacking this knowledge, he unwittingly kills his biological father and subsequently commits incest with his mother. From a dramatic perspective, the character of the mother plays a crucial role in bringing about her son’s knowledge of his true parentage and birthplace. Without her awareness of the past and her physical presence on stage, Oedipus could not come to a full recognition of himself. The horror of this discovery is conveyed through the repetition of the metaphor of the sown field in reference to the incest crime at the end of the play.

The question about place works in tandem with the metaphor of the sown field – an image typically used of conjugal and procreative sex, in which the husband is figured as a farmer who sows his seed in his wife, the earth, and produces a root or a shoot (Clark 2001: 369–70). The metaphor is widespread in the poetic tradition and in Athenian culture itself, in which the language of the Greek wedding involved the pledge “I give you this girl for the sowing of legitimate children” (ταύτην γνησίων/παίδων ἐπ’ ἀρότω σοι δίδωμι, *Men. Pk.* 1013–14). In Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, the Athenian ambassador speaks of his desire to “plow” the naked figure of Reconciliation (*georgein*, *Ar. Lys.* 1173; cf. *Ach.* 989–99). Creon in *Antigone* uses similar words when he angrily dismisses Haemon’s love for Antigone with the phrase: “There are other fields to plow” (ἀρώσμοι γὰρ χᾶτέρων εἰσὶν γῦα, l. 569). Deianeira employs this language to describe the infrequent conjugal visits of her husband, Heracles: “We begat children, whom that one only saw as often as the farmer sees a distant field [*arouran*], when sowing [*speiron*] and reaping” (*S. Tr.* 31–3). The image of the father as a farmer expresses both his agency and his distance from the actual process of gestation and childbirth.

As early as Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes*, however, the sown field was specifically associated with Oedipus’ crime of incest: “The parricide, Oedipus, who went so far as to sow a root of blood in the sacred field of his mother, in the place where he was given life” (πατροκτόνον Οἰδιπόδαν, ὅστε ματρὸς ἀγνάν/σπείρας ἄρουραν ἴν’ ἐτράφη/ρίζαν αἱματόεσσαν, *A. Th.* 752–6). As in the passage above, the verb *speiro* emphasizes paternal agency, as does *rhiza*, which denotes that from which anything springs as a root. But, instead of negating the mother, Oedipus displaces the father, assumes his place in the reproductive chain and engenders an aberrant brood destined to perish; so Antigone (in the *Antigone*) speaks of the light spread out “over the last root of Oedipus” (ρίζας ἐτέτατο φάος ἐν Οἰδίπου δόμοις, l. 600). Moreover, in this context the metaphor, instead of expressing distance, suggests a horrifying proximity between mother and son

as the place from which he came and to which he will return. The imagery of the sown field is also specific to place, in that it recalls the autochthonous origins of the Thebans, who arose from dragon's teeth sown into the ground (DuBois 1988: 70). It thus brings together both the geographical and the maternal origins that are at the heart of the riddle of "knowing where," which Oedipus must solve (on the image, see Musurillo 1957: 41–2; DuBois 1988: 73–4).

The importance of place and of the autochthonous past is evoked in the first line of the play, when Oedipus addresses the assembled group of suppliant children as "the youthful charges of Cadmus," recalling the king who sowed the dragon's teeth into the Theban earth. The blight that has stunted the fruit buds (*kaluxin egkarpois*, l. 25) and rendered the birth pangs of women without issue (τόκοισί τε / ἀγόνοις γυναικῶν, ll. 26–7) develops the metaphor of the sown field by linking together crop failure and human infertility. The chorus more fully elaborates this idea in its first song: "Neither will the offspring of the famous earth increase, nor will women bear the pangs in which they cry out to Artemis in labor" (ll. 171–4). The agricultural parallel is further developed when Oedipus prays that the gods send those who disobey his orders "neither harvest of the earth nor fruit of the womb" (μήτ' ἄροτον αὐτοῖς γῆς ἀνίεναί τινα / μήτ' οὖν γυναικῶν παῖδας, ll. 270–1). In all of these instances the Theban soil and the bodies of women are treated as places that will not produce issue; they are also at the root of Oedipus' quest for identity – or, as Teiresias puts it, "[y]ou do not see what trouble you are in, *where* you live, nor with whom you live" (ll. 413–14).

As many scholars have already noted, *Oedipus Tyrannus* relies on a complex pattern of linguistic ambiguity, particularly evident in the language of kinship, which hints at Oedipus' true identity throughout the play (Vernant and DuBois 1978), by turns distancing him from, then connecting him to, the *genos* of Laius. For example, Oedipus states that he shares the same marriage bed as Laius and has a *homosporos* wife – that is, he "sows" the same woman (l. 260; see Vernant and DuBois 1978: 492–3; DuBois 1988: 75). The term *homaimos* denotes a close blood tie in Sophocles, normally among siblings (and so *A. Th.* 812, 931–2). Teiresias, however, uses the word in its true sense when he prophesies that Oedipus will be shown to be both the slayer of his father and his *homosporos*: not his co-sower, but rather his blood relation (καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς / ὁμόσπορος τε καὶ φονεύς, ll. 459–60). Recognizing that Laius' *genos* had produced no heirs, Oedipus vows to fight for him "as if he had been my father" (l. 264). This *genos*, of course, will turn out to be the "unendurable race" sired by Oedipus (*genos atleton*, l. 791; cf. 1059).

As Aeschylus in the *Libation Bearers*, Sophocles uses in this play the physical confrontation between mother and son to dramatize a moment of unspeakable horror – in this case, the exposure of the crime of incest. As Oedipus moves closer to discovery, the ambiguity of language intensifies. Indeed, Jocasta embodies this linguistic mode through her double status as legitimate wife of Oedipus and as his biological mother. When the chorus identifies her to the Messenger as the "wife and mother of that one's children," the word order in Greek implies, "this is his wife and mother" (γυνὴ δὲ μήτηρ θ' ἦδε τῶν κείνου τέκνων, l. 928; see Goldhill 2009: 23). The ignorance of mother and son as to their true relationship heightens the dramatic irony throughout the scene, until they uncover the terrible truth. Oedipus has already suspected in his youth that he is supposititious or "counterfeit to his father" (πλαστός ὡς εἶην πατρί, l. 780). Without a father, Oedipus requires the knowledge of the mother to recover his true identity – a knowledge, as it turns out, that Jocasta indeed possesses. She provides a substantial clue early in the scene, when she advises Oedipus to ignore the oracle, adducing as proof the prophecy that Laius

would die at the hands of his son: “Not three days passed after the birth of the child when that one bound together his ankles and cast him out by the hands of others on the trackless mountain” (παιδὸς δὲ βλάστας οὐ διέσχον ἡμέραι / τρεῖς, καὶ νιν ἄρθρα κείνος ἐνζεύξας ποδοῖν / ἔρριπεν ἄλλων χερσίν εἰς ἄβατον ὄρος, ll. 717–19; cf. 851–9). The casting out of the infant brings up again the question of place: the infant is abandoned on Mt. Citheron, rescued, and brought to Corinth. Oedipus will later use a cognate of *blaste* (“bud” or “birth”) to describe the terrible engendering of his own children, “born as they were born” (βλαστοῦσ’ ὅπως ἔβλαστε, l. 1376). Moreover, the reference to the hobbling of Oedipus’ feet will serve as the primary token by which he soon learns to recognize himself (ll. 1032–4).

The revelation that indeed Jocasta had already given birth to a child prior to the arrival of Oedipus at Thebes is accompanied by significant hints about the true relationship between the speakers. For example, Jocasta observes that Oedipus bears a resemblance to the deceased Laius: “your appearance is not far from his” (μορφῆς δὲ τῆς σῆς οὐκ ἀπεστᾶται πολὺ, l. 743). Once Oedipus suspects that he is the murderer of Laius, Jocasta again calls into question the validity of oracles, supporting her view with the fact that “my child” (παιδὸς ἐξ ἐμοῦ, l. 854) never killed his father, as prophesied. When she instructs Oedipus not to fear marriage with his mother (τὰ μητρὸς μὴ φοβοῦ νυμφεύματα, l. 980), reassuring him that such things are common in dreams, she comes perilously close to the truth. Upon learning that he is not a blood relative of either Polybus or Merope (ll. 1016–20), but rather a foundling from Mt. Citheron who still bears the scars of his exposure, Oedipus’ fears about patricide and incest are allayed. However, this discovery forces a terrible knowledge upon Jocasta. She recognizes the truth much earlier than her son, and begs him to stop: “May you never find out who you are!” (εἶθε μήποτε γνοίης ὅς εἶ, l. 1068).

The disjunction between what Jocasta knows and what Oedipus mistakenly believes is painfully illustrated by the latter’s continued struggle to apprehend the truth. Shifting his focus from the murderer of Laius, he turns to the problem of his own identity. He focuses on identifying his biological mother, perhaps because he assumes that he is the product of an illicit union and the father is unknown. He first believes himself to be of servile origins, from a “third mother” or third-generation slave (*trites* [...] *metros*, 1062–3). Then, unable to point to a mortal woman, he invokes Fortune as his mother (1080–2). The chorus further speculates about his maternal origins, citing first Mt. Citheron as his nurse and mother (τροφὸν καὶ ματέρα, l. 1091), and then speculating that he is the offspring of a liaison between an unnamed nymph and a god, such as Hermes, Apollo, or Dionysus (1098–109). In his exchange with the herdsman, however, Oedipus discovers not the identity of his mother – the focus of his previous speculations – but that of his father: the infant came from Laius’ house and was in fact his own child (κείνου γέ τοι δὴ παῖς ἐκλήξεθ’, l. 1171). Again, Jocasta holds the key to Oedipus’ identity, since the herdsman acknowledges that “she inside could say most beautifully how it was” (l. 1172). Whereas Jocasta had earlier stated that Laius cast the baby from the house (*keinos* [...] *errhipsen*, ll. 718–19), the herdsman now says that Jocasta herself gave him away (l. 1173). The language again comes close to exposing the true relationship of mother and child when Oedipus uses *tekousa*, a word that expresses the physical closeness between mother and child, as we have seen, of the woman who gave up him up (l. 1174). Indeed, this new detail, that Jocasta, not Laius, gave away the baby, forces upon Oedipus the recognition of his true identity: “I who have been found to be accursed in birth, accursed in wedlock, accursed in the shedding of blood” (ὄστις πέφασμαι φύς τ’ ἀφ’ ὧν οὐ χρῆν, ξὺν οἷς τ’ / οὐ χρῆν ὀμιλῶν, οὐς τέ μ’ οὐκ ἔδει κτανῶν, ll. 1184–5).

The revelation of Oedipus' true origins activates the agricultural terminology that was absent during the scene with Jocasta but now returns with increasing intensity. The proliferation of references to the sown field signifies not simply fertility, but the dysfunctional sexuality that interrupted, and will ultimately eradicate, the paternal line. In this regard it brings together the imagery of blighted land and thwarted procreation described in the first part of the play. It also suggests the problem of heredity and the possibility of monstrous birth associated with the mother, in whom the source of life is also its termination. The chorus is the first to bring this imagery to the foreground when it responds thus to Oedipus' cries of horror: "How could the fields of your father put up with you so long in silence?" (πῶς ποτε πῶς ποθ' αἱ πατρῶ-/ αἱ σ' ἄλοκες φέρειν, τάλας, / σῖγ' ἐδυνάθησαν ἐς τοσόνδε, ll. 1211–13; cf. Ormand 1999: 140–1). The chorus' question understands Jocasta as the physical property of the father – a property that has been violated by the son: both have shared in the nuptial chamber (*thalamepoloi*, l. 1210), in a monstrous "marriage without marriage" (*agamon gamon*, l. 1214), which has eroded the boundaries between parent and child, making them one and the same (τεκνοῦντα καὶ τεκνούμενον, ll. 1214–15).

Jocasta also makes use of similar language in the moments before her death, although she stresses the role of the mother in the incest crime through repetition of words for maternal generation:

Remembering the ancient sowings [*spermaton*], by which he himself would die, and would leave her to give birth [*ten de tiktousan*] to a begetting unhappy in children [*dusteknon paidourgian*].
She laments the marriage bed, where she,
doubly wretched, would give birth to a husband from her husband [*ex andros andra*] and children from her child [*tekn' ek teknon tekoï*]. (ll. 1246–50)

Worse than giving birth to what will destroy her, she has spawned her husband's destruction and skewed his bloodline. The problem of place returns in her allusion to the marriage bed, site both of Oedipus' original conception and of that of their children – in other words the place where she gave birth to all of them. Her "double wretchedness" recalls not only her double status as wife and mother, but also the double status of her husband and children.

Lastly, in entering the house Oedipus also draws upon the metaphor of the sown field as he seeks "the wife not a wife, but the field that had yielded two harvests, himself and his children" (γυναῖκά τ' οὐ γυναῖκα, μητρώαν δ' ὅπου / κίχοι διπλῆν ἄρουραν οὐ τε καὶ τέκνων, ll. 1256–7). Like Jocasta, he evokes the paradox of doubleness, Jocasta as both his mother and wife, and the birth of himself and his own children from the same source. The designation of Jocasta as a field, not a woman, recalls earlier dislocations of place and their connection to Oedipus' identity: his rescue on Mt. Cithaeron, his flight from Corinth, and his problematic presence at Thebes. All of these places, in fact, instantiate the mother in some form: Mt. Cithaeron as the site of maternal abandonment, Corinth as the home of his adoptive mother, and Thebes as the source of maternal origin. The return to Thebes, then, has re-enacted the fatal autochthonous sowing of Cadmus, resulting in famine and sterility (DuBois 1988: 70).

Such dislocations of place figure prominently in the final scene, where the metaphor of the sown field conveys both the horror of incest and the need to forsake Theban earth as the symbol of monstrous generation. Oedipus' use of agricultural language in the play's final lines graphically acknowledges his ultimate violation of place, for he has

“sowed his mother, where he himself was sowed, and begot [children] from the source of his own being” (τὴν τεκοῦσαν ἤρσεν, / ὄθεν περ αὐτὸς ἐσπάρη, κὰκ τῶν ἴσων / ἐκτήσαθ’ ὑμᾶς, ὥνπερ αὐτὸς ἐξέφυ, ll. 1497–9; cf. 1485). His proper place is not the marriage bed of Jocasta nor the Corinthian court, but Cithaeron, where his parents, while living, had already established his tomb (ll. 1451–4). Thus, the crime of incest not only involves a dislocation of place, but also has resulted in a terrible multiplication of identities: the son is not only a son but also a husband; the children are not simply the offspring of their father but his siblings too; the mother is both wife and a mother to her son. This chain of double identities produced through the mother represents the most extreme and fatal expression of maternal affiliation. Understood in symbolic terms, it evokes the threat posed to the stability of the democratic *polis* by the maternal blood tie and by familial insularity – a theme familiar from the Aeschylean model.

Guide to Further Reading

On the representation of women in antiquity and Athenian drama, see especially Pomeroy (1975), Foley (1981a and 1981b), Easterling (1984), duBois (1988), Zeitlin (1990 – now also available in (1996), *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*. Chicago), and Loraux (1993 and 1998).

On the family in ancient Greece, see Lacy (1968), Ogden (1996), Patterson (1998), Pomeroy (1998).

For general discussions of Sophoclean drama, see Knox (1964), Winnington-Ingram (1980), and Segal (1995).

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Marriage in Sophocles: A Problem for Social History

Cynthia Patterson

[T]ragedy is the imitation not of persons but of action and life; and happiness and unhappiness consist in action.

Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450^a16–18

1 Introduction

In Sophocles' tragedies, married life – and the action or “business” of marriage – seems to be inherently unhappy. Unhappy marriage is, of course, the stuff of drama, then and now, but Sophocles depicts in his tragedies a starkly bleak view of marriage, without any apparent suggestion that it *could* be happy. Focusing on the female characters of Sophocles' tragedies, Kirk Ormand finds that marriage “fails to be a *telos* in the full sense of the word,” but is rather “a state of perpetual and unfulfilled longing” (Ormand 1999: 161). His judgment applies quite broadly to women both married and unmarried, royal or slave, loyal and adulterous (or incestuous). But, since marriage is essentially a partnership or “yoking together” (Arist. *Pol.* 1253^b10) and its *telos* (goal/end) is presumably the functioning – or the good (or happy) functioning – of that partnership, we can also include the male characters in the landscape of Sophoclean tragic marriage – for example, Heracles with Deianeira or Creon with Eurydice. Doing so drives the point home: Sophocles leaves his marriages incomplete, unfulfilled – and certainly unhappy for both spouses. It also raises the question of the significance of this feature of Sophocles' drama for our understanding of his society and of the place of marriage within it. What, if anything, do these tragic marriages have to do with social reality?

In this chapter I consider the portrayal of marriage in five of Sophocles' surviving tragedies: *Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Electra*, *Ajax*, and *The Women of Trachis* – with the eye of a social historian. (A number of Sophocles' fragmentary plays, such as *Hermione* and *Tereus*, may also have contained significant comments on marriage. For the fragments of Sophocles, see Hahnemann in this volume.) I argue here that Sophocles' drama should

not be seen either as a critique or as a confirmation of contemporary marriage and gender hierarchies – nor, even less, as a picture of “how married life was at that time.” Aristotle’s comments in the *Poetics* – and the citing of Sophocles himself – may offer some guidance on what might be called the modality of Sophoclean marriage. After arguing that in poetry “things probable [*eikota*] though impossible [*adunata*] should be preferred to the possible [*dunata*] but implausible [*apithana*]” (Arist. *Po.* 1460^a26–7), Aristotle suggests a corresponding standard for the correctness of poetic mimesis: “If the criticism is that something is not true [*alethe*], perhaps it is as it ought to be [*hos dei*], just as Sophocles said he created characters as they ought to be, Euripides as they really are” (1460^b32–4). Leaving aside the question of the relevance of the comment for Euripides’ drama, we can understand Aristotle (and Sophocles) as saying that the truth of Sophoclean drama (and characters) is not historical truth, but a kind of philosophical or necessary truth.¹ Using his favorite analogy of painting, Aristotle repeats his comments on plausibility and possibility a bit later and adds: “It may be impossible that people should be as Zeuxis painted them, but it is better [*beltion*] so. For the *paradeigma* ought to be of higher stature” (1461^b12–13).² In this context Sophocles’ characters, portrayed “as they ought to be,” are not ideally good – clearly they often are not! – but simply ideal or paradigmatic, and their starkness and severity becomes the starkness and severity of the paradigm (cf. Hall 1997: 99, where the “tragic universe” is said to be “simultaneously idealized and dysfunctional”). Sophocles’ characters and their actions, then, portray or “imitate” not a functioning community, but essential and conflicting principles of that community. The value of his drama as a source for social history – and of his dramatic marriages as evidence of social reality – is thus limited, but also deepened. We do not learn much about “everyday married life” in classical Athens from Sophocles’ plays, but we do come to understand, as they are “writ large” on the tragic stage, the necessary choices of ancient marriage and the essential tensions of marriage as a cultural institution built upon, and shaping, a natural biological relationship. But what were the elements of marriage in classical Athens? Before we can consider Sophocles’ images of marriage, we need to be clear as to what we mean by marriage in the Athenian context, and how marriage functions as a social institution.

2 The Process of Marriage in Classical Athens

Turning again to Aristotle, we learn that “there is no name for the yoking together of husband and wife” (*Pol.* 1253^b). But there is no need to panic. What we, today, call the institution and relationship of marriage (in the singular), in Athens (and Greece) was a composite of several identifiable legal, social, and religious events, actions, and activities. Ancient Athenian marriage is best understood as a process unfolding over time, its main features being the betrothal (*enguein*) and wedding celebration (*gamein*), followed by the creation of a household (*sunoikein*) and the production of children (*paidopoiein*). All four terms could stand for the marriage relationship (the part for the whole), but the “yoking together” was a process, not a single event (Patterson 1991). The successful completion of the process involved seeing it begin anew, as children entered adulthood (often at what we might consider a very young age) to begin their own marriages, and this fulfillment was a key part of happiness. Thus, Solon gives the first prize for happiness to Tellus, who not only received the honor of public burial but “had fine children [*paides*] and lived to see children [*tekna*] born to them” (Hdt. 1.30). A brief survey of the ancient Greek and Athenian marriage process will reveal the specific ways in which

marriage gave shape to the lives of both men and women, and it will also provide a social context or introduction for the discussion of the dramatic and “paradeigmatic” portrayal of marriage in the drama of Sophocles.

Betrothal (engue)

According to an Athenian law, perhaps Solonian, cited in Demosthenes’ speech *Against Leochares*, “[the woman] whom father or brother or grandfather has betrothed/entrusted [*enguese*], from this woman are born legitimate children [*paidas gnesious*]” (Dem. 44.49). Unstated but clear is the identity of one to whom the betrothal is made or the trust is given: the husband and father of the woman’s future children. *Engue* (“betrothal”) is, then, essentially a contract between two men, with the specific purpose of establishing the legitimate (*gnesios*) status of future children born to one man by the daughter (or sister or granddaughter) of another. The woman – and future wife – may not have been present; her presence was not necessary for the completion of the contract (see Oakley and Sinos 1993). Yet establishing that a person’s mother was a *gune enguete* (“wedded woman”) was a key point in courtroom arguments for his or her legitimacy and thereby for the claim to inheritance or citizenship. As a result, this is the moment in the marriage process about which there is most public or official scrutiny. It is also the moment at which the woman seems most passive, which is reflected in the agricultural language that may have been part of the traditional “contract.” The words of a father in Menander’s *Dyskolos*, “I betroth/entrust (*enguo*) this woman to you for the purpose of the cultivation of legitimate children” (l. 842; see also *Samia* 727 and *Pk.* 1013–140), are often taken as a genuine quotation of the language of *engue*. Whether or not this was in fact customary usage, Menander’s language captures the essential interest of *engue* in the status of the children a woman might bear. And, whether or not a woman was present, *engue* changed her status – she was now an *enguete gune*. But this was not yet marriage.

Wedding (gamos)

Engue appears frequently in public courtroom discussions of legitimacy, but the wedding celebration (*gamos*) was a more genuinely public event. Marriages are the first event described by Homer in the “city at peace” on the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*:

And there were marriages [*gamoi*] in one, and festivals.
They were leading the brides along the city from their maiden chambers
Under the flaring of torches, and the loud bride song was arising.
(*Il.*18.490–3, trans. R. Lattimore)

And the *Odyssey* also includes a notable acknowledgment of the public character of the *gamos*, when Odysseus orders his household to “dance to merry music,” so that the neighbors will think the house is celebrating a wedding (“Married at last – the queen so many courted [...],” 23.150 ff.) rather than cleaning up the bloody slaughter of the suitors. More extensive evidence comes from Athenian painted pottery, particularly those vases made for feminine use or for use in the *gamos* itself (see Oakley and Sinos 1993; also Sutton 1981). From these images, supplemented by bits and pieces of text, we can put together a wedding celebration that was itself a process, beginning with sacrifices to, among others, the divine pair Zeus and Hera and nuptial baths for the bride and groom.

There followed a bridal dinner, usually in the house of the bride, and then a torch-lit procession, as singing and dancing friends and relations accompanied the couple to their new home – where they spent the night and awoke to another full day of feasting and celebration. And now husband and wife were ready to enter upon their marriage.

Setting up a household (sunoikein)

Now began the hard work of marriage and the setting up of the common household (*oikos*). Odysseus' wish for Nausicaa:

And may the gods accomplish your desire;
 A home, a husband, and harmonious
 Converse with him – the best thing in the world
 Being a strong house held in serenity
 Where man and wife agree (6.195–9, trans. R. Fitzgerald)

– captures the essential partnership of the marital household and reminds us of the partnership of Odysseus' household, to which he longs to return. Perhaps the most imaginative yet realistic account of marital “living together” from the ancient Greek world, however, comes from Plutarch's short essay on marriage, *Marital Advice* (*Gamelika parangelmata*). Written as a marriage gift to his friends Eurydice and Pollianus, the essay discusses the importance of marital harmony and partnership through a long series of analogies. A typical example is the following:

When two notes are struck together, the melody belongs to the lower note. Similarly, every action performed in a good household [*sophronouse oikia*] is done in agreement by each partner [*hup' amphoteron homonoounton*], but displays the leadership and decision of the husband. (Ch. 11)

That “living together” (*sunoikein*) was key to what marriage was in ancient Athens (and no doubt in Greece in general) is evident in its use in the marriage laws cited in the fourth-century case of Apollodorus against Neaira:

If a foreigner [*xenos*] shall live together [*sunoikein*] with an Athenian woman in any way or manner whatsoever, he may be indicted before the *thesmothetai* by anyone who chooses to do so [...] The same principle shall hold also if an alien woman shall live together with an Athenian [...]. ([Dem.] 59.16)

The use of *sunoikein* here does not indicate that Athenians did not distinguish marriage from concubinage – it was hardly illegal for an Athenian man to keep a foreign concubine; rather the law chooses that aspect of marriage that seemed (as it did to Plutarch) most essential to the relationship: the common household.

Begetting children (paidopoia)

Nevertheless, a marital household in ancient Greece needed children to be complete and successful. *Engue* assumed the subsequent birth of children who would be legitimate; in its most basic sense, *gamos* designated a sexual union that carried the possibility, and usually the hope, of children. So at the end of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* Athena promises the

Furies that sacrifices “on behalf of children and the *telos gamelios* [fulfillment or rite of marriage]” will be theirs (A. *Eu.* 834). The importance of children is explicitly underlined in the gloss given to *sunoikein* by Apollodorus in his speech against Neaira: “For this is what *sunoikein* is – when someone produces children [*paidopoietai*] and sons to phratry and deme and bestows daughters to husbands” ([Dem.] 59.122). On the other hand, if a woman did not bear children, doubt might be cast on her status as wife (see e.g. Isaeus 3). That *sunoikein* should entail *paidopoiein* is readily established – as, for example, in a didactic remark that Ischomachus makes to his wife in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*: “why do you suppose your parents gave you in marriage and why did I marry you? So that we both would have the best possible partner in the household and in the production of children” (7.11).

In sum, Athenian (and Greek) marriage is a process, one of the clearest and most complete single statements of which is provided by Herodotus’ description of the marriage of Agariste – the daughter of Cleisthenes, tyrant of Sicyon – and the Athenian Megacles. Cleisthenes held a Panhellenic contest for the hand of his daughter and, after declaring Megacles the winner, he said: “to Megacles son of Alcmaeon I pledge [*enguo*] my child Agariste by the law of the Athenians.” Then Herodotus continues: “when Megacles accepted the betrothal [*phamenou enguasthai*] the wedding [*gamos*] was confirmed by Cleisthenes.” And “from these two living together [*touton sunoikesanton*] was born Cleisthenes the Athenian” (Hdt. 6.130). This was marriage, a process that, like the course of life itself, had to be run to the end before it could be judged happy.

3 Sophoclean Marriages

In five of his surviving seven tragedies – *Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Electra*, *Ajax*, and most especially *Women of Tracchis* – Sophocles offers portraits of marriage through the words and actions of a variety of characters. Only in *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus* is marriage not a concern. In this section I briefly survey Sophoclean marriages (in the surviving tragedies) against the background of the account of marriage outlined in the previous section. I make no claim to do justice to the literary complexity and richness of these plays, but I hope to call attention, as a social historian, to the ways in which they, through their characters, can be seen to instantiate, in the tragic mode, the essential paradigms of the ancient Greek marriage process. We do not see “real marriages” in action, but extreme situations of crisis and conflict set in distant times or places, which nonetheless (or for that very reason) illuminate the absolutely central place of marriage as the first partnership of contemporary Athenian society.

Antigone

The figure of Creon looms over the action of *Antigone*, as he imposes his will (or attempts to do so) on the other characters and in the process destroys his own marriage and the possibility of marriage between Antigone and Haemon (his niece and son). Although he emphasizes the enforcement of public law and order and this issue might seem to be his only concern in the drama, Creon also makes quite clear his view of marriage, which essentially reduces it to the act of *engue* (betrothal). For him, marriage seems to be

nothing more than a contract made between men, in which the woman/wife is a passive object of exchange. Antigone is the betrothed and intended bride of his son Haemon, a fact not mentioned by anyone until line 568, when Ismene confronts Creon with the question: “Will you kill the bride of your own son?” Creon’s answer is significant: “There are other fields for him to plow” (l. 569). For him, the wife is replaceable; other “fields” will do as well for a man’s plow. The tragic error of this understanding (or misunderstanding) is brutally evident at the end of the play, when he has no longer a wife or a family.

Now it might seem “impossible” that a man could so ignore the welfare of his own family members and could sentence to death his own niece and future daughter-in-law. The Athenian audience would certainly have recognized that, after the death of Antigone’s father and brothers, Creon was her guardian. Indeed, it was Creon who likely had betrothed or entrusted Antigone to his son Haemon. But, as Aristotle suggests, the possible (or the real) should not be looked for in Sophocles’ drama, but rather the probable, based on character or on the “ideal” paradigm. Creon is the paradigmatic public/political man who sees marriage as essentially a contract between men. He is this man purely and completely; and his actions reflect his character. The result of his actions is, likewise, complete: the horrifying sequence of suicidal deaths that conclude the play. Haemon and Antigone celebrate their *gamos* in death in the bridal chamber/tomb where Creon has sent Antigone “to live a buried life,” and the play ends with the Messenger’s report that Eurydice, Creon’s wife and Haemon’s mother, had killed herself – but not before cursing Creon as a “childkiller” (l. 1305). So the *Antigone*.

Oedipus Tyrannus

The image of marriage as agricultural cultivation is again prominent in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, with repeated emphasis on Oedipus’ confusion of the maternal and marital field: “he will be the son and husband of his mother, he will be a sower in the same place and murderer of his father,” says Teiresias early in the play (ll. 459–60), and the theme only becomes more insistent as the drama progresses. The marriage of Oedipus and Jocasta in fact confuses all the parts of the marriage process. Against the backdrop of the “unfortunate” marriage of Laius and Jocasta, Oedipus, the child of that marriage, returns to the bed of his mother and begins the process anew. Jocasta plays a double marital and family role as well. Unlike the figure of Eurydice in *Antigone*, who is barely allowed a word and whose suicide after the loss of her household and children seems to take all by surprise, the mother/wife Jocasta is center stage, from her entry at line 634, when she rebukes her brother Creon and her husband/son Oedipus for quarreling, to her exit at line 1070. After realizing who Oedipus is and after hearing him wish her “joy in her rich family,” she has a final pronouncement on his identity: “Alas, alas, unhappy! For this is all I can call you, and nothing else ever again” (ll. 1071–2). She then goes off stage and indoors to her suicide. In this play the action and the characters may again seem quite impossible, but the tragedy of the confusion of marriage in the family of Oedipus certainly calls attention to the social foundation that a rightly ordered marriage both requires and provides.

Electra

With *Electra* we move from Thebes and the family and marriages of Laius, Jocasta, and Oedipus to Argos (or Mycenae) and those of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus. Not only has Clytemnestra cut short her marriage by killing her husband,

she has also actively taken a new partner with whom she sleeps (*suneudein*: see e.g. l. 587) and produces children (*paidopoiein*: l. 589), while preventing her well-born children from coming of age. Her new adulterous and “polluted” marriage (ll. 493–4) keeps Orestes from entering into his inheritance and Electra from entering her own marriage, grievances that drive them at least as much as the murder of their father. If, in the words of Apollodorus to Neaira’s jury, “this is what *to sunoikein* is – when someone produces children [*paidopoetai*] and introduces sons to phratry and deme and bestows daughters to husbands” ([Dem.] 59.122), then Electra and Orestes can rightly charge Clytemnestra with creating a new and false household, which destroys their own. But Clytemnestra has an answer that also calls on the values of marriage, arguing that Agamemnon died justly (or “Justice took him”) because he – who “did not suffer the same pain when he begot [sowed] as I did, the one giving birth” (ll. 532–3) – sacrificed his daughter to the gods. Further, he did this for his brother Menelaus and *his* marriage, clearly the act of “a thoughtless father with poor judgment” (*aboulou kai kakou gnomen patros*, l. 546), who valued another family over his own, “sowing” but not protecting his daughter.

Significantly, Sophocles’ Clytemnestra sees the crucial issue as Agamemnon’s betrayal of their common family or household in favor of that of his brother, rather than as the terrible but necessary choice envisioned by Aeschylus (the “yoke of necessity,” *Ag.* 218), which set Iphigeneia’s life against the success of the Greek army. Sophocles’ Electra brushes aside Clytemnestra’s accusation, saying that Agamemnon killed Iphigeneia unwillingly, because Artemis demanded it; but she, Clytemnestra, killed *him* because she was persuaded by the “evil man” with whom she now slept (ll. 561–2). Clytemnestra, not Agamemnon, betrayed their family – an act that resulted, as noted earlier, not just in the “casting out” of their properly born children but, above all, in Electra’s unmarried and childless state. Note especially that both Electra and Clytemnestra argue the justice of their case on the basis of the values of marriage, each one claiming the greater support of Dike or the Furies. Each presents what can be seen as a necessary or paradigmatic position; yet, despite Orestes’ and the chorus’ optimistic last words, no marriage or household survives the end of play.

Ajax

Ajax is the story of the madness and suicide of the hero Ajax – and of the effect of both on the three people closest to him: his “spear-won” concubine Tecmessa, their son Eurysaces, and his bastard brother Teucer – a decidedly irregular household. The plot in brief is as follows. At the end of the Trojan War, the victorious Greeks had awarded the prize of the armor of Achilles to Odysseus, thus driving Ajax into a murderous rage, from which the Greek heroes were only saved when Athena took away his senses. Thinking that the Greek cattle were the Greek leaders, Ajax savagely slaughtered them, and as the play opens he is still gloating in his tent, not yet returned to sanity. When he does see clearly again and recognizes what he has done, he considers that there is no possibility of regaining his lost honor and begins to make his farewells in veiled but clear words, saying to the chorus: “it is not the way of a clever doctor to chant incantations over a pain that needs surgery” (ll. 581–2).

Tecmessa had been the first to realize Ajax’s intentions and begged him to think of her and to continue living, in words that echo in a remarkable way those of Andromache to Hector in Book 6 of the *Iliad* (Ormand 1999: 112–16; *Il.* 6.390–502,

Aj. 485–524). As Andromache implores Hector to stay within the city, so Tecmessa begs Ajax that he, who is everything to her, should not abandon her, and, in a way remarkably similar to Hector’s fears for Andromache, Tecmessa imagines her own fate together with that of their child: “For on the day when you perish and by your death abandon me, believe that on that day I shall be seized with violence by the Argives together with your son and shall have the treatment of a slave” (*Aj.* 496–9). But, as Ormand notes, Sophocles “deftly undercuts” his own comparison: Hector calls Andromache his wife, while Tecmessa calls herself a “bedmate” (Ormand 1999: 113). And Tecmessa, a “spear-won” battle prize, is of course already a slave, as she herself says (l. 489).

Andromache pleads with Hector that, with her family gone (her father and seven brothers were all killed by Achilles, and her mother was ransomed only to be “struck down by Artemis in her father’s house”), he is her “father, mother, brother, and bedmate” (*Il.* 6.429). Tecmessa also has only Ajax to protect her, since Ajax *himself* destroyed her fatherland (*patris*) and her parents were taken off to Hades by a mysterious “other fate” (*alle moira*, l. 516). Finally, unlike Hector, Ajax is unmoved, although he does later offer a prayer for his son that recalls Hector’s own (*Aj.* 550–9, cf. *Il.* 6.476–81). In sum, the overall effect of the comparison is to draw attention to the difference between the model and its imitation and to emphasize that a slave is not a wife and vice-versa. We might recall here Aristotle’s comment in the *Politics* that the nameless “yoking of husband and wife” is distinct from the other two primary household relationships, that of parent and child and that of master and slave. Using analogies from the public realm, Aristotle explained that the rule of the master over the slave was despotic, that of the parent over the child monarchic, and that of the husband over the wife political – with the qualification that in this case the political rule was not shared: the husband never left office or gave up the “trappings” of authority (1259^b9–10).

The inferior position of Tecmessa is underlined by the contrast with Ajax’s plan for their son, Eurysaces. Leaving Tecmessa’s own fate undetermined, Ajax instructed her to “command” his bastard brother Teucer to bring his son to his parents’ home, where he would “tend them in old age” (l. 570). By giving his son his shield (and name) and this responsibility, Ajax legitimizes Tecmessa’s child as his own heir – that is, as his own father’s heir – overlooking Teucer and leaving Tecmessa a “spear-won” concubine with an uncertain future. Although Teucer does refer to Tecmessa as Ajax’s *gune* (woman or wife: l. 1168), suggesting a certain ambiguity about her status in his mind, there is nonetheless no suggestion that Tecmessa as “widow” would accompany Eurysaces to Greece. That she does not have the position of wife is further made clear through her silence during the funeral rites for Ajax. Teucer does not include her in the burial ritual he undertakes, after standing up, with Odysseus’ support, to the scorn of Menelaus and Agamemnon. Unlike Andromache, who in the *Iliad* gives the first funeral lament for her dead husband Hector, Tecmessa, now silent, offers only a lock of her hair (and she does it indirectly, through her son).

In sum, in his portrait of Ajax and Tecmessa, Sophocles has painted a striking image of what marriage is not, relying on implicit contrasts with the *Iliad* to make clear, it seems to me, that marriage is not only a partnership but also a kind of friendship. Men and women cannot be equals within ancient Greek marriage, but, in a relationship that functions as a marriage, friendship might be considered essential (see Aristotle’s discussion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and specifically 1158^b, on the “unequal friendship” between husband and wife).

Women of Trachis

Finally, we come to *Women of Trachis*, a play that can be said to be essentially “about” marriage (Ormand 1999: ch. 2). As in *Ajax* but in a more extensive way, Sophocles seems to be drawing on a Homeric model, now the marriage of Penelope and Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, in order to call attention to the failure of its imitation in this play. The marriage of Deianeira and Heracles functions as a sort of negative model of marriage to the same extent that the marriage of Penelope and Odysseus is a positive model. Like Penelope, Deianeira waits at home, with her nearly grown son, for the return of her husband Heracles, who, like Odysseus, is a wandering hero. The similarities, however, serve to call attention to striking differences that lead to strikingly different endings – a happy reunion for the one marriage and death and suicide for the other. Both women have marriage and suitors on their mind, but in diametrically opposed ways. Deianeira opens the play by re-living her traumatic courtship by the river Achelous, “who came in three shapes to ask my father for me, at some times manifest as a bull, at others as a darting, coiling serpent, and again at others with a man’s trunk and a bull’s head; and from his shaggy beard there spouted steams of water from his springs” (ll. 10–14). From this monstrous suitor (often taken as a classic image of a young girl’s fear of male sexuality and as a fairly alarming bedmate in any case), Heracles, “the famous son of Zeus and Alcmene” rescued her and took her as his bride. But Deianeira’s fear has remained; it is now transferred to Heracles, for whom she “nourishes” (*trephein*) one fear after another. She has children to nourish, but it is her fear that she “nourishes” instead. Another striking indication of Deianeira’s being “stuck” in the moment of what we can see as her “betrothal” (*engue*) to Heracles is her use of agricultural language to refer to herself and their children: “We had, indeed, children, whom he, like a farmer who has taken over a remote piece of plowland, regards only when he sows and when he reaps” (ll. 31–3). Despite her children, Deianeira never seems to have become a full partner with Heracles in the *sunoikein* of marriage – the setting up and running of a common household. In contrast, at the opening of the *Odyssey*, Penelope is craftily holding at bay the plague of suitors encamped in her hall. That she is Odysseus’ partner in their common *oikos* is clear, as Odysseus himself is pleased to observe when he returns in disguise and sees her “winning gifts” from the suitors with her beauty and charming words (Book 18). At that point, Homer hints, she may already have a suspicion of her husband’s identity (see Winkler 1990), and the two may be suspected of playing a clever game with one another and against the suitors. Penelope is hardly a passive witness to the events of the poem. Indeed, it is often noted that her cleverness is a match for Odysseus’ – and she is not afraid to test him (and enrage him) with her trick of asking that his bed, built of a living olive tree, be moved into the courtyard.

Earlier in the poem Odysseus had wished Nausicaa a marriage undertaken in *homophrosune* (“like-mindedness”). Odysseus’ wish, of course, is realized in his own marriage with Penelope. As Helene Foley has shown, Homer subtly but unmistakably demonstrates the “like-mindedness” of this couple in a series of reverse similes, for instance, by comparing Penelope’s fame to that of a just king, or the weeping Odysseus to a woman mourning her lost husband (*Od.* 19.107–14; 8.523; Foley 1978; see also Felson 1994). Deianeira and Heracles, on the other hand, seem most of all to lack “like-mindedness” – and in contrast to the happy reunion of Penelope and Odysseus, for which Athena extends the night, no reunion is possible for this couple, who never meet on stage. Sophocles does

use a reverse simile to describe Heracles when, at the end of the play, the hero, suffering from the poison with which Deianeira unintentionally kills him, “cries out weeping like a girl” (*parthenos*, ll. 1071–2), and then three lines later calls himself a “womanish creature” (*thelus talas*, l. 1075). But this only serves to heighten his distance from his wife, as does his command that his son Hyllus marry Iole, the “spear-won” concubine he has brought home with him and with whom Deianeira had imagined that she would have to share both her bed and her marriage. Using the language of marriage in an oddly distorted way, Deianeira had protested, “yet what wife [*gune*] could live together [*sunoikein*] with this woman, sharing the same marriage?” (*koinonousa ton auton gamon*, ll. 545–6). And then, to win him back and save her marriage, Deianeira gave Heracles a robe laced with poison, trusting the deceitful words of the centaur who said that the substance (made from his own blood) was a love potion.

As he lies dying, in bitter anger against Deianeira, Heracles demands that his son Hyllus punish his mother for her deed and marry the woman who had provoked the deed. Hyllus protests vigorously against the order to marry the woman who had destroyed his parents and their marriage; he only consents under duress, calling on the gods as witnesses that the deed was “Heracles’ own” (ll. 1249–50).

How different is the interchange between Penelope and Odysseus and their son in Book 23 of the *Odyssey*! When Telemachus rebukes his mother for having a hard heart and not immediately acknowledging Odysseus as her husband, she replies that she and Odysseus know each other better than anyone else, and Odysseus supports her to Telemachus: “let your mother test me at her leisure/Before long she will see and know me best” (*Od.* 23, 113–14; see Felson 1994). It seems clear that, in portraying the unhappy and incomplete marriage of Deianeira and Heracles, Sophocles has drawn on, and contrasted, the “like-minded” and (after a 20-year separation) complete marriage of Penelope and Odysseus. The friendship of marriage, again, requires not equality but *homophrosune*.

At the end of *Antigone*, the chorus pronounces: “Good sense [*to phronein*] is by far the first part of happiness” (ll. 1348–9). Like-mindedness (*homophrosune*) would in turn seem to be the first part of a happy marriage (cf. the Plutarch passage quoted above, p. 384). But in *Women of Trachis*, the one play of Sophocles that makes marriage its focus, like-mindedness is absent, as is happiness.

4 Reading Sophocles as Social History

What value do Sophocles’ tragic and troubled marriages have for the social historian? What evidence might they provide for the character and experience of marriage in ancient Greece, or in Athens? Very little, said W. K. Lacey 44 years ago in *The Family in Classical Greece* (1968), excluding tragedy in general from his discussion with the comment that the “Athenian audience did not suppose that figures on the tragic stage were normal human beings living in normal family circumstances” (p. 10). Quite true; Athenians did not normally sentence their own nieces to be buried alive, marry or murder their mothers, commit suicide on the shores of Troy, or find themselves courted by a river god. Such a literalist understanding of historical significance, however, is rarely articulated today; a more mainstream view, especially among literary critics, is that, in ways “indirect and oblique,” tragedies produced on the Athenian stage “both respond to social and psychological realities and use marriage to address a larger set of social and political

issues” (Foley 2001: 60; cf. Hall 1997: 99). More specifically, Athenian drama, with its often “misbehaving” female characters, is seen as reinforcing the gender hierarchy of the democratic city: “play after play [...] portrays the disastrous effects on households and the larger community of divinely inspired madness, anger, sexual desire, or jealousy in women unsupervised by men” (Hall 1997: 109). No matter that, in “play after play,” male violence, anger, and aggression produce at least as much trouble!

The extraordinary openness and “freedom of speech” of ancient Athenian tragedy (Hall 1997) might suggest that the playwrights were subjecting Athenian society to scrutiny and exploring – as Ormand puts it – “the rifts and fissures” of Athenian society and Athenian marriage. Contemporary criticism, however, often views the result not as “radical critique,” but as “yet another form of containment” (Ormand 1999: 14). Women are put in their (subordinate) place, and the male order is affirmed (Zeitlin 1985).

I am not convinced that this message was Sophocles’ intention (for a similar doubt, cf. Griffin 1999a). In any case, if Athenian tragedy, written and performed by men for a male audience – still notionally male even if women were present (see further below) – mainly (or merely) reinforced the male-dominated social and political order, Athenian drama would hold little value or interest for the social historian, who hopes to go beyond – or under – the dominant ideology to investigate a larger lived reality. In what follows I suggest an alternative way to read Sophocles as social history, emphasizing instead his portrayal of tragic choices in tragically incomplete (and unreal) marriages that nonetheless help to clarify, again as “ideals,” the real complexities of the process of marriage in the world outside the theater.

The character of the audience in the theater, however, merits a comment here. Debate continues over whether women attended the Athenian theater performances, and “not proven” seems to be the usual verdict (see e.g. Goldhill 1997, but note Rehm 2006). Given that the performances were part of the festival of Dionysus, in which women certainly participated, the burden of proof may be on those who argue that women were not or could not be there. But perhaps the larger question is whether Sophocles (and other dramatists) imagined an audience that included women – or whether they wrote with only men in mind. Here I suggest that a consideration of the writing and audience of Sophocles’ contemporary, the historian Herodotus, may provide some guidance. Although Herodotus’ central theme may be war, his story is much larger, embracing human experience, male and female, in all its diversity. Whether or not we imagine women in the audience when Herodotus performed his *History* for the Athenians (to much acclaim), I do not know of anyone who argues that he wrote for a “men only” audience. What is important is that Herodotus wrote about “things human,” not simply about “things masculine”; and, although he was no doubt a “man of his time,” he did not write of women as an ideological “other” but as participants in the drama of his story (or stories). Despite the fact that one is an historian and the other a poet (and despite Aristotle), I suggest that we should recognize that Herodotus and Sophocles told stories with similar themes, and also with a similar, broadly conceived audience in mind.

5 Conclusion: Sophocles on Marriage

How, then, do we read the significance of the unfortunate and unhappy marriages portrayed by this evidently fortunate and happy man? It is true, of course, that Sophocles’ stories were traditional tales, and that he is not responsible for (and could not have

substantially altered) the details, and especially the outcomes, of the plots. Yet, as the summaries in Section 2 of this chapter have shown, the way in which the dramatist calls attention to the issue of marriage through his use of the contemporary language of marriage, and his portrait of the marriage process at various stages, make marriage an important theme even in plays where it may not seem to be crucial to the action (*Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Electra*, and *Ajax*). That is, Sophocles has chosen to tell his traditional tales of mythical kings and queens in language and with emphasis that calls attention to the contemporary marriage process and relationship. Similarly, it can be noted, Herodotus found marriage customs to be an essential “bedrock” institution for each of the many and diverse societies he describes in his *Histories*.

I suggest that we can read Sophocles as social history if we understand that his plays neither imitate reality nor propagate an ideology, but rather portray essential social values and human conflicts through characters who act in ways that would be most unlikely in the “real world,” but are nonetheless “necessary” given who these characters are. In *Antigone*, for example, Creon sees the world through a narrow political lens, which excludes women as players and completely subordinates marriage and the household to the male relationships of public, political life. Antigone herself, on the other hand, is, in a sense, a mirror image of Creon; for her a husband is replaceable, and both political power *and* marriage should yield to the ties of the natal family (here, the incestuous family of Oedipus) and to the “unwritten laws” of the gods. She is neither a “good” nor a “bad” woman (cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1990), but a character whose actions follow “by necessity” from who she is, just as Creon’s do from who he is. The necessary decisions these characters make create the tragedy of the drama, which is both less “real” (in the ordinary sense) than everyday life and more complex than everyday ideology. For the social historian, Sophocles’ characters present paradigms of social choice and social crisis; like the Athenian audience, which experienced the horrific events represented on stage with “pity or fear,” coming perhaps to a fuller understanding of the nature and difficulty of successful marriage, so also the social historian can read Sophocles’ depictions of marriage as instructive, in their “perfect” and archetypal failure, on what might underlie, in less dramatic and paradigmatic ways, the strength or weakness of a marriage in the “ordinary” world.

If *Antigone* shows marriage and the marriage process destroyed by a narrowness of vision (even if a heroic narrowness), *Oedipus Tyrannus* presents the consequences of completely confusing the process, as Oedipus returns to the bed of his mother. In *Electra* we see the violation of multiple elements of marriage: Electra angry that she is unable to come of age and enter into her own marriage because Clytemnestra has set up a false new marriage; and Clytemnestra arguing that Agamemnon had already betrayed their marriage through his sacrifice of Iphigeneia, the child of that marriage. In *Ajax*, the co-habitation (or “sharing a tent”) of Ajax and Tecmessa mimics marriage – they share a bed and have a child – but fails to be one, since they are master and slave, not husband and wife.

Women of Trachis presents us with Deianeira and Heracles, who never meet on stage and whose marriage fails by the same criterion that makes the Homeric marriage between Odysseus and Penelope a success: like-mindedness. It is worth noting that, although in this play Deianeira is represented as trapped in an unfulfilled marriage without recourse to help from her own family, this is not a reflection of social reality (cf. Ormand 1999: 24). In Athens marriage was not an “irrevocable” transaction; women retained connections with their natal families and remained important participants in the activities (including

marriage and burial rituals) of those families. But by representing Deianeira's experience in this stark and impossible yet necessary manner, Sophocles instructs both us and his immediate audience on what could make a real marriage successful, or even happy. Once again – and especially in this play – we can appreciate the depth and richness of Sophocles' portrayal of marriage – both in its relation to the poetic tradition and as social process. Reading Sophocles as social history, then, is a matter of allowing the necessities of his plots and characters to illuminate the contingencies of the historical record, so bringing to the fore the essential principles, realities, and tensions underlying marriage and Athenian society in general.

Happiness, as Solon advised, is often illusory – and cannot be awarded until all the evidence is in. According to the late fifth-century comic poet Phrynichus, Sophocles himself was a happy man:

Fortunate [*makar*] Sophocles, who after a long life
Died a happy [*eudaimon*] and a gifted man;
A fater writing many fine tragedies
He made a good end, having endured no evil. (Fr. 32, trans. H. Lloyd-Jones)

Whether and what part marriage played in that happiness is a question for another occasion, and most likely without a clear answer. But if that particular social history is irretrievable, the larger social history illuminated by Sophocles' drama is not.

Guide to Further Reading

The interconnections between Sophoclean drama and contemporary Athenian society have long been a focus of discussion. Victor Ehrenberg (1954) and Bernard Knox's *Oedipus at Thebes* (1957) remain fundamental discussions of the basic issues. More recently, and on the specific topic of this chapter, I recommend Rush Rehm (1996), Kirk Ormand (1999), Helene Foley (2001), and Josine Blok and Mark Griffith in Lardinois and McClure (2001).

Notes

- 1 Cf. Aristotle's well-known comments on the difference between history and poetry (*Po.* 1451^a36–^b11), introduced thus: "it is not the poet's function to relate actual events, but the kinds of things that might occur and are possible in terms of probability or necessity."
- 2 There seems to be some disagreement on the translation of this passage. Janko translates: "For it may be impossible that there are people like those Zeuxis painted, but [it is] better [so]. For [the artist] should improve on his model."

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Masculinity and Freedom in Sophocles

Bruce M. King

1 Introduction

A public life of martial exploit and political pre-eminence, recognized and praised by contemporaries and perhaps even by poets; a private life whose stable order is, conversely, best attested by silence; the engendering of a son whose deeds will substantively repeat those of the father, as they also recommemorate his name: such are the principal lineaments of masculinity under the sign of the epic hero. Sons reproduce their fathers, and the poet's praise recapitulates both, in an order that, in its repetitions, aspires to a numinous atemporality. In fifth-century Athens this model of the epic hero retains a hold upon the imagination; but the epic's preference for the past over the present – its projection of sons who might match, but never surpass, their fathers – increasingly ill fits a perfervid, imperially expansive, sometimes besieged city. Within Athens, masculinity (*ἀνδρεία*) then comes to be identified with the freedom of the citizen – itself manifest, to paraphrase Thucydides' Pericles, in an effortless abundance of brave and unconstrained action (Th. 2.39.4) and in an equally effortless autonomy of self (*τὸ σῶμα αὐτάρκης*), which aspires not to the paternal, but to the “delight” – *χάρις* – often associated with art (Th. 2.41.1). While the labors of the epic hero seek completion in the timeless songs of the bard, the easy, native freedom of the Periclean citizen translates into a life of artful action. The Athenian man thus needs no epic poet: his actions surpass those of his father and create their own present glory (see Th. 2.41.4: “we do not need the praise of a Homer [...]”).

And yet the Athenian man did not, of course, lack in tragic poets (even if unmentioned by Pericles). In the plays of Sophocles the principal forms and ends, mythic and contemporary, of Athenian masculinity are dramatized as spectacularly unfulfilled. While Sophoclean tragedy decisively critiques the epic model of masculine transmission through the son's repetition of the father's deeds and name, it is not the Periclean citizen of Thucydides' praises who subsequently comes to the fore, but rather a figure to whom the

city's promised alignment of masculinity and freedom is ever askew. In the set of readings that follows, I will argue that, in the evident absence of the old model of masculinity and in the context of the dramatized foundering of the new, Sophocles' protagonists (and not solely his male protagonists) articulate – if briefly and often enigmatically – a longing for a freedom that is understood not as the fulfillment of gender, but rather as a freeing from gender itself – that is, a freeing from the cultural practices through which gender is made out of sex. The tragedy of masculinity is inseparable from the tragedy of gender itself.

2 Masculinity Becomes Electra

At a desperate moment, Sophocles' Electra, thinking that Orestes has perished and, with him, any hope of revenge, implores her sister Chrysothemis to join her in killing Aegisthus; through bold, united action the sisters will gain a transformed future, which might also restore their original natures (*El.* 970–85):

[I]n the future you will be called free [ἐλευθέρα], as you were born, and you will get a fitting marriage; for everyone loves to look toward the excellent. And as for fame in the speeches of men, do you not see how much you will gain – for you and for me – if you obey me? Which of the citizens or strangers when he sees us will not hail us with praise? “Look on those sisters, friends, who preserved their father's house, who though their enemies were strong took no thought of their own lives, but stood forth to avenge murder! All should love them, all should reverence them; all should honor them at the feasts and among the assembled citizens for their manliness [ἀνδρεία]!” Such things will be said of us by all men, so that in life or in death our fame will never die.

Electra's speech is an ever more vertiginous fantasy of revenge and fame, as well as a bravura imagining of gender transgression. She begins her appeal to Chrysothemis with the promise that the murder of Aegisthus will win her a husband and will insure the protection of the paternal *oikos* (for Aegisthus is “not so stupid,” ll. 964–5, as to permit any further descendants of Agamemnon to survive). But thoughts of marriages to be gained (thoughts, that is, of normative kinship), whether for Chrysothemis or for Electra, can only be delusory in the context of plotting Aegisthus' death; for, although all may “love to look toward the fine,” the matrimonial allure of a man-killer for the eligible Mycenaean is surely negligible; Clytemnestra has already ruled this town. Electra herself, as she enters ever further into her own vision, imagines a future and a fame that surpasses the marital bonds of the *oikos*: the sisters will save not only their paternal line, but the city itself; they are to be tyrannicides to whom love, reverence, and honor will be granted not by a husband, but by “all” (note the quadruple repetition of forms of *πᾶς*- in ll. 981–4, as well as the usage at l. 973), whether citizens or outsiders (ll. 975, 982), at festivals and at civic gatherings (ll. 982–3). The sisters will be honored as heroes; in particular, the words of Electra's imagined speaker evoke a devotee of the cult of the Athenian tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton, whose praises continued to be sung in Sophocles' own time and whose statues could be seen in the Athenian agora (Juffras 1991: 103–4). But the sisters will also – and also in the manner of heroes – be both male and dead. At the culmination of Electra's performance of the public accolades to come, she imagines that the sisters will be praised for their ἀνδρεία (l. 983) – for their literal “manliness” (the abstract noun ἀνδρεία is, of course, derived from the concrete noun ἀνήρ, “man”). And in the lines that follow, and now in her own voice, Electra anticipates the κλέος (fame)

that will redound upon these manly sisters, when (or if) they “live or die” (l. 985). Of those alternatives, it is the latter that comes strongly to the fore in Electra’s speech, both in the invocation of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, who perished in their slaying of the tyrant Hipparchus (Th. 6.57; a “reckless action,” 6.58), as well as in the specific expectation of *kleos*, which refers precisely to the fame in song that the hero gains in recompense for his own death (at l. 976, Kamerbeek 1974 compares the imagined speech to a “laudatory epitaph”).

Electra’s speech carries her – and her audience – an enormous imaginative distance within a brief compass: from the present abjection of the two sisters to promises of a restorative wedding for Chrysothemis, to public acclaim for the sisters as icons of (male) citizenship, and, finally, to death and posthumous heroization. It is an account of the life course, though one that begins with a model of female completion (in marriage), only to end in a model of male completion (in heroic civic action). Indeed, Electra’s evocation of this bifurcated life course begins from considerations of birth (as it correspondingly ends in thoughts of death), for she exhorts Chrysothemis to join in killing Aegisthus, so that, in time to come, Chrysothemis might be called “free” or “a freewoman” (ἐλευθέρᾳ), as she was “by birth,” or even as she is “by nature” (ἐξέφυς, l. 970). Electra’s exhortation plays first to class loyalty: Chrysothemis will gain a husband fitting to her birth-rank; in marriage she will be a “freewoman.” Marriage, so the argument goes, restores, or even completes, an initial (female) nature: as Chrysothemis once was, so – in marriage – shall she once again be. And yet the difficulty of fully closing this argument is evident in the double valence of Electra’s language: “free” at birth (or by nature) is not easily compatible with “freewoman” by marriage; the ambiguity (which is reflected in the choices of contemporary translators and commentators: cf. e.g. Lloyd-Jones: “free [...] which you are by nature” with Kells: “freewoman” “in keeping with your ancestry”) is not finally sustainable, though an enormous amount of cultural energy, whether Greek or contemporary, goes into persuading otherwise (to paraphrase de Beauvoir: one is not born a freewoman, one becomes one). Chrysothemis might have been free at the moment of birth, as perhaps we all are, but then never again – and certainly not by marriage; or, to put it a bit more abstractly, certainly not by inscription into the kinship system (however cozy Chrysothemis’ imagined place in the social hierarchy). (The comic comparandum is Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* 379, where the leader of the women’s chorus proclaims “I am ἐλευθέρᾳ” precisely as she ceases to behave as a “freewoman” – that is, a wife – and claims a more absolute freedom within the city; and see Schaps 1998 for an argumentative and illuminating study of the freedom of Athenian women.)

As if responsive to the elisions of her own argument that Chrysothemis will have a suitor, that a husband will make her “free,” which are themselves indices of the secondary status of a woman’s freedom, Electra turns toward the masculine, as she shifts from imagining Chrysothemis’ wedding to joining – or figuratively marrying – the two sisters as tyrannicides who will be posthumously immortalized (in the manner of the lovers Harmodius and Aristogeiton) for their ἀνδρεία – for their quality as ἄνδρες (see Bassi 2003 for an illuminating study of the semantics of ἀνδρεία). As Electra moves from the woman’s life course to the man’s, her voice also shifts, from her evocation *in voce propria* of Chrysothemis’ wedding (never of her own) to her ventriloquizing of the praises of the celebrant/spectator (who is, presumably, male). The shift to the third person distances something of the shocking quality of Electra’s speech, but it does not finally diminish its extraordinarily transgressive force. Electra has re-engendered herself as a man – and not just any man, but one who is comparable both to a founding hero of the Athenian

democracy and to a hero of a recognizably Homeric sort (τις-speech is the familiar name of the convention; and note, too, that the spectator uses grammatically masculine forms of the dual in his praise of the “sisters”: κασιγνήτω, l. 977, ἀφειδήσαντε, l. 980). In her imagining of how she would be seen and praised, of how she would be a hero, Electra has removed herself from the kinship structures that create and constrain a woman. As if having recognized that Chrysothemis’ freedom (and so Electra’s) is impossible – that a freewoman is, by any crucial (Athenian) measure, always at least something of a cultural oxymoron (and a free woman even more so) – Electra has recourse to a fantasy of masculine heroic action, as if thus she might be truly “free,” ἐλευθέρος, as if in the larger realm of the city she might gain a field of unconstrained speech and action. And it is also at this juncture, at this explosion of transgressive desire, that conundrums of gender multiply: for the female protagonist – and especially for one who has been as abused as Electra – an escape from the founding structures of gender (as exemplified by the wedding, which both promises and limits freedom) is discovered in the idealized male life, which is completed not in marriage, but in martial, public action. And yet, as noted above, the hero’s life – for that is the only male life that Electra can imagine – is closely coupled with death (that, finally, is the force of Electra’s adoption of the third-person voice: she commemorates herself as a man and in the voice of a man); moreover, the hero’s life – or any near-image of it – is nowhere present (or is present only in memory) in the world that Electra inhabits. The hero, in Sophocles’ dramatization, is both death-bound and always already an anachronism. The difficult charge of Electra’s speech is that the desire for freedom articulates itself in the wish for a masculine life, which – for all that it tempts for its promise of a larger realm of freedom – is nonetheless also dramatized as a life that is multiply impossible: pledged to death, pledged to the past, and never free of its own social constraints. A recurrent aspect of the terrible poignance of Sophoclean heroes – male and female – is their desire for a freedom from the constraints of kinship (from the transformation of sex into gender); and some part of their haunting power is their ability to articulate that desire for freedom, even as they are soon to be – as is most often the case – violently re-inscribed within systems of gender and of social reproduction.

Within the action of the *Electra*, it is, of course, Orestes who will shortly come to the fore – who is, indeed, brought to new birth following his “death” at Delphi (ll. 1232–3: “Ah birth, birth – ἴω γοῦαι, γοῦαι – of one most beloved,” as Electra, in projective maternal glee, proclaims to Orestes). And yet Orestes emerges as an especially vicious, mindless model of masculine action: he kills Clytemnestra at Apollo’s command, but is unable to articulate the claims of justice that might ground the god’s orders (ll. 1424–5). Likewise, he kills Aegisthus in the literal and figurative dark, unable to respond to Aegisthus’ question about how his murders will permit him to escape the retributive killing that is the curse of the Pelopid house (ll. 1497–8); Orestes’ sole response – and his last words – is an imprecation to indiscriminate slaughter (ll. 1505–7): “whoever would act outside the law – kill them!” In the final lines of the play (1508–10) the chorus addresses itself to the “seed of Atreus” – σπέρμ’ Ἀτρέως – and proclaims that that child has “only just come through to freedom – δι’ ἐλευθερίας – having been completed by the effort.” Whether the chorus’ addressee is Electra or Orestes (or both), the conclusion is bitter: Electra is now free from the rule of Aegisthus, but she remains displaced, her wild desire, as well as her wild capacity for truth-telling, unlikely to be completed by a marriage whose limits she has already rejected; while Orestes’ new adult freedom can only be a mockery of the freedom for which Electra longed and for which she would have somehow, heroically, slipped the constraints of gender. Indeed, Orestes’ first assertive

acts within the play – which might be predictive of his rule as the new master of house and city – are to ask repeatedly for Electra’s silence (ll. 1236, 1238, 1251–2, 1257, 1259, 1271–2); that is, Orestes would annul Electra in the one realm in which she was most free and most dangerous – her speech (see l. 1256 for Electra’s habitual ἐλεύθερον στόμα; and see, more largely, the readings of Kitzinger 1991 and Ormand 1999: 60–78).

I have begun this chapter on the topic of masculinity in Sophocles with an extended reading of Electra’s fantasy of gender transgression because both the fantasy and its foreclosure – the fantasy and its ironies – elicit the larger difficulty of resolving a stable figure of masculinity in Sophocles. Though masculinity is, notoriously, the unmarked term, it rarely, if ever, turns out to be where it is named, and it is everywhere baffled; it is a central aspiration, though one that is ever unattainable, as it rests in the first place in the thrall of a model of action that is located in an irretrievable past. In the gap that then opens up between an idealized, poetic past and the post-heroic present of the *polis*, Sophoclean tragedy dramatizes the spectacular failure of an anachronistic – if still glintingly numinous, still charismatic – masculine norm (as in the self-destructions of Ajax and Heracles), even as it also dramatizes the emergence of forms of masculine practice that, for all their greater nearness to the norms of the *polis*, are nonetheless marked as destructive for the very intransigence of their homology between male self and city (as in the case of Creon), or are defined by a purely instrumental (and still civic) logic (Odysseus in *Philoctetes*, Agamemnon and Menelaus in *Ajax*, Polyneices in *Oedipus at Colonus*) or by a willful disregard of the past and its legacies (as is the case with Orestes). Masculinity, as it is represented by Sophocles upon the tragic stage of fifth-century Athens, is largely aporetic: the old heroic model, subjected to democratic critique, cannot withstand that critique; the willfully autonomous man is condemned by the *demos* to die by his own hand, by his own excess of individual force; and yet some *numen* still remains about the figure of the old hero – and perhaps all the more stubbornly as the stage comes to be populated by characters who aggressively mistake the norms of the city for those of consciousness itself.

The unsettled content and coherence of masculinity is especially evident in Electra’s fantasy of gender transformation, for the word ἀνδρεία, the most transparent of words for “the quality of being a man” and the word that is the culmination of the praise that Electra imagines will be hers (*El.* 983), appears only there in the extant corpus of Sophocles; “masculinity,” that is, appears only in the transgressive fantasy of a woman who is at the very ends of social possibility. Indeed, ἀνδρεία’s lack of an unironic referent within the *Electra* (and within the Sophoclean corpus) points toward a certain emptying-out of the (presumably) once evident sense of “masculinity,” even as Electra’s imagined masculinity reflects her longing for a freedom from the constraints of gender itself. At this juncture where norm gives way to fantasy, Electra’s singular use of ἀνδρεία illustrates a characteristically Sophoclean dilemma, in which protagonists are dramatized as being at variance with, or in rebellion with, the norms of kinship itself – at variance, that is, with the founding cultural practices by which gender is produced; beyond the intertwined norms of kinship and gender, a promise of freedom – of recovering “the inch of nature” (into which even Chrysothemis was born) – seems always to beckon. Some part, then, of the anxious poignance of Sophocles’ plays derives from the dramatic centrality of characters who desire a life less constrained by the norms of kinship, even as we watch those characters violently re-inscribed within the kinship system and its practices of legitimation. This dramatic inhabitation of the space between kinship and life (or kinship and more life) might then account for the capacity of Sophocles’ characters to “play their other” – the

“manly” Antigone, the Heracles who dies weeping, “found to be a virgin [παρθένος]” (*Tr.* 1071, 1075) – or to linger, disastrously or uncertainly, between youth and the paternal imperatives of masculine formation – Haemon, Hyllus, Neoptolemus – or, as in the paradigmatic case of Oedipus, to skew and disrupt the kinship system by occupying too many places – son and husband, father and brother – simultaneously within that system.

3 No Future

After lamenting his own name (ll. 430–2), Ajax – who has now recognized that his slaughter and torture of the flocks was a divinely sent madness – thinks first of Telamon, his all-too-alive father (ll. 434–40), then of Achilles, who is all too dead (ll. 441–4). For Ajax, it is the thought of Telamon – and of Telamon’s fame, his κλέος – that revivifies his own shame and, in consequence, insures his inability to return home and his suicide at Troy. Telamon, in the prior generation, had sailed to Troy as a member of Heracles’ expedition against Laomedon; and at Troy, Telamon had won Laomedon’s daughter Hesione, “the first prize of the army” (Hesione, following her bestowal upon Telamon, is Teucer’s mother, 1301–3). Yet, in his own generation, Ajax has won only dishonor (ll. 434–6); how, then, can he return home, where he would encounter a father who, in Ajax’s stricken imagining, would “not endure to look upon me, appearing naked – γυμνός – without prizes?” (ll. 463–4; and see ll. 470–2). As the son’s failure to win positive κλέος diminishes the standing of the father’s κλέος, so Telamon will regard Ajax as if he were invisible. Indeed Ajax, of the Homerically famous body-armor, rather startlingly imagines himself as naked before his father: for while Telamon was awarded Hesione as a prize that publicly signified his masculine honor, Ajax’ defeat – within the ranks of the Achaeans – strips him of his social identity; he would thus return home as naked – as vulnerable, as stripped of masculine prowess – as an infant. Such a dread scenario is, for Ajax, “unendurable” (l. 466); but so, too, is any return to the battlefield, since any martial victories, as well as Ajax’s own eventual death, would only “delight” the Atreidae (ll. 467–9). Ajax is, then, immobilized, pinned between the father to whom he cannot return and the Atreidae, who would use and exhaust his martial valor to their own ends. In his paralysis, Ajax bears comparison to the withdrawn Achilles of the *Iliad*, who is likewise caught between his revulsion from the Atreidae and an inability to return home to a father who sent him to Troy with the parting imprecation that he should be “always best in martial valor” (αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν, *Il.* 11.784).

But, if Ajax is most similar to Achilles in his commitment to an ideal of male honor in which the warrior’s deeds are readily matched by public award, his own ability to sustain such a conception of heroism is doomed upon the death of Achilles, for Achilles is a singularity – a one-time fantastical juncture of sign and signified – that is forever vanished. Achilles is, as it were, a dream of ever unfallen, ever self-completing masculinity, in which the heroic act and its meaning translate without loss into the public words of others. In this regard, the maintenance of Achillean masculinity is an impossibility – and not for Ajax alone. Ajax, however, because he is the best of the Achaeans after Achilles (*S. Aj.* 1340–41), suffers most for the cruel truth that any degree of difference, however slight, is decisive and utterly transformative of act and meaning. Amongst the Achaeans, the rebellion of Ajax is a minor havoc – not, as was the case with Achilles’ withdrawal in the *Iliad*, an utter catastrophe. Indeed, Ajax’s slaughter of the flocks is a horrific, parodic inversion of Achilles’ rage: all that remains is the bestial gore, utterly absent is Achilles’

capacity for political, and even cosmological challenge. The lost singularity of Achilles is uncomfortably acknowledged in the forlorn contrafactual assertion of Ajax (following his first evocation of Telamon) that, “had Achilles been alive and had he awarded the prize of valor in a contest for his own arms, no one other than I would have taken hold of them” (ll. 442–4). Ajax’s conclusion twice refutes itself: had Achilles been alive, there would, of course, have been no contest for his arms and, even had there been, Achilles would not have awarded the prize to any warrior other than Achilles. The latter point registers a traditional rift within the heroic ethos: the contest for the title of “the Best of the Achaeans” inevitably leads to dissension amongst the warriors – to contention about the criterion of judgment, to anger at the victories and rewards of others (which is the scenario of the *Ajax*’s opening). And yet the gist of Ajax’s counterfactual – had Achilles been alive, none of this would have happened – does articulate something of the dramatized – always already anachronistic – wreck of heroic masculinity in the *Ajax* (a dramatic scenario that recurs in the *Philoctetes*): within Ajax’s generation, it was Achilles alone who could sustain the unity of deed and speech (even “in his own time” Achilles functions, as it were, as a myth), and he is the single hero who might have saved Ajax, and the Achaeans more generally, from the debilitating charge that the son, for all that he might reproduce the father, is nonetheless an adulteration of the generative principle and sign.

The old heroic code’s juncture of imaginative hold and anachronistic hollowness is unsettlingly evident in Ajax’s prayer for his son Eurysaces (ll. 545–51):

Lift him up, lift him up here. He will not be frightened to look on this newly spilled blood, not if he is truly my son. But now you [Tecmessa] must break him into the wild laws of his father and make his nature like my own. Son, I pray that you’ll be luckier than your father, but like him in the rest.

Commentators have sometimes found Ajax’s prayer for Eurysaces (as well as his treatment of Tecmessa) to be lacking in the compassionate reciprocity that runs through Sophocles’ intertext, the meeting of Hector, Andromache, and Astyanax in *Iliad* 6, which likewise culminates in the father’s prayer for the son (ll. 6.476–81). Yet Sophocles’ Ajax, in his prayer that Eurysaces be a likeness of his father, does not deviate from the thematic content of Hector’s imagining of Astyanax’s future. Hector prays that an unknown man might someday pronounce Astyanax to be “better by far” than Hector himself (πατρός δ’ ὅ γε πολλὸν ἀμείνων, ll. 6.479). Yet the “better” that Hector imagines is purely one of quantity: Astyanax is to be a greater iteration – a greater concentration – of Hector’s own public qualities, not a man of a fundamentally different sort. Neither Hector nor Ajax – and no matter the degree to which each has suffered the alienations of heroic masculinity – can imagine a qualitatively different mode of life; and this dramatized repetition of roles – this ossification of the heroic – is central to the disquiet that each scene provokes. Ajax, however, in his imagining of his son’s future, substitutes “luckier” – εὐτυχέστερος (S. *Aj.* 550) – for Hector’s “better.” Eurysaces is to reproduce Ajax, but the hope of some greater good fortune for Eurysaces – some more beneficent concord of character and contingency – opens up into a fleeting imagining, on Ajax’s part, of a childhood that is as yet unconscripted to social ends, as yet unbroken into the “wild laws” of the father – or of anyone else (ll. 554–62):

[E]ven now I can envy you [Eurysaces] this: you sense nothing of this trouble. The sweetest life is in knowing nothing, until you learn of pleasure or pain. But when you do come to that time, then, amongst enemies, you will have to show what kind of son from what kind of father you are. But until that time, feed yourself on the easy breezes, nursing your young

life, a delight [χαρμονή] to your mother here. No one of the Greeks shall outrage you with brutal insult, I am certain, even though you are without me; such a watchman of your nurture shall I leave to guard you – Teucer...

Even as Ajax imagines Eurysaces proving his paternity against the inevitable future enemies, he valorizes a childhood that is imagined in terms of natural ease, in which nurture is not analogous to the breaking of a colt but proceeds (if mysteriously) from a nearness to the wind, the freest of elements. The son's training into masculinity is now seen as a loss of a natural ease, of a joyful closeness to the mother. To return to the comparison with *Iliad* 6: Hector, in his evocation of his son's future, imagines that Astyanax's bringing home of spoils of war will be a "delight" to his mother (χαρείη δὲ φρένα μήτηρ, 6.481); Ajax imagines the boy's painless youth will itself be the mother's delight – χαρμονή.

Ajax's elusive evocation of childhood finds a parallel and some explication in Deianeira's elaboration of the easy nurture of youth, which she offers to the *Trachiniae*'s chorus of unwed girls, in the monitory hope that they may never "suffer the discoveries" (ἐκμάθοις παθοῦσα, l. 143 – a neat contextual reversal of the tragic πάθει μάθος) that she, as a married woman, has come to know (ll. 144–50):

For youth is nurtured in places of its own, where neither the sun-god's heat, nor the rain, nor the wind troubles it, but it raises up its life in pleasures, until such time as one is called a woman rather than a maiden and gets a share of worries in the night, afraid on account of one's husband or children.

Deianeira speaks, as does Ajax, of a youth that is unthreatened, seemingly nurtured by nature itself – and, finally, as transient and as mysteriously figured as it is also ungendered. Moreover, Deianeira's words make explicit the mythological background of this depiction of childhood, for her words echo Odyssean descriptions of paradisiacal locales: the Elysian Fields, unmarked by snow, storm, or rain (*Od.* 4.566); and Olympus itself, which endures neither wind, rain, or snow (*Od.* 6.43–4; see Easterling 1982 on *S. Tr.* 144–7 for further comparanda; and cf. *S. Ant.* 984–6 for the wind-nourished childhood of Cleopatra). In the reveries of Ajax and Deianeira, childhood is compared to the realm of immortalized heroes or of the gods themselves. But, while the inhabitants of the Elysian Fields or of Olympus will rest forever in their untroubled ease, mortal children will, of course, fall into a state of threat and grief, which Deianeira (as her words move from mythological allusion to social reality) equates with marriage and which Ajax equates with being broken into the warrior's life and its attendant pursuit of *kleos*. To reformulate the issue: childhood comes to an end when the cultural imperative of femininity or masculinity, with its associated structures of kinship, imposes itself; specifically, the woman's role in producing legitimate children in marriage, the man's role in reproducing, through his own actions and those of his sons, the name of the father. But what is so compelling in Ajax's and Deianeira's memories of childhood is that the *telos* of adulthood is, again, presented as a loss. If it is one of the ruling fictions of archaic and classical Greek culture that the making of children and the perpetuation of the father's name are recompense for the fact of personal mortality, the recollections of Ajax and Deianeira effect something of a reversal by locating immortality in the past and by representing adulthood and its genderings – the wedding, the warrior's training – as an entrance into pain and grief. What then persists – especially at the dramatized moment before disaster – is the haunting image of a freedom that has been lost, not through a

divine expulsion, but through a cultural imperative all the more powerful for being imprinted, as a teleology, upon the life course itself. For both Ajax and Deianeira, whose respective tragedies are structured by an ossification of gender roles, freedom is imagined in a return to the ungenderings of childhood, which is here marked as a time – even a pre-Promethean (or pre-Pandoran) time – of easy nearness to the divine.

4 Inglorious *nothoi*

Such imagined freedoms – or such eruptions of the Imaginary – gain pathos precisely for being irrecoverable, even as they advert the hero's lack of futurity. Ajax takes his own life tormented by his shame at Troy and anticipating that, if he were to return home to Salamis, Telamon's silent shunning would confirm his social death. The return to Salamis is left, instead, to Teucer – son of Telamon and Hesione, Ajax's half-brother – who confirms Ajax's fear of Telamon, though Teucer (even as he addresses Ajax's corpse) imagines not the old man's silence but his noisy abuse (ll. 1006–16):

Where can I go [...] I who was no help at all to you in your troubles? For surely Telamon, your father and mine, will welcome me with a kind smile when I come home without you! Yes, surely! It is not his way to smile more sweetly even when fortune is good. What will he hold back? What malicious thing won't he say? Bastard [νόθος], born of a war-spear, traitor to you, dearest Ajax, by cowardice and unmanliness [κακανδρία]! Or by cunning, that I might gain your power and your house.

As Ajax had earlier attributed his inability to return home – and the logic of his suicide – to a fear that Telamon would turn his face from him, Teucer anticipates a father who will be aggressively in his face, charging him with “unmanliness” (the unique use of *κακανδρία* in Sophocles' extant tragedies). While both the silence and the abuse of Telamon strip his sons of masculine identity, the malicious words directed at Teucer in his imagination especially register his birth, not from Telamon's legitimate wife Eriboia, but from Hesione, Telamon's prize at Troy (see Ebbott 2003: Ch. 2 on Teucer the *νόθος*, and Patterson 1990 for *νόθοι* in Athens). While the silence that would greet the legitimate son enacts his failure to gain the *kleos* that revivifies the paternal name, the abuse directed at Teucer registers his already low status within the larger community. Telamon's rejection of Teucer – his second symbolic filicide – thus expels Teucer from a community within which his place had already been suspect: “I will be disowned, driven from his land, accounted a slave in his words, rather than a free man” (*ἐλεύθερος*, ll. 1019–20); and, as Sophocles' audience would well have known, expulsion is precisely the fate that Teucer is accounted to have met with upon his return to Salamis. Yet Teucer's unjust banishment from the paternal home might also turn out to be the ironic prerequisite to his gaining of a more secure status as an *ἐλεύθερος*; for Teucer will go on – beyond Sophocles' tragedy, but not beyond the knowledge of Sophocles' audience – to found a new Salamis on Cyprus (see Horace *Odes* 1.7). While the “legitimate” Ajax suffers and dies according to the logic of a heroic *kleos* that closely yokes the deeds of the son to the name of the father (the legitimate son thus re-legitimizes the father), the *νόθος* Teucer sails, as it were, out of that model of masculine repetition to Cyprus, where (we might imagine) he potentially frees himself of a past that the *Ajax* itself dramatizes as obsolete, but as still exerting a devastating hold upon consciousness and upon the possibility of

action. In Teucer's acidic verbal dueling with the Atreidae over the burial of Ajax in the second half of the play, where some critics have seen Teucer's "pervasive intellectual inadequacy" (Winnington-Ingram 1980: 61, with n. 11), we might hear a proleptic reply, from Teucer, to the abuse of Telamon: "Never again could I marvel at the errors of a man who was nothing by birth, when those reputed to be well-born [εὐγενής] err in words such as these" (ll. 1093–6).

In the colloquies that follow, Teucer emerges as a staunch defender of his lineage and of his right to speak and to honor Ajax with burial; moreover, Teucer concludes with praise for his mother, the "princess" Hesione (ll. 1300–2), as well as with an assertion of his own claim to be *aristos* (l. 1304) and, crucially, with the deflection of shame – and of its accusing gaze – onto the Atreidae (ll. 1304–7): ὄρα μὴ τοῦμον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ σόν, "look not at my standing, but at your own" (l. 1313) – apt words in response to the Atreidae, as well as to Telamon. In Teucer's spirited rejection of the Atreidae's attempts to silence his speech through their invocation of communal norms of legitimacy and of shame – norms shared and mobilized by Teucer's own father – Teucer himself opens the possibility of making a qualitative difference between himself and his father (a possibility not available to Eurysaces, who will take his place beside Telamon and, ultimately, on Telemon's throne, thus insuring that Ajax's prayer – may the son reproduce the father – will be all too fully granted). Imagining Teucer's future can, of course, only be tentative and does not diminish the unsettled and unsettling force of the end of the *Ajax*, but Teucer's escape from the tragic model of masculinity – an escape that, I would suggest, is made possible by his contentious rejection of the paternal, shaming norms of his culture – holds at least some promise of a greater freedom, which is all the more alluring when set against the disastrous fates of other Sophoclean sons overwhelmed by the commands and curses of their fathers: Haemon, Hyllus, Polyneices, and, of course, Oedipus.

Teucer's future is set in a locale that is off the tragic stage, and his departure from that stage – his exile from home – is attributable to his status as a νόθος, with its (presumably) attenuated relation to the father. Oedipus is most definitely not a νόθος (he is, to his spectacular misfortune, the legitimate son of Laius and Jocasta), but, while he still lives in Corinth, he is almost called one. In Oedipus' account of the "chance happening" – τύχη – that set in motion his exile from Corinth and his return home to Thebes (his journey back, that is, to the tragic stage), he tells of a drunkard who, it seems, was about to call Oedipus a "bastard," but who then, as if catching himself up before the king's son, called him, Oedipus, rather a "made-up" (πλαστός) son for his father (ll. 779–80; on the scenario, see Dawe 1982, with comments at l. 790). The drunkard avoids the opprobrious word νόθος by substituting what is, we presume, a more genteel (though quite uncommon) word for "illegitimate." Yet the euphemism, if it tempers the explicit charge of bastardy, might also have the force of removing Oedipus from any connection at all to biological generation. The meaning of πλαστός, which is a hapax in Sophocles, ranges from "fabricated" to "counterfeit" in archaic and classical literature (πλαστός is sometimes contrasted to what is "true" or "by nature"); perhaps most intriguingly, Pandora – the paradigmatic artifact – is said by Hesiod to be πλαστή, "molded" by Hephaestus from the earth itself (cf. *Th.* 513 with *Op.* 70). In the jibe that he is πλαστός, Oedipus is thus charged with being "false" or "suppositious" to his father; but it might also be suggested that Oedipus is "formed" in the manner of an artifact, for elsewhere πλαστός is always used, not of biological generation, but of the products of human craft (statues, vessels, clay molds) or (metaphorically) of human speech, where the connotation is largely negative ("false" speeches, "feigned" Bacchic cries, "hypothetical" cases).

This suggestion of Oedipus' artificiality at the very beginning of his own narrative of his departure from Corinth – to the oracle at Delphi, to the murderous crossroads, to the throne at Thebes, to the bed of Jocasta (and beyond, to Cithaeron and to Colonus) – has the salutary effect of reminding us that Oedipus is, at the point of his own setting-forth, only a story, only “made up” (we might also wonder if the “drunk” who calls Oedipus an “artifact” and thus sets his plot in motion is a figure for the author himself).

And yet Oedipus is not, of course, a fabrication like any other, but one that has come to have a foundational place in Western thinking about masculinity, about rationality, about the unconscious – about fathers and about various symbolic fabrications of fathers (see the chapter of Armstrong in this volume). My own, much more limited point here is to note that the *Oedipus Tyrannus* has set a pattern, but not a wholly necessary pattern, for its own critical reception: within the *Oedipus* a good deal of narrative energy is directed toward showing that the son who is “false to his father” is, “in fact,” the “true,” legitimate son of Laius; but perhaps even greater subsequent interpretive energy has been directed toward that same project of “renaturalizing” Oedipus, of proving and re-proving Oedipus' identity as Laius' son and as Laius' murderer, even as the *Oedipus* itself can suggest that the number of parents of Oedipus is multiple and, most notoriously, that the number of murderers of Laius is also multiple (see Goodhart 1978 for an essential exploration of the meaning of the play's reports of plural murderers; and see Ormand 1999: 123–52, and Pucci 1992, from whose arguments my own comments take essential bearings). My point is not to deny that Oedipus is Laius' son and murderer, but to suggest, rather, that the *Oedipus Tyrannus* itself calls critical attention to the enormous cultural work that is necessary in order to establish the norms of kinship. Further, as readers and critics – and especially as readers and critics who might be involved in our own contentions with the constraints of a falsely naturalized kinship order – we should not neglect the telling Sophoclean irony that the establishment of a “true” kinship – of the identity of father and son – is also the fulfillment of a curse.

The drunkard's charge that Oedipus is a “pretense” of a son to his father (πλαστός πατήρι, which might also imply that Oedipus is Merope's child by another man) is one in a number of passages in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* in which the characters speculate or pronounce upon Oedipus' birth-origins: for Teiresias (who, of course, knows Oedipus' parentage), “the day itself” will give birth to Oedipus (as it will also destroy him, l. 438); for the chorus, Oedipus might be a child of Cithaeron, of Pan, or of Dionysus (ll. 1098–109). Oedipus himself, when he is at his fullest pitch of anxious expectation, fantasizes that Chance – τύχη – might be his parent (ll. 1080–3):

I account myself a child of Chance, she who provides well, and I will not be dishonored. *She* was the mother from whom I was born, and the months who are my kin have marked me as small and great.

At the moment immediately before the arrival of the herdsman with his account of Oedipus' birth in Thebes and subsequent exposure on Cithaeron, Oedipus removes himself from paternal generation, as he would also remove himself from any sense of τύχη that might still connote divine “providence” (however unexpected that providence's workings might be); the τύχη that gives birth to Oedipus rests wholly on the (secular) side of contingency and of free will. In his fantasy of origins and of a seemingly lunar, unearthly rhythm of life, Oedipus generates himself without a father, as if to forestall the imminent revelation of his birth from Laius – and of the legacy of paternal

curses, of Apolline providence and teleology, that birth from Laius enacts and perpetuates. Indeed, such a fatherless birth (or, at least, the consequences of such an *adunaton*) might be one fulfillment of Ajax's prayer that his son might be "luckier" – εὐτυχέστερος – than his father (*Aj.* 550, see above), as it points toward a form of masculinity that might succeed in making a meaningful difference between father and son.

Oedipus' fantasy of himself as a fatherless "child of chance" is, from this point of view, a last imagining of freedom, which might be set for comparison beside the recollections of Ajax and Deianeira of the near-divine freedom of a genderless youth, or even beside Electra's fantasy of gender transgression as freedom. In each of these instances the protagonist is, of course, recaptured by the norms and teleologies of gendered life. Oedipus is soon revealed as the quite particular child of Laius and Jocasta, defined not by the months or by temporal flux, but by a single "day of lamentation" (ll. 1282–5); nor is he free of providential, paternal chance, but he is rather saved by that chance "for the greatest suffering" (l. 1180; and see Segal 1999: 230 for an elaboration of the crushing ironies). The man who occupied too many places within the kinship order too closely in time – child, adult, elder; son, husband, father – is, as it were, disambiguated and, in the process, the structural and temporal order of kinship is revealed. And yet fantasies of freedom are displaced only at some great personal and social cost: the limits that we are unable to abide might well be more formative than those that are set down as social law; we should, likewise, be wary of regarding Oedipus as a founding sacrifice to the norms and teleologies of kinship – or of any other over-edifying (over-Oedipalizing) reading. Before he was a complex or a structure, Oedipus was already a fabrication, and a fabrication false to his maker; and it is that difference – that bastardy – that might matter to us most, as, in our own contemporary contestations of masculinity, we endeavor to find ways to be creatively false to our various fathers.

Guide to Further Reading

Recent work on the topic of masculinity in the ancient world includes Bassi (1998), two volumes of papers edited by Foxhall and Salmon (1998a and 1998b), one edited by Rosen and Sluiter (2003), and Van Nortwick (2008). Two quite rich – and quite different – books, each of which has much to say about masculinity in Athens, are Wohl (2002) and Ludwig (2006). More general and wide-ranging introductions to the study of masculinity include Adams and Savran (2002); Gardiner (2002); and Reeser (2010). Finally, I continue to find "Axiomatic," the Introduction to Sedgwick (1990), bracing reading.

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PART VI

Historical Interpretations

Aristotle on Sophocles

John T. Kirby

The fifth century of Athens was an extraordinary moment, not just in the history of the Greek-speaking peoples, but of the whole world. It was a time fraught with experimentation, in intellectual ferment that expressed itself exuberantly in manifold ways. Athens was the cradle of radical democracy in a time and place where various forms of monarchy or oligarchy were the norm. It was a place where a Sicilian import – methodical instruction in rhetoric – could bloom and spread. It was a moment when great artists and architects like Pheidias could express their genius in the creation of works whose freshness, beauty, proportion, and grandeur continue to astonish us even today. It was an environment in which philosophical thinkers might dare to conduct thought experiments that might actually land them in prison in other times and places in the ancient Mediterranean world. And it was a milieu in which drama – a new art form, emerging out of what is probably one of the most ancient and universal urges of humankind – could be brought to a level of aesthetic sophistication that it might never have reached otherwise.

It is the juxtaposition of these last two items – philosophy and drama – that principally concerns us in this chapter; and, of the philosophers and the dramatists that we could discuss in that connection, it is Aristotle and Sophocles on whom we will focus most. Certain differences between them will inevitably affect our analysis.

Aristotle, of course, is not a fifth-century philosopher but a man entirely of the fourth (384–322 BCE), whereas the life of Sophocles (*c.* 497/6–406/5 BCE) virtually encompasses the fifth century: an ancient tradition has it that he danced in the victory chorus celebrating the Greek victory at Salamis; and he was (in winter 406/5 BCE) the last of the three great tragedians to die. Moreover, Sophocles was himself born at Colonus, at the outskirts of the ancient city of Athens (situated roughly where the Kolonaki district of the modern city lies), and his whole life embodied the spirit of Athens.

Aristotle, by contrast, was born far to the north, in Stagira, and grew up in close contact with the royal court of Macedon, where his father was court physician. So his earliest cultural milieux – including his first linguistic environment and his first political

exposure – were not only not Hellenic, but in some ways counter-Hellenic; certainly foreign (and in some ways antithetical) to the notion we entertain of the “ordinary” Athenian ideal. He came and went several times to and from Athens; he was disqualified from inheriting the headship of Plato’s Academy because he was not born an Athenian citizen; and his study of political institutions vouchsafed him an unusually broad exposure to other forms of government besides that of Athens. All of these distinctions between the two men will inevitably condition any approach to Sophoclean drama by way of Aristotle. That said, given the phenomenal achievement of both men, the prospect is virtually irresistible.

1 Aristotle on Sophocles and/in the Development of Attic Tragedy

Setting aside the few references to another Sophocles, one of the Thirty Tyrants, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* cites Sophocles perhaps half-a-dozen times – mostly passages in the *Antigone* – to illustrate details of rhetorical invention and style. But obviously any “Aristotelian” approach to Attic drama will principally involve extensive exposure to the *Poetics*. This deceptively short essay – or, more properly, “torso” of an essay (ancient sources indicate that it originally took up two scrolls, but the second one has yet to be found) – spends a substantial portion of its text on the consideration of the nature and function of tragic drama; but it is not, first and foremost, a handbook for playwrights: rather, it is a philosophical consideration of the fundamental nature – what Aristotle would have called the *ti en einai* – of *mimesis* in general, and of drama in particular. This notion may smell suspiciously essentialist to postmodern theorists, but in fact it proves to be impressively practical and useful when looking rhetorically at virtually any artistic genre we may encounter today. And “rhetorically” is a key word here, since Aristotle conceives of all the arts in quintessentially rhetorical terms (Kirby 1991a): the *Poetics* resonates extensively with another treatise of his, the *Rhetoric*, and his approach to tragedy is limned carefully according to the rhetorical principles we find in the latter text. (Very likely the two documents were each revised, over time, in light of the other; whether these documents were drafted from notes that Aristotle himself had made in order to lecture from them, or from notes taken by his students in the Lyceum on lectures given by Aristotle is not entirely clear.)

A generation or so ago, it was common to minimize the usefulness of the *Poetics* as a tool for understanding classical tragedy. But this probably had to do, not only with Aristotle’s distance from the heyday of Attic tragedy, but also with the fact that his agenda in the *Poetics* does not match what those modern scholars hoped or expected from him. In reading any intelligent author, however, we stand to gain much more from the experience if we let him/her decide what s/he wants to discuss.

Aristotle certainly knew what he wanted to discuss. And we would do well to recall that he literally did discuss these topics – aloud, with his students. Subjects such as rhetoric and poetics formed part of the afternoon curriculum at the Lyceum, and it was probably in that context that the notes that became these treatises were prepared. He may have discussed similar topics in his published dialogues (the public or so-called “exoteric” works); but these have apparently not survived the wrack of time. The “acroamatic” or “esoteric” works – so-called because they were composed for use *within* (*eso*) the school itself, for “listening-to” (*akroasis*) by his students – may actually have

been preserved through the centuries because readers in later antiquity, assuming that they contained some “esoteric” doctrine (in the sense of “secret” teachings), jettisoned the exoteric works and saved only these.

So much for the destructive vagaries of time. But the surviving corpus of Aristotle’s writings shows a definite cohesiveness in terms of focus and methodology. In the twenty or so years that he spent working with Plato, Aristotle learnt well the process of definition and division (*horos* and *diairesis*) that Plato seems to have learnt from Socrates, who in turn may have had it from the sophists. Aristotle puts this practice to good use in his studies of biology – indeed, our modern system of Linnaean taxonomy has its origins in Aristotle’s work – but he also extends it to the examination of everything else he was inspired to study. And that seems to have included every single thing that he noticed in the world about him. In addition, we apparently owe to him our basic modern divisions of academic philosophy, such as logic, metaphysics, ethics, politics, epistemology, and aesthetics.

It is in this latter category that the *Poetics* seems to belong. Indeed, it is not too much to assert that the *Poetics* promulgates a comprehensive typology of aesthetics (Kirby 1991b): a program for understanding the nature and function of *mimesis* in every art form known to the ancients (and, it would seem, virtually all of those known now to us). Aristotle busies himself with this project in the first four chapters of the work (*Po.* 1447^a–8^b), before focusing more narrowly on the nature of what he calls *poiesis* – literally “making,” but what we might also call “artistic composition in language”: the point here is not whether the text is in prose or verse, so much as whether it entails *mimesis* (“representation” or “imitation”) of the world we live in. Along the way (*Po.* 1448^b) he makes some important observations about the cognitive function of *mimesis* – offering, already in the fourth century BCE, some important theoretical assertions about the semiotics of representation, the psychology of art, and the enjoyment of the aesthetic experience.

Only once he has laid this broader groundwork does Aristotle turn to a closer scrutiny of the arts of language. As noted above, he conceives of the poetics of drama in terms of his own innovative approach to rhetoric (Kirby 1991a): the schema he enunciates in the *Rhetoric*, that of a rhetor delivering a *logos* to an audience, is actually played out on two levels in the course of a theatrical play – in what I have called the “direct” rhetoric between characters on stage, but also in the “indirect” rhetoric between playwright and audience (Kirby 1992). For this alone his work would be strongly resonant with modern and postmodern theories of art; but it does prompt us to consider certain questions that may press us beyond our comfort zone, particularly in the realm of authorial intent. What is the artist trying to “tell us”? What is the “message” or “meaning” of this play or novel? The less diegetic and more overtly mimetic the work, the less likely that we will be able to answer such questions confidently. And (to come back to Sophocles for a moment) this becomes vividly clear in the case of a play such as *Antigone*: what is the playwright’s estimation of her actions? Does he think of her as a noble, heroic figure, a role model for all to emulate? Or does he see her as a dreadfully misguided, overly rigid ideologue, who suffers consummately – “tragically” – for her obstinacy? Or (the most postmodern explanation, perhaps) does he put it all into a play so that the *characters* do all the talking, thus relieving him of the responsibility to articulate his own opinion more straightforwardly?

Such are the complexities of the indirect rhetoric. Although Aristotle does not comment overtly upon them in the extant text of the *Poetics*, he has plenty of other fish to fry, in keeping with the goal mentioned previously – his quest for the *ti en einai* or “fundamental nature” of whatever subject is under discussion. He centers his attention

upon drama, a genre of composition that, in Athens, took three principal forms: tragedy, comedy, and satyr play. (There are a few tantalizing remarks about comedy and satyr play in our extant *Poetics*, but his longer treatment of comedy – and perhaps also of the satyr drama – was apparently in the now-lost second scroll of the treatise.)

Surely every human civilization engages in dramatic representations of one sort or another; Aristotle himself implies as much when he says that *mimesis* is a trait natural to humans (*Po.* 1448^b). But the three forms of Attic drama just mentioned are quite particular to the time and place from which they sprang. Perhaps less controversially to us now than a few decades ago, Aristotle locates the origin of the Attic dramatic choruses in the ceremonies at religious festivals: the tragic chorus, he says, originated in connection, somehow, with the dithyrambs (*dithuramboi*) performed in honor of the god Dionysus at the City and Rural Dionysia each year; and the comic chorus had its roots (again: somehow) in the phallic processions (*phallika*) that were also probably a part of the Dionysia (*Po.* 1449^a). But precisely what that actually means is anything but clear.

This passage in the *Poetics* on the origins of drama is historically (as opposed to philosophically) one of the most important in the treatise. Frustratingly, it is also one of the most terse. (A good example of how the treatises of Aristotle have come to be termed “lecture notes”: it may be that he originally made very skeletal outlines of ideas for his lectures, subsequently fleshing them out into workmanlike prose – and that this passage is one that never got fully fleshed out.) In any case, here – in one of the spots where we would most have loved for Aristotle to expatiate – he is, instead, at his most condensed and thus cryptic.

Take, for example, his terse phrase διὰ τὸ σατυρικὴν καὶ ὄρχηστικωτέραν εἶναι τὴν ποιήσιν (1449^a): Richard Janko, in his excellent translation of the *Poetics*, renders this as “because the composition was satiric and mainly danced” (Janko 1987: 6); in his commentary on the passage Janko observes:

It is not clear whether Aristotle derives tragedy from satyr-play, or only from something like satyr-play. There is no evidence that tragedy derived from it directly, and many believe that this remark cannot be reconciled with his remarks about tragedy’s relation to dithyramb above (a10). Tragedy apparently shared with satyr-play and dithyramb a common ancestry in Dionysiac ritual, and this is surely what Aristotle means. (Trans. Janko 1987: 79)

Part of the confusion here comes from Aristotle’s earlier comment (mentioned by Janko): a few lines before this *dia to saturiken* phrase, Aristotle speaks of Attic drama as “arising from an improvisatory beginning (both tragedy and comedy – tragedy from the leaders of the dithyramb, and comedy from the leaders of the phallic processions)” (Janko 1987: 6; the Greek is καὶ ἡ μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐξαρχόντων τὸν διθύραμβον, ἡ δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν τὰ φαλλικά, 1449^a). This is, naturally enough, generally taken to mean that the genre known as tragedy developed out of the genre known as *dithurambos*, and that the genre known as comedy developed out of the genre known as *phallikon*. But note that Aristotle, even though he is working with telegraphically brief syntax here, writes not *apo tou dithurambou* [...] *apo tou phallikou* (“from the dithyramb [...] from the phallic hymn”), but *apo ton exarchonton ton dithurambon* [...] *apo ton ta phallika*: “from those who led off the dithyramb and the phallic processions.”

This distinction may be significant. The *exarchon*, or chorus leader (especially at the early stage of development to which Aristotle is referring), was probably also typically the *composer* of the particular dithyramb or *phallikon* being performed. See, for example,

the fragment of Archilochus in which he boasts: ὡς Διωνύσοι' ἄνακτος καλὸν ἐξάρξαι μέλος | οἶδα διθύραμβον οἴνωι συγκεραυνωθείς φρένας ("I know how to be the *exarchon* of the dithyramb, the beautiful song of Lord Dionysus, (even) when I am completely soured with wine," Archil. Fr. 120 West): in other words, Archilochus, a soldier and poet of the seventh century BCE, prides himself on his ability to stay on task as a singer/dancer and chorus leader even when he is three sheets to the wind. Given his poetic prowess in other verse forms – and the pugnacity of his pride – I think we may reasonably infer that the dithyrambs for which he was *exarchon* were also ones that he had composed himself.

It is possible, then, that Aristotle, in writing "from those who led the dithyramb and the phallic processions," means very precisely what he says: that the earliest tragedies and comedies originated, not *out of* dithyrambs and *phallika*, but from *the people who produced* dithyrambs and *phallika*: in other words that these chorus leaders, skilled in composing and performing these very ancient choral songs in honor of Dionysus, eventually tried their hands at a new and quite different genre – still including song and dance to some extent, but an invention so radically new that it could not be said to have *developed out of* dithyramb or *phallikon*. If my hypothesis is correct, then these innovators proposed to stage these more elaborate performances – dramas, as they must now be called – as part of the festivities at the City and Rural Dionysia. Aristotle and other ancient sources, as well as the Souda, actually give us names for some of the people who may have been responsible for such innovations: Arion of Corinth, Epigenes of Sicyon, Thespis of Icaria. (Later dithyrambic poets such as Timotheus of Miletus and Philoxenus of Cythera were active during the great age of the tragedians, which shows that the dithyramb tradition did not entirely precede, nor die out because of, the rise of drama.)

Whether Aristotle's notes on the subject are so brief because he never got around to expanding the text, or because the topic was only of marginal interest to him, or simply because his own data were unusually limited, we cannot know. The first and third of those possibilities strike me as the most likely; the prose, as I have indicated, is unusually cramped even for Aristotle; and, if he had any textual evidence for such a tradition, it is not material that is now available to us. In any case, the issue is more than usually fraught, and was the subject of much scholarly discussion across the twentieth century (see e.g. Lesky 1956, Patzer 1962, Pickard-Cambridge 1962, Else 1966, and Herington 1985, to name only some of the best-known; John J. Winkler's as-yet-unpublished *Rehearsals of Manhood* will, if and when it appears, propound a striking new theory on the topic, very different from anything else yet put forward).

Doubtless historians of drama yet to come will spin new theories. But whether or not they accept them, they will in any case have to come to terms with the sentences in the *Poetics* immediately following the passage we have just discussed:

κατὰ μικρὸν ἠϋξήθη προαγόντων ὅσον ἐγίγνετο φανερὸν αὐτῆς; καὶ πολλὰς μεταβολὰς μεταβαλοῦσα ἢ τραγωδία ἐπαύσατο, ἐπεὶ ἔσχε τὴν αὐτῆς φύσιν. καὶ τό τε τῶν ὑποκριτῶν πλῆθος ἐξ ἑνὸς εἰς δύο πρῶτος Αἰσχύλος ἤγαγε καὶ τὰ τοῦ χοροῦ ἠλάττωσε καὶ τὸν λόγον πρωταγωνιστεῖν παρεσκεύασεν: τρεῖς δὲ καὶ σκηνογραφίαν Σοφοκλῆς. (*Po.* 1449^a)

[Tragedy] grew little by little, as [the poets] developed whatever [new part] of it had appeared; and, passing through many changes, tragedy came to a halt, since it had attained its own nature. Aeschylus was first to increase the number of its actors from one to two; he reduced the [songs] of the chorus, and made speech play the main role. Sophocles [brought in] three actors and scenery. (Trans. Janko 1987: 6)

The first sentence here glosses swiftly over the period about which we would love to know more. The verb *proago* means “lead forward, [cause to] advance”; hence “develop.” As I have mentioned, these early *proagontes* (“developers” of tragedy) perhaps included people like Arion, Epigenes, and Thespis. If Aristotle does not dwell here on these *proagontes*, it may be because he had already written about them at length in his now-lost *On Poets*. In any case, he is generally more interested in philosophy than in history, as we see from the rest of the sentence: to say that tragedy “came to a halt when it attained its own nature” suggests his famous notion of the four causes, spelt out in Book 2 of his *Physics*; the most important of these is the *telos* or “final cause” (from which we get our word “teleology”). He applies a similar idea in some of his biological writings, and he tells us in *Politics* 1252^b that *phusis*, “nature,” is to be equated with *telos*. “[T]he tragic form, like an organic growth, develops until it reaches its *telos*, when its potentiality is fully realized” (Lucas 1968: 82); this is what matters most to his thumbnail sketch here.

Left to our own devices, we may hypothesize further the course that these developments took, “little by little,” in the period preceding – and including – the three great tragedians of the fifth century. I offer such a hypothesis here, in six stages:

1 The simplest, primal musical performance is that of the solo singer, without instrumental accompaniment. This arises so far back in the prehistoric period that we cannot say much of anything about it, other than to point out that it is the precursor to all lyric monody, including the Homeric *epos* (which notably adds the instrumental accompaniment of a lyre).

2 In some ways the next logical development is to add voices. Even if these are singing in unison (as it appears the ancient Greek choruses were doing), and even if there is no accompaniment by an instrument such as a lyre or an *aulos*, this experience is a powerful one in many ways. It builds community by providing for the shared creation of musical beauty; it becomes an obvious way of embellishing the ceremonies of a festive moment; and it affords a convenient occasion for another communal practice that brings tremendous pleasure: group dancing. Whether in the development of the human species choral song preceded choral dance or vice versa, or whether they developed more or less simultaneously, we have no way of knowing; but the two phenomena nestle together at one of the earliest points on this trajectory.

3 Somewhere along the way, those Dionysiac poets (so briefly mentioned by Aristotle) decided to add some solo material to the lyrics being sung by their choruses. It is reasonable to assume that this solo material was sung by the *exarchon* himself. But this addition has enormous consequences. Suddenly there are *two* entities in the musical moment, not one: the collective voice of the chorus and the single voice of the soloist. It would be all but irresistible for these two entities to sing in antiphonal response to one another, and indeed this mode of performance remains, even today, one of the great pleasures of the musical experience, in genres ranging from the gospel choir to the cantata and oratorio to grand opera.

4 But there is no reason that such antiphony need be *mimetic* (in the narratological sense): it could still be entirely *diegetic* (“narrative”) (perhaps some of the narrative lyrics of Stesichorus were performed in this style). The shift from *diegesis* to *mimesis* – from narration to imaginative enactment – is the most momentous step of all in this development; and it is this step with which Thespis is traditionally credited.

Once the composer envisions the soloist and the chorus, not as component parts of a narrative, but as dramatic *characters* (people other than themselves), we have true

theater, if only in an embryonic form. This is the format underlying the lyric dialogue known as the *kommos* (*Po.* 1552^b), the lament sung antiphonally between the tragic chorus and one or more of the actors on stage. As the *kommos* is generally thought to be one of the most primitive elements of tragic drama, this shift to *mimesis*-in-antiphony may have seen some of its earliest instantiations in *kommoi* – whether these were performed in funeral situations, at the Eleusinian Mysteries, or in some other milieu (see Pickard-Cambridge 1962: 179–80 for discussion).

5 So far, this scenario envisions two entities in the story – one individual, one collective. With the addition of *mimesis*, these entities become characters in a drama: no longer the members of the local chorus and its director, but people entirely different, perhaps characters from myth or legend. At some point, perhaps very early or even immediately, the individual becomes the focal point of the drama. But the types of interaction that a single character is able to have with a group are limited; beginning in infancy, each of us naturally learns first to relate to other individuals one at a time. And the most intense interactions are perhaps those that occur between oneself and another individual. So it was probably only a matter of time before someone (may we now call him a “playwright”?) decided to add to the mix another solo performer in addition to the *exarchon* – another individual who could interact with the first solo performer, totally independent of the interaction or even the presence of the chorus. To the person who made this brilliant addition, Aristotle here gives a memorable name: Aeschylus.

Once there are two “soloists,” one-to-one antiphony is possible. And since this performance is mimetic – since these two performers are now “actors” representing characters in a drama – it is a natural next step to give them *spoken* parts in addition to sung parts. This spoken antiphony we call dialogue; and, according to Aristotle in this same passage, it was also Aeschylus who increased the importance of spoken dialogue (*ton logon protagonistein pareskeuasen*). Whimsically, Aristotle uses a theatrical metaphor here, saying literally that spoken dialogue, *logos*, “plays the main role” (*protagonistein*), relegating the sung portions of the drama to, as it were, a supporting role.

6 To recapitulate the developments so far: we now have two actors, separate and distinct from the chorus, and equipped to communicate with one another primarily in spoken dialogue rather than in song. In addition, we have the chorus; these will still need a leader, because of the metamorphosis of the *exarchon* into one of the actors; and so at some point – perhaps as early as step 4 above – there will be a chorus leader distinct from the original *exarchon*. At some point, certainly by step 5 above, this leader will be known as the *koruphaios*.

But there is another innovation to be added: a third actor, that is, a third individual who will interact in spoken dialogue with the two actors used by Aeschylus. The dramatist who added this third actor, according to Aristotle, was none other than Sophocles himself. (There are moments in the extant plays of Aeschylus where there must be three speaking actors on stage at the same time; see e.g. *Ag.* 855 ff. for a scene with Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Cassandra together. The *Oresteia* was presented in 458 BCE; at this point Sophocles was almost 40 years old – certainly old enough for his theatrical innovations to have had considerable influence on his older contemporaries.)

In this passage we also learn of a very different sort of innovation by Sophocles: the introduction of *skenographia*. This appears to mean painted scenery in the form of a backdrop, or else some sort of embellishment of the *skene*. This word refers to the simple, all-purpose structure at the back of the stage area that was used to represent a palace, a

temple, or whatever other building the plot of the drama might require. *Skene* means, literally, a “tent,” and the verb *skenaō* means “to pitch a tent” or “to camp out”; a *skencion* was a tent-pole. In the earliest period the *skene* probably was literally that: a very temporary structure set up just for the period of the performance itself. By the time of Sophocles, as the City Dionysia were now a very well-established annual event with its own dedicated space at the foot of the Athenian Acropolis, the *skene* was probably a more permanent structure, made of wood or even of stone. The more substantial the building, of course, the more opportunity for the addition of scenery. We would like to know what Sophocles’ scenery looked like; but then, we would like to know anything more about ancient Greek scenery in general.

2 Aristotle (and Sophocles) Reading Sophocles

This, then, is how Aristotle orients Sophocles to the development of tragedy as a genre. He offers, in addition, a number of observations about Sophoclean drama that come more under the heading of literary criticism. As we examine these, we shall see that (once again) the driving force behind Aristotle’s comments is his own philosophical method: his observations are not just a collection of striking *aperçus* on texts and performance, but rather a nexus of carefully woven threads in a larger tapestry that demonstrates considerable artistic unity of its own.

The first appearance of Sophocles in the *Poetics* is at 1448^a, where he is compared (in different ways) to Homer and to Aristophanes:

ὥστε τῇ μὲν ὁ αὐτὸς ἂν εἴη μιμητὴς Ὀμήρω Σοφοκλῆς, μιμοῦνται γὰρ ἄμφω σπουδαίους, τῇ δὲ Ἀριστοφάνει, πράττοντας γὰρ μιμοῦνται καὶ δρώντας ἄμφω. (*Po.* 1448^a)

Consequently, in one respect Sophocles is the same sort of representational artist as Homer, in that both represent good people, but in another he is like Aristophanes, since both represent men in action and doing [things]. (Trans. Janko 1987: 3)

Lucas (1968: 68) aptly observes on this passage: “we have here two illustrious pairs, Homer and Sophocles, whose subjects are heroic characters, Sophocles and Aristophanes, whose medium is drama.” The inclusion of Aristophanes is important for underscoring the fact that Sophocles is not a diegetic artist, like Homer, but rather a dramatist, whose art consists in putting actors on the stage where they can represent the characters in the drama. But what Sophocles does share with Homer is profound, for Aristotle’s conception of what tragedy entails (and must entail): the tragic character, unlike the comic, he tells us, must be *spondaios* – “serious” or “noble” in a moral sense, though not a paragon of perfection. The reason for this, it emerges, is that we must be able to feel for him or her the emotions that tragedy elicits par excellence: emotions such as pity and fear. Whatever *katharsis* is taken to mean in the *Poetics* (and this must surely be one of the bitterest battlefields in the realm of classical philology), it is linked by Aristotle in his famous definition of tragedy to “such emotions” as pity and fear:

ἔστιν οὖν τραγωδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος ἐχούσης, ἡδυσμένω λόγῳ χωρὶς ἐκάστῳ τῶν εἰδῶν ἐν τοῖς μορίοις, δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι’ ἀπαγγελίας, δι’ ἐλέου καὶ φόβου παραινουσα τὴν τῶν τοιοῦτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν. (*Po.* 1448^b)

Tragedy is a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements [used] separately in the [various] parts [of the play]; [represented] by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions. (Trans. Janko 1987: 7)

The tragic character, says Aristotle, experiences a *peripeteia* or reversal of fortune as the result of some *hamartia* (mistake – this is a mistake based on ignorance, not a character flaw, though the tragic hero may indeed exhibit defects of character). But if the character is not *spoudaios* – noble or respectable at some level that makes him or her admirable to us as we watch or read the play – we will not feel pity for them when we observe their downfall; we will either laugh, as we do at the foibles of a ridiculous (comic) character, or else just feel that the fallen character got what he deserved. For a tragic play to fulfill the criteria enunciated by Aristotle here, then, the character must be *spoudaios*. And that, according to Aristotle, is one of the principal traits of the Sophoclean hero. Certainly this obtains in the extant plays of Sophocles, with Oedipus as perhaps the defining example. So deeply characteristic is it of the tragic characters of Sophocles that it made sense to Bernard Knox to entitle his book on Sophoclean drama *The Heroic Temper* (Knox 1964).

Aristotle also compares Sophocles to Euripides on a number of occasions, typically to the disadvantage of Euripides.

ἐὰν ἐπιτιμᾶται ὅτι οὐκ ἀληθῆ, ἀλλ' ἴσως <ὡς> δεῖ, οἶον καὶ Σοφοκλῆς ἔφη αὐτὸς μὲν οἶους δεῖ ποιεῖν, Εὐριπίδην δὲ οἴοι εἰσίν, ταύτη λυτέον. (Po. 1460^b)

[I]f [the poet] is criticized for representing things that are not true, perhaps he is representing them [as] they should be, e.g. as Sophocles said that he himself portrayed people as they should be, but Euripides portrayed them as they are – this is the solution. (Trans. Janko 1987: 38)

This passage is obviously interesting, not only because it resonates with comments Aristotle makes at 1454^b and 1461^b, but (and perhaps especially) because it purports to be a comment by Sophocles himself. Where Aristotle read or heard it is not known; but we have no reason to doubt that Sophocles did make the comment. If he did, it shows a remarkable sense of self-awareness, as well as a keen eye for the work of his great contemporary (and occasional rival) Euripides: it also goes a long way toward explaining the considerable psychological appeal of Euripides' plays.

καὶ τὸν χορὸν δὲ ἕνα δεῖ ὑπολαμβάνειν τῶν ὑποκριτῶν, καὶ μόνον εἶναι τοῦ ὅλου καὶ συναγωνίζεσθαι μὴ ὡς περ Εὐριπίδην ἀλλ' ὡς περ Σοφοκλεῖ. (Po. 1456^a)

[The poet] should regard the chorus as one of the actors. It should be a part of the whole, and contribute to the performance, not as in Euripides but as in Sophocles. (Trans. Janko 1987: 25)

Sophocles is said to have written a treatise of his own, *On the Chorus*. It is rare to find an artist who can articulate what his art attempts to accomplish; and rarer still, of course, for that artist to be of the caliber of a Sophocles. What we might learn from such a work! And we may still, if Herculaneum or some other ancient library relents and disgorges it from its millennia of concealment. In the meantime, however, we are dependent on (a) the comments of other ancient readers like Aristotle, who may here be referring obliquely

to his own reading of *On the Chorus*; and (b) to the seven extant plays themselves, which are *in fine* our best evidence of Sophocles' approach to writing for the tragic chorus.

It is a commonplace in histories of tragedy that in the fourth century BCE, as also in some of our extant Roman plays, we find the role of the chorus diminished, in terms of both quantity and quality, to the point where, when the playwright felt it was about time for the interjection of a choral ode, he just wrote XOPOY (*khorou*, i.e. “[song of] the chorus”) – and let the troupe choose some nice lyric passage to perform. This interlude was known as an *embolimon*; the use of *embolima* was, however, already introduced in the fifth century (Aristotle attributes it first to Agathon: *Po.* 1456^a). In this passage comparing Sophocles with Euripides, however, Aristotle does not seem to be referring to the amount of material assigned to the chorus, but to the nature of its involvement in the plot. In Aeschylean drama, of course, its role was central (Lucas 1968: 193); it is no accident that Aeschylus is not even mentioned in this sentence. Without the Aeschylean chorus, there could practically be no Aeschylean play. But the chorus of the Sophoclean play is, if not quite tantamount to “one of the actors,” nonetheless particularly imbricated in the progress of the plot. This is evident not only in the formal odes, but in the shorter exchanges that the chorus (or the *koruphaios* on its behalf) have with the actors on stage. Moreover, Sophocles uses the specific lyric meters – and, doubtless, the accompanying dance-figures – to great dramatic effect. For example, in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the chorus sings and dances a *huporchema* as its third *stasimon*. A *huporchema* is a particularly happy and sprightly dance, which well matches the eager anticipation the chorus expresses as it waits impatiently to hear the truth about Oedipus's parentage:

Who bore you, my child,
which of the long-lived nymphs,
consorting with your father,
mountain-roving Pan?
Or was it some bedmate of Loxias,
who loves all the upland pastures?
Or was it the lord of Cyllene,
or the Bacchic god who dwells
up on the mountain-peaks,
who received you as a lucky find
from one of the glancing-eyed Nymphs
with whom he so often plays. (Soph. *OT* 1098–109;
trans. Blondell 2003: 136)

The whole ode is short – just one strophe and antistrophe – and sets the unsuspecting onlooker up for wonderful news when the herdsman comes on stage to tell Oedipus the details of his birth. For the audience who knows the story, however, the innocence and happiness expressed in the ode makes the mounting tension all the more unbearable. This is tragic irony at its most poignant, and a good example of how Sophocles makes the chorus *sunagonizesthai* (“contribute to the performance”) in an integral way.

Another passage comparing Sophocles and Euripides occurs in chapter 14, where Aristotle is discussing knowledge and ignorance in the *dramatis personae*:

ἔστι μὲν γὰρ οὕτω γίνεσθαι τὴν πράξιν, ὥσπερ οἱ παλαιοὶ ἐποίουν εἰδότας καὶ γινώσκοντας, καθάπερ καὶ Εὐριπίδης ἐποίησεν ἀποκτείνουσαν τοὺς παῖδας τὴν Μήδειαν: ἔστιν δὲ πράξι μὲν, ἀγνοοῦντας δὲ πράξι τὸ δεινόν, εἴθ' ὕστερον ἀναγνωρίσαι τὴν φιλίαν, ὥσπερ ὁ Σοφοκλέους

Οιδίπους: τοῦτο μὲν οὖν ἔξω τοῦ δράματος, ἐν δ' αὐτῇ τῇ τραγωδίᾳ οἷον ὁ Ἀλκμέων ὁ Ἀστυδάμαντος ἢ ὁ Τηλέγονος ὁ ἐν τῷ τραυματίᾳ Ὀδυσσεῖ. ἔτι δὲ τρίτον παρὰ ταῦτα τὸ μέλλοντα ποιεῖν τι τῶν ἀνηκέστων δι' ἄγνοιαν ἀναγνωρίσαι πρὶν ποιῆσαι. (*Po.* 1453^b)

The action may arise (i) in the way the old [poets] made people act knowingly, i.e. in full knowledge, just as Euripides too made Medea kill her children. Or (ii) they may be going to act, in full knowledge, but not do it. Or (iii) they may act, but do the dreadful deed in ignorance, and then recognize the friendly relationship later, as Sophocles' Oedipus [does]. This is outside the drama; but [they may do the deed] in the tragedy itself, as Astydamos' Alcmeon or Telegonus in the *Wounded Odysseus* [do]. Again, fourth beside these [ways] is (iv) to be about to something deadly in ignorance [of one's relationship], but to recognize it before doing so [...]. (Trans. Janko 1987: 18; on the numbering of the possibilities – a technical detail of textual criticism – see Janko 1987: 197)

The passage, though initially it looks forbiddingly complicated, is in fact an excellent example of the way Aristotle's mind organizes things. One could map it graphically with a 2 × 2 punnet square: on the side, put “knowing” and “in ignorance”; on the top, put “commits” and “does not commit.” The top left will then be Aristotle's (i) here; the top right, (ii); the bottom left will be (iii), and the bottom right, (iv).

For Aristotle, these are in ascending order of excellence. Here, oddly, Sophocles comes in at second to last, as Oedipus does commit the tragic act, though in ignorance. But examples (i) and (iv) – the absolute worst and best – are both from Euripides: the *Medea* and the now-lost *Kresphontes*, respectively, with supporting examples of (iv) from Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* and a non-extant *Helle* whose author is unknown.

The relatively low score awarded here to *Oedipus the King* is particularly striking because this play so often serves in the *Poetics* as Aristotle's paradigm of excellence; it certainly seems to be the play on which his formal definition of tragedy was most closely based. If nothing else, this score shows Aristotle's fairness – or at least his commitment to the working of his own system of thought. *Oedipus the King* and *Iphigenia* are paired again at *Poetics* 1455^a:

πασῶν δὲ βελτίστη ἀναγνώρισις ἢ ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων, τῆς ἐκπλήξεως γιγνομένης δι' εἰκότων, οἷον ἐν τῷ Σοφοκλέους Οιδίποδι καὶ τῇ Ἰφιγενείᾳ: εἰκὸς γὰρ βούλεσθαι ἐπιθεῖναι γράμματα. (*Po.* 1455^a)

The best recognition of all is that which results from the incidents themselves, when our astonishment comes about by means of probable [incidents], e.g. in Sophocles' *Oedipus* and the *Iphigenia*: it is probable that Iphigenia would wish to dispatch a letter. (Trans. Janko 1987: 22)

This time they are both cited as positive examples. Aristotle here is talking about *anagnorisis* (“recognition”), the moment when the tragic character's ignorance about his/her mistake (or, more specifically, often about the identity of another person) is revealed. The argument from *eikos* (“probability,” “likelihood,” or even “plausibility”), a rhetorical strategy that we are told was first taught by the Sicilian sophist Corax, is one of the oldest and most useful techniques of persuasion; this is perhaps because an *eikos* prompts, or carries with it, an implicit inference that allows the listener to make the logical connection him/herself, based on what seems likely. The making of inferential connections is itself a pleasurable experience, as Aristotle points out (*Po.* 1448^b).

Moreover, the assertion of *eikota* re-inscribes an assurance that the world around us is indeed what it seems – that we are in control of our environment, or at least in control of our understanding of it. So *eikota* serve an important psychological function in all human communication, including the aesthetic. Aristotle’s approbation of Sophocles in this context is an implicit nod to the playwright’s acuity as a student of human psychology.

In a passage very near the end of our extant torso of the *Poetics*, Aristotle pairs Sophocles with Homer, just as he had done in his first reference to Sophocles:

ἔτι τῷ ἐν ἐλάττονι μήκει τὸ τέλος τῆς μιμήσεως εἶναι (τὸ γὰρ ἀθροώτερον ἤδιον ἢ πολλῶν κεκραμένον τῷ χρόνῳ, λέγω δ’ οἷον εἴ τις τὸν Οἰδίπουν θείῃ τὸν Σοφοκλέους ἐν ἔπεσιν ὅσους ἡ Ἰλιάς. (*Po.* 1562^b)

[(Tragedy) has the advantage (over epic)] that the end of the representation is in a smaller length. What is more concentrated is more pleasurable than what is diluted with a lot of time [in performance]. I mean, e.g., [the effect] if someone put Sophocles’ *Oedipus* into as many epic verses as the *Iliad*. (Trans. Janko 1987: 41)

The reference to Sophocles’ *Oedipus* is merely parenthetical, and included as an example of relative size. The formal definition of tragedy at 1448^b does stipulate that a play must have a certain *megethos* (“size”), but this must still be sufficiently short that the play can be observed in a single sitting (in the case of a dramatic tetralogy at the Dionysia, *four* of them must be able to be performed in a single day). Certainly, no one could sit through a reading of our complete text of the *Iliad* without intermission. Aristotle’s point in this passage is that the shorter overall length, and concomitant opportunity for cohesiveness, is one of the things that make tragedy a genre superior to the *epos*; and it is surely no accident that he chooses Sophocles here as a foil to the great Homer (see Schein’s chapter in this volume).

3 Conclusions

That it makes instant sense to consider Sophocles alongside Homer is a measure of the magnitude of his own reputation already in classical Greek culture. After his death, according to one ancient tradition, a hero cult was in fact founded at Athens in his honor, though not for his victories in dramatic competitions: his cult name was said to be Dexion, “he who receives,” in commemoration of his willingness to accommodate the worship of the god Asclepius in his house. Even in antiquity he elicited a kind of respect and admiration that the firebrand Euripides, for all his power as an artist, would probably never receive. In that regard it is probably also logical that Aristotle leans more heavily on Sophocles than on Euripides as his paradigmatic playwright.

People often set, as a thought experiment or parlor game, questions of preference that are meant to shed light on one’s personality or worldview: Plato or Aristotle? Freud or Jung? Mozart or Bach? This kind of binary, though handy and often illuminating, might blossom into greater nuance if we expanded the game to a ternary schema: Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides? (“Choose only one.”) For Aristotle, the choice – despite the *embarras de richesses* from which he could choose – is pretty clear: Aeschylus has an antique grandeur, and is quite possibly (see Else 1966) the actual “father of tragedy”; and Euripides is sometimes hair-raisingly effective in the theater, and even earns from

Aristotle the sobriquet *tragikotatos*, “the most tragic” (*Po.* 1453^a); but overall it is Sophocles whose work is the most closely aligned with the criteria that the Aristotelian system requires and celebrates. It is Sophocles whose plays most nearly attain the kind of philosophical excellence that the *Poetics* explores.

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Sophocles and Homer

Seth L. Schein

De Sophocle Homeri discipulo è il lavoro che vorrei fare, ma una vita non basterebbe.
 [The book I would want to write is On Sophocles, the pupil of Homer, but one lifetime would not suffice.]

Edward Fraenkel, *Due seminari romani* (1977): 15

1 Homeric Sophocles

It was a staple of Greek literary criticism, from the fourth century BCE through to the middle ages, that Sophocles was an admirer and emulator of Homer (φιλόμηρος, ζηλωτής Ὁμήρου) and himself “Homeric” (Ὀμηρικός). Modern scholars have, for the most part, agreed with this judgment, but have had relatively little to say in any detail about what Homer and Sophocles have in common, or about how Sophocles adapts and transforms Homeric poetry in order to generate his distinctive language, style, dramaturgy, ideas, and values. In this chapter I first trace the history of the ancient, medieval, and modern association of Sophocles with Homer. Then I briefly illustrate Sophocles’ adaptation and transformation of a Homeric “model” in one scene of *Ajax*. Finally, I discuss how, in *Philoctetes*, Sophocles generates his distinctive dramatic poetry through close readings and interpretations of Homeric poetry.

When I speak of Sophocles’ “close reading and interpretation of Homeric poetry,” I am referring to his engagement with, and poetic exploitation of, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. This is related to, but different from, his propensity to base the plots of his plays on mythology associated with the Trojan War, mythology that would have been known to Sophocles and his audiences not only from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* but from other Trojan War epics constituting the so-called Epic Cycle, which were composed later than the two Homeric poems and were constructed, as it were, around them – but, like these poems, were based on much older traditional oral poetry and mythology. Most scholars,

however, do not make this distinction and consider that the frequency with which Sophocles bases his plots on episodes of the Trojan War is part of what makes him “most Homeric.” This is true, for example, of Sir Richard Jebb, the great Victorian editor of Sophocles, when he speaks of “the story” of the *Ajax* and “the conception of the hero” as “fundamentally Homeric” (Jebb 1896: ix) or of the “Homeric colouring” of *Electra* as “strongly marked” (Jebb 1894: xli). It also seems implicit in the comment by A. E. Pearson, the editor of the fragments of Sophocles, that Sophocles “laboured [...] to present under new conditions the majesty of life which Homer has first portrayed” (Pearson 1917, vol. 1: xxxi).

Zoilus, one of the speakers in Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophistae* (*Learned Banqueters*, late second century CE), says that “Sophocles used to enjoy the Epic Cycle, so that he made even whole dramas, following its mythical inventions” (ἔχαιρε δὲ Σοφοκλῆς τῶι ἐπικῶι κύκλῳι, ὡς καὶ ὅλα δράματα ποιῆσαι κατακολουθῶν τῆι ἐν αὐτῶι μυθοποιίῳι, Ath. 7, 277e1–2). Stefan Radt, the author of the standard edition of Sophocles’ fragments in *TrGF* (Radt 1999), has shown that, of the 122 known titles of Sophocles’ plays, 32 definitely, and another 13 probably, are based on stories of the Trojan War and its aftermath – between 28 percent and 37 percent of all the known titles. By contrast, of Aeschylus’ 80 known titles, only 18 definitely and 3 probably are grounded in Trojan mythology – between 22 percent and 26 percent. For Euripides the numbers are even smaller: only 15 out of 78 known titles definitely, and another 2 probably, are based on this mythology – between 19 percent and 22 percent (Radt 1983: 194–6; cf. Zimmermann 2002: 239–40).

Despite Sophocles’ affinity for plots drawn from mythology associated with the Trojan War, the titles of his 122 plays (Radt 1983: 217–18) do not support the statement in the *Life* of the poet, transmitted in some manuscripts along with the seven surviving plays, that Sophocles “copies the *Odyssey* in many dramas” and “produces his plots in the poet’s footsteps” (*TrGF* 4: 75, T 1.80–1 Radt). In fact, only two or three of Sophocles’ Trojan plays seem to be based on the *Odyssey* (*Nausikaa*, *The Footwashing* (*Niptra*), and probably *The Phaeacians*); the plots of all the other Trojan dramas come from stories told in the Epic Cycle. It has sometimes been thought that the comment in the *Life* refers to a perceived tendency in the *Odyssey* to hint at or allude to other episodes in the Trojan cycle of myths, and that Sophocles could be considered to have developed these allusions into whole dramas and in this way could be said to “produce his plots in the poet’s footsteps” (Welcker 1839–41: 87; Radt 1983: 201). This interpretation, however, seems forced and difficult to accept, though it is equally difficult to imagine what else these words could mean. They almost certainly do not refer to Sophocles’ occasional use in his dramas of Odyssean narrative motifs, or to the echoes he gives of Odyssean diction – such as the play on the name of Odysseus in fr. 965, cited by the author of the *Life* in support of his claim that Sophocles often imitates the *Odyssey* (*TrGF* 4: 75, T 1.83–4 Radt; see below).

While Sophocles based the plots of two or three of his plays on the *Odyssey*, it is striking that he based none on the *Iliad*. By contrast, Aeschylus, who based the plots of five plays on the *Odyssey* (*Kirke*, *The Bone Gatherers*, *Penelope*, *Proteus*, and *The Conjurors of the Dead*), also dramatized episodes of the *Iliad* in *Myrmidons* (the sending of Patroclus to fight in Achilles’ armor) and in *Phrygians* (the events of the last book of the *Iliad*, including Priam’s night-journey to Achilles’ shelter to ransom Hector’s corpse). Radt (1983: 202) suggests that perhaps Aeschylus had these plays in mind when, according to Cynulcus in Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophistae*, he called his tragedies “slices from the great banquets of Homer” (τεμάχῃ [...] τῶν Ὀμήρου μεγάλων δείπνων, Ath. 8, 347e6); but it

is impossible to know this certainly. Radt also observes that Aeschylus' treatment of these "tragic" episodes might make him a better recipient than Sophocles of the famous characterization "the tragic Homer," made by Polemon, head of the Academy from 314 to 276 BCE. Radt's suggestion, however, implies that what in Sophocles is "Homeric" is his reworking of Trojan War mythology as we know it from the Epic Cycle, while Polemon seems to have had something else in mind.

Polemon is reported by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives of the Philosophers* (D.L. 4.20 = *TrGF* 4: 75, T 115a Radt) and by the Epicurean Philodemus (*Academicorum Index*, P.Herc. 1021, col. 14.45) to have been "a lover of Sophocles" (φιλοσοφοκλής); and Diogenes quotes Polemon's epigrammatic assertion "that Homer was the epic Sophocles and Sophocles the tragic Homer" (τὸν μὲν Ὀμηρον ἐπικὸν Σοφοκλέα, τὸν δὲ Σοφοκλέα Ὀμηρον τραγικόν). Diogenes gives no reason for Polemon's claim, but the brief entry for "Sophocles" in the medieval lexicon known as the *Suda* (probably of the late tenth century) says that "Polemon [...] used to enjoy both Homer and Sophocles and said that each of them was equally wise [...] and [...] that Homer was the epic Sophocles and Sophocles the tragic Homer" (*Suda*, π 1887 = *TrGF* 4: 75, T 115b Radt). The notion that Sophocles shared with Homer a particular kind of "wisdom" recalls (and may even be derived from) Xenophon's account, in his *Recollections of Socrates* (early fourth century BCE), of a conversation between Socrates and Aristodemus. Socrates asks his follower if there are men whom he "has admired for [their] wisdom" (*sophia*), and Aristodemus replies that he "has most admired Homer for epic poetry and Melanippides for dithyramb and Sophocles for tragedy and Polycleitus for sculpture and Zeuxis for painting" (*Mem.* 1.4.3). It is clear from the context that Aristodemus utterly misses the point of Socrates' question, which aims at the conclusion, articulated later in the same chapter, that true wisdom belongs only to a god, not to a human being (see Gigante 1980–1: 13; and cf. Pl. *Phdr.* 278D3–4). Xenophon's Socrates here uses *sophia* ("wisdom") in a philosophical sense, but Aristodemus takes it to mean "artistic skill," an older sense of the word, common in Homer and other poets (see *Il.* 15.411, *Sol.* 13.52, *Pi. Ol.* 1.116). Aristodemus admires Sophocles, Homer, and the other artists because they are the most skilled – the best – in their respective genres (Gigon 1953: 122–6; Strauss 1972: 21–6).

Later in the fourth century, when Aristotle associates Sophocles with Homer on the grounds that "they both imitate superior men," that is, heroic characters (*Po.* 3.1448^a 25–7), he in effect combines Socrates' and Aristodemus' attitudes, since he admires the two poets both as imitators and for the ethically serious objects of their imitation. Possibly, too, given the importance of the mean in Aristotle's ethical thought, he may be implying that Sophocles' comparability to Homer has something to do with his being an artistic mean between Aeschylus and Euripides. Such a middle position of Sophocles in relation to the other two tragic poets is emphasized by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (late first century BCE) in his essay *On Literary Composition*, when he says that Homer is the literary "summit on which everyone's gaze should be fixed," because of the way he blends the "austere" and "polished" styles, and then mentions Sophocles among those writers who "practiced the same mean" (ὅσοι τὴν αὐτὴν μεσότητα ἐπετήδευσαν), along with Stesichorus, Alcaeus, Herodotus, Demosthenes, Democritus, Plato, and Aristotle (*Comp.* 24 = *TrGF* 4: 76, T 119 Radt). Similarly, the first-century CE orator Dio Chrysostom, in his comparison of the Philoctetes plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, though he does not specifically mention Homer, places Sophocles "in the middle between the other two [tragic poets]" on stylistic grounds: "he possesses neither Aeschylus' originality

and simplicity nor the craftsmanship, shrewdness, and rhetorical effectiveness of Euripides,” but “his verse is dignified and grand, tragic and euphonious to the highest degree, combining great charm with sublimity and dignity” (D.Chr. *Or.* 52.15, trans. D. A. Russell).

Further attestation of Sophocles’ “Homeric” and “philhomer” qualities can be found in (1) the *Life*, which probably dates from the first few centuries CE and has been transmitted along with the plays in some manuscripts; (2) the older *scholia*, brief inter-linear or marginal comments found in some manuscripts, which derive from the work of the first-century BCE scholar Didymus Chalcenterus and in some cases go back to earlier Hellenistic scholars; (3) the entry on Sophocles in the *Suda*, a lexicon based on earlier scholarly compilations as well as on some ancient texts and commentaries (4) the commentaries on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by the Byzantine scholar Eustathius (twelfth century CE), which were composed sometime before he became bishop of Thessaloniki in 1178. The *Life* says that Sophocles “delineates character, embellishes cunningly and elegantly, and uses contrivances artfully, reproducing the grace of Homer. For this reason a certain Ionian” (or “a man named Ionikos,” the text is uncertain) “says that only Sophocles was a student of Homer” (ἠθοποιεῖ τε καὶ ποικίλλει καὶ τοῖς ἐπινοήμασι τεχνικῶς χρῆται, Ὀμηρικὴν ἔκματτόμενος χάριν. ὅθεν εἰπεῖν †Ιωνικόν τινα† μόνον Σοφοκλέα τυχάνειν Ὀμήρου μαθητὴν, *TrGF* 4: 39, T 1.85–7 Radt) – where “only Sophocles” presumably means “Sophocles and not Aeschylus or Euripides.” The *Life* also claims that Sophocles “on the whole used Homeric names; and [in a clause already quoted] produces his plots in the poet’s [*sc.* Homer’s] footsteps, and he copies the *Odyssey* in many dramas” (τὸ πᾶν μὲν οὖν Ὀμηρικῶς ὠνόμαζε. οὓς τε γὰρ μύθους φέρει κατ’ ἴχνος τοῦ ποιητοῦ· καὶ τὴν Ὀδύσειαν δὲ ἐν πολλοῖς δράμασιν ἀπογράφεται, *TrGF* 4: 39, T 1.80–1). Although this text is corrupt in at least one place and the statement about copying the *Odyssey* “in many dramas” is incorrect (see above), the *Life* clearly recognizes Homeric features both in Sophocles’ style and in the content of his dramas. It cites, as a specific example, how Sophocles “copies” the *Odyssey* by “play[ing] etymologically on the name of Odysseus in the Homeric manner”: “I am rightly named Odysseus for my troubles:/for many enemies find me odious” (ὀρθῶς δ’ Ὀδυσσεύς εἰμ’ ἐπώνυμος κακῶν· / πολλοὶ γὰρ ὠδύσαντο δυσμενεῖς ἐμοί, fr. 965). These lines clearly echo the story of the naming of Odysseus at *Od.* 19.406–9, where there is a play on the name of Odysseus and the verb *odussasthai*, “to cause and suffer pain” (see *Od.* 1.60–2).

Like this comment on fr. 965 in the *Life*, the evidence of the *scholia* on the seven surviving plays has more to do with echoes of specific Homeric passages than with general considerations of content and style. More than 175 comments refer to verbal correspondences between Sophocles’ text and specific passages in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (Cantarella 1970: 314–15). Most of these comments either cite Homer by name before quoting the Homeric passage, or call something in Sophocles’ text “Homeric” or a “Homeric teaching.” When the *scholia* do not mention Homer by name, they usually speak of an echo or allusion to a particular Homeric character or passage (Cantarella 1970: 315–16). For the most part, what the scholiasts say about particular words, phrases, or expressions is quite superficial, but sometimes their comments have interpretive significance. For example, on *Philoctetes* 94–5, “But I wish, king, to miss the mark utterly, / doing well, rather than to conquer, doing vilely” (spoken by Neoptolemus to Odysseus), the scholiast remarks: “Sophocles introduces him [*sc.* Neoptolemus] speaking his father’s speech, ‘That man is hateful to me as the gates of Hades, / who hides one thing in his mind and speaks another.’” This apt quotation from the opening of Achilles’

speech to Odysseus at *Iliad* 9.312–13 shows that the scholiast recognizes the contrast between Neoptolemus' Achillean heroism and the wiliness of Odysseus, qualities that help to define each figure as a particular kind of hero.

In his commentaries on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Eustathius repeatedly calls Sophocles “a lover of Homer” (φιλόμηρος), “the emulator of Homer” (ὁ ζηλωτής Ὁμήρου), and “Homeric” (Ὀμηρικός). He often says that Sophocles writes “in emulation of Homer” (Ὀμηρικῶι ζήλωι) and calls attention to his use of words and phrases found in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Usually Eustathius describes Sophocles as “having taken” (λαβῶν) a word or phrase from Homer or as “paraphrasing,” “following,” or “having imitated” him (παραφράζων, ἀκολουθῶν, μιμησάμενος) (Radt 1983: 218–21; cf. Miller 1946: 99–102; van der Valk 1971: lxxvii, with n. 1). All told, Eustathius mentions Sophocles by name in more than 70 places where he observes that there is a Sophoclean imitation of a specific word or phrase from Homer. Almost all of these references are to the seven surviving plays, though Eustathius also cites fragments 454 and 1084. Sometimes he does not name Homer but cites a clear imitation of a passage in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*: for example, he notes that *Ajax* 550–1 is modeled on *Iliad* 6.479 by observing that Ajax, like Hector, prays for his son's future, although – unlike Hector, who wishes that Astyanax may surpass him – Ajax cannot bring himself to speak of his son's superiority and wishes only that he be “similar to [his] father” (Radt 1983: 222).

Eustathius was a major influence on the earliest scholar in modern times to discuss Sophocles' imitations of Homer: Henricus Stephanus. It is no accident that Stephanus concludes his essay *De Sophoclea imitatione Homeri, seu de Sophoclis locis imitationem Homeri habentibus, dissertatio* (*A Treatise on the Sophoclean Imitation of Homer, or on Places in Sophocles Having an Imitation of Homer*; Stephanus 1568) by saying that Sophocles' adaptations of Homer's gnomic or proverbial statements show that he was φιλόμηρος (“a lover of Homer”), one of Eustathius' favorite terms (Stephanus 1568: 95). A series of later scholars followed in the wake of Eustathius and Stephanus by pointing out additional Homerisms in Sophocles (e.g. Wiedemann 1837; Lechner 1859; Hemmerling 1868). Their studies, however, which restrict themselves mainly to “imitations” of specific words, phrases, and short passages, barely begin to address Sophocles' thoroughgoing and profound absorption of Homeric poetry and do not really show why Sophocles can rightly be called “(most) Homeric,” or even the “tragic Homer.”

This “profound absorption” can be seen in what one might call situational or structural echoes of Homeric poetry, as well as in verbal imitations. For example, all of Sophocles' surviving plays, except *The Women of Trachis*, feature “heroes” who absolutely, and often harshly, refuse to alter a course of action to which they have committed themselves, since to do so would compromise their values and violate their personal integrity. Though well-wishing family and friends or personal and political enemies ask or try to force them to do so, they remain intransigent and unyielding. This heroic resolve recalls the attitude and behavior of Achilles in the *Iliad*, whose “situation, mood, and action” as well as his impassioned, self-revealing rhetoric set an example for his Sophoclean counterparts (Knox 1964: 51–2).

Yet Sophocles does not merely reproduce Homeric models of heroic behavior and human experience; rather his characters are Homeric *with a difference*. They share with their Homeric namesakes and models a combination of greatness and helplessness, of superhuman strength and resolve and all too human vulnerability and proneness to error. At the same time they express or evoke fifth-century political and social ideas, institutions, and values, which are substantially different from those found in Homeric epic.

Even Homeric characters, such as the oligarchic Menelaus in *Ajax* and the sophistic, politically opportunistic Odysseus in *Philoctetes*, are not only figures out of the epic past, but unmistakable versions of contemporary Athenian political leaders. The plays repeatedly call attention to the multiple dimensions inhabited by the characters and challenge viewers and readers to evaluate epic ideas, institutions, and values in light of modern ones, and vice versa. Sophocles' characteristic blend of truth to Homer and difference from Homer enables him to "transmut[e] his sources into something new and distinctively his own" (Easterling 1984: 1).

2 The *Ajax*

One scene that shows particularly well this process of transmutation is the so-called "family scene" in *Ajax*, where Tecmessa pleads with Ajax to pity her and their infant son, Eurysaces, and not to kill himself, and Ajax speaks to his son and about the boy's future. This scene recalls, in many details of language and rhetoric, the scene in Book 6 of the *Iliad* where Hector meets and speaks with Andromache at Troy's Scaean Gates as he is about to return to the fighting, and wishes for a happy future for their infant son, "whom Hector used to call Scamandrius, but the others, / Astyanax [King of the city], for Hector alone protected Ilion" (6.402–3; see Perrotta 1935: 144–7; Kirkwood 1965: 51–70; Easterling 1984: 1–8; Zanker 1992: 20–5, Zimmermann 2002: 240–6). Those features of the scene in the play that seem on the surface most Homeric are actually most Sophoclean, because they show the poet both evoking his Iliadic model and transforming it into something quite different, and making the difference felt precisely through a series of contrasts with the model.

For example, Tecmessa's rhetoric and diction recall those of Andromache in the scene in *Iliad* 6, when she tries to persuade Hector not to return to fighting on the plain of Troy. Yet the tenderness of the Iliadic scene, which is evoked through verbal and situational echoes, is in counterpoint with, and calls attention to, the extreme brutality of the scene in the play, where a spear-won concubine, not a wife, is victimized, not cared for, by her master, not her husband, who is utterly alienated from, not a symbol and exemplar of, the values of family and community (Easterling 1984: 1–2). In replying to Ajax's expression of frustration, shame, and rage at how he has killed the herds and the herdsmen, failed to kill the Atreidae and Odysseus, and disgraced himself in the eyes of his father (*Aj.* 434–40, 445–53, 462–5), Tecmessa appeals for pity for herself and her son. This is the reverse of the sequence in the *Iliad*, where Andromache's appeal to Hector to pity her and their infant, Astyanax, prompts Hector's statement that it is precisely "the shame I feel before the Trojan men and Trojan women with training robes" that prevents him from doing as Andromache desires and "shrink[ing] far away from battle like a coward" (*Il.* 6.442–3). In her appeal to Ajax, Tecmessa calls on him to "be mindful of me; for a man *should*/be mindful, if he experiences something gratifying" (τερπνόν – referring not merely to the sexual pleasure she has given him but to all that follows from their shared bed, including their son, Eurysaces; Easterling 1984: 4).

For reciprocal favor [χάρις] always begets reciprocal favor;
and whoever is not mindful of having been treated well,
this one would no longer be a man who is noble [εὐγενής] (*Aj.* 520–4).

Tecmessa skillfully appropriates Ajax's own feeling that the Greeks, in awarding Achilles' armor to Odysseus, did not honor or adequately requite what he had done for them in battle (ll. 437–46). She also echoes Ajax's climactic concern, at the end of the speech to which she is replying, that “the noble [εὐγενής] man/must either live well or die well” (ll. 479–80). In other words, Tecmessa appeals to Ajax to live up to his own standard of nobility. On the other hand, in the *Iliad* Hector himself brings up his own standard of nobility as a reason *not to do* what Andromache asks of him: “for I have,” he tells her, “learned to be noble [ἐσθλός]/always and to fight in the front ranks of the Trojans,/ trying to win great glory for my father and my own glory” (*Il.* 6.444–6).

The difference between Hector's unselfish definition of nobility, which involves achieving something for his father as well as for himself, and Ajax's absorption in his own honor and reference to his father only as someone before whom to be ashamed, in a negative sense (ll. 434–40, 462–6), is matched by their respective references to their infant sons. In the Iliadic scene, when Astyanax shrinks back, frightened by the horsehair plume on Hector's helmet, “dazed [*atuchtheis*] by the sight of his own dear father” (6.468), the baby reacts like a warrior or a war-horse on the battlefield, who is terrified and stampeded in flight by an enemy (cf. the same verb, *atuzomai*, at *Il.* 6.38, 41; 18.7; 21.4, 454), and recoils from the symbol par excellence of Hector's identity as a warrior-hero. (The formula *kouthaiolos Hector*, “Hector of the shining helmet,” is used 38 times in the *Iliad*.) Hector's response to Astyanax's terror is to laugh, remove the helmet to kiss and dandle his son, and pray for Astyanax's future greatness as a warrior and ruler among the Trojans:

and someday may a man say, “This one is far better than his father,”
as he returns from war; may he bring back the bloody spoils
after he has killed an enemy man, and may his mother
rejoice in her heart. (*Il.* 6.479–81)

Ajax, however, has a completely different kind of involvement with his son, whom he treats merely as an extension of himself. He orders that the boy be brought home to tend the old age of Ajax's parents (568–70) – an obligation Ajax himself will fail to meet, when he commits suicide – and he insists that, while the rest of his armor should be buried with him, Eurysaces should have his “unbreakable shield made of seven layers of oxhide” (572–6), the symbol par excellence of Ajax's warrior prowess, after which the boy was named (Eurysaces means “broad shield”).

Ajax has already wished for his son's future greatness in terms conspicuously different from those in which Hector prays for Astyanax's future: “lift him” (he tells his Tecmessa),

lift him toward me; for he won't be afraid,
if he is rightly mine from his patriline.
But it is necessary at once to break him like a colt into his father's
raw and savage ways and that he be made similar (to his father) in his nature.
O child, may you be more fortunate than your father
but in other respects similar; and may you not be an ignoble coward [...]
You must show among your enemies
what sort of man you have been reared (to be) from what
sort of father. (*Aj.* 545–51, 556–7)

Ajax thinks of Eurysaces only in relation to himself, and when he thinks of the boy's future he makes no mention of Eurysaces' own glory, or of Tecmessa. The similarities

with, and, more importantly, the differences from Hector's treatment of Astyanax in *Iliad* 6 are obvious. As in the rest of the "family scene," the echoes and parallels clarify by contrast how *different* Ajax is from Hector, and how unlike the tender pathos of the Iliadic scene the harsh and bitter world of the play is – whose hero, unlike Hector (but like Hector's enemy, Achilles, only more so) is utterly alienated from the human community in which he exists. If the Iliadic Hector is the greatest of all warrior-heroes whose heroism is deeply rooted in family and community loyalties (though, in the end, it is tragically at odds with these loyalties), Ajax, by contrast, knows no such loyalties and is unmoved by appeals made in their name. He can think of his wife and son only as extensions of himself and agents of his will, and his selfishness is one aspect of his general "refusal to accept life on the terms that he sees that most men must abide by" (Kirkwood 1965: 62; cf. 68–70). It is precisely the "Homeric" echoes in Tecmessa's appeal to Ajax and Ajax's address to his son and comments on his future that make the scene in *Ajax* so different from that in *Iliad* 6 and, one might say, so distinctively Sophoclean.

3 The *Philoctetes*

The most thoroughgoing and productive example of Sophocles engagement with Homeric poetry in the seven surviving plays can be seen in *Philoctetes*. This play frequently refers, both explicitly and allusively, to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, in ways that include both the kind of verbal imitations on which ancient and medieval commentators focused and situational and structural echoes. These imitations and echoes, in turn, generate a tension within the play between epic and "tragedic" versions of Odysseus and Achilles and a contrast between what one might call Philoctetes' Achillean and Odyssean identities. As a result, the play combines generic complexity with ethical ambiguity and invites audiences and readers to make sense both of contrasting Homeric paradigms and values and of contradictions between these paradigms and values and those of late fifth-century Athens.

Philoctetes exploits the traditional contrast between the straightforwardly noble Achilles and the deviously effective Odysseus, opposing these paradigmatic heroes to one another, as they are opposed throughout the classical period, for example, in Plato's *Hippias Minor*. Philoctetes is associated ethically with the Iliadic Achilles through his absolute refusal to give in to Agamemnon's spokesman, Odysseus – a refusal that echoes Achilles' similar refusal in Book 9 of the *Iliad* (Schlesinger 1968: 103–5; Beye 1970; Fuqua 1976: 49–50; Perysinakis 1992: 81–2; cf. Whitman 1951: 182) – and on account of Neoptolemus' eventual choice of Philoctetes over Odysseus as a "father figure" (Avery 1965; Whitby 1996: 39; Roisman 1997; Kosak 1999: 115, 125–8; Davidson 2001). On the other hand, this model of Iliadic heroism is complemented by the play's simultaneous association of Philoctetes with the Homeric Odysseus (Davidson 1995), as he undergoes a sequence of experiences that recall the adventures of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. As a result, Philoctetes can be seen as both an Odyssean and an Achillean hero.

Philoctetes and Odysseus

The relation of the play to its Homeric background can first be seen in its opening lines; Odysseus tells Neoptolemus, "This is the shore of Lemnos, a land circled by the sea; / it's uninhabited and no mortal sets foot on it" (1–2). Here Odysseus uses the word περιρρύτου

(“circled by the sea”), which recalls the opening of the *Odyssey*: there Odysseus is confined on Calypso’s island, Ogygia, which is “circled by the sea” (ἄμφιρύτηι, *Od.* 1.50; see 1.198). When he is unable to leave Ogygia, Odysseus is represented as symbolically dead in a virtual Land of the Dead (Güntert 1919; Anderson 1958; Vernant 1996), just as Philoctetes on Lemnos is “a corpse among the living” (l. 1017), “the shadow of smoke, / merely a phantom” (ll. 946–7), who does not see why the Greeks have come for him – “I who am nothing and as far as you’re concerned have long been dead” (l. 1030). Furthermore, just as his isolation on Lemnos resembles that of Odysseus at the beginning of the *Odyssey*, so his eventual departure from the “sea-surrounded land of Lemnos” (l. 1464) and “return home” (l. 1471) to health and heroic identity at Troy evoke the basic pattern of that epic – a pattern in which Odysseus frequently escapes the danger of literal or symbolic death, often on isolated islands, and returns home, where he slays the suitors and thus re-establishes his distinctive identity as husband, father, and king (Frame 1978: 1–80).

Other features of the play’s dramatic action associate Philoctetes with the Odysseus of the *Odyssey*. For example, Odysseus’ pattern of symbolic death and rebirth is paralleled by Philoctetes’ paroxysm and subsequent awakening “beyond hope / still living and breathing without pain” (ll. 882–3). In addition, the description of Philoctetes’ dwelling given by the Sophoclean Odysseus (ll. 16–9) –

a two-mouthed rock-cave nearby –
the sort where in winter there are two places
to sit in the sun’s warmth, and in summer
a cool breeze sends sleep through a grotto open at both ends,

– recalls the description of the two-mouthed cave of the Nymphs in the Ithacan harbor of Phorkys, near the spot at which the Phaeacian sailors set Odysseus ashore (*Od.* 13.103–12), but this association is ironically qualified by a crucial difference: in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus, with the help of Athena, hides in the cave the riches given him by the Phaeacians (13.136–8):

bronze, lots of gold and woven garments,
much more than Odysseus ever would have taken from Troy
had he come unharmed with his allotted portion of plunder.

By contrast, as Philoctetes tells Neoptolemus (ll. 273–5), when Odysseus and the Greeks abandoned him, asleep, ten years earlier (ll. 3–7, 15–19), they left him

the sort of things
you would offer an ill-fated man – a few
rags and a small helping of food too.

Neoptolemus’ description of what he sees in the cave (ll. 33–9) – a bed of pressed-down leaves, a drinking cup poorly carved from a block of wood, some rags drying in the sun, and a bit of fire-starter – enhances this contrast, as does the Sophoclean Odysseus’ ironic reference to these items as Philoctetes’ “provision that would make [...] a home” (οἰκοποιὸς τροφή, l. 32) and his “treasure” (θησαύρισμα, l. 37).

These situational parallels between Philoctetes and the epic Odysseus are paradoxical, because in the play, as commentators have recognized since antiquity, Odysseus is represented not as his Homeric self but as a typical, late fifth-century Athenian politician,

willing to use both physical violence and sophisticated rhetoric for personal and political ends. Odysseus' penchant for violence is expressed through the frequent use of diction involving the word βία ("violence," "force"). This includes, for example, the naming periphrasis "the violence (βία) of Odysseus" (ll. 314, 321, 592) to designate the person, "Odysseus" (this is a typical device in Homeric epic, but in Sophocles' extant plays it occurs only in these three lines and at *Tr.* 38), and an otherwise unparalleled idiom consisting of a form of ἄγω ("bring") adverbially modified by the phrase ἐκ βίας ("by violence," ll. 563, 945, 985; cf. ἀπάξεται βίαι "[Philoctetes] will be brought away by violence," l. 988 (Machin 1983: 261–76)).

The contrast between Sophocles' fifth-century Odysseus and Odysseus in the *Odyssey* is signaled on several occasions when Philoctetes refers to Odysseus as the son of Sisyphos, one of the arch-criminals in the Greek mythological tradition, rather than as the son of Laertes, who is his father in the *Odyssey* (*Ph.* 417, 1311; cf. l. 625). The contrast can also be seen at the end of the Prologue, when Odysseus anachronistically invokes Athena, his patron deity in the *Odyssey*, as "Victory Athena the City Goddess" (Νίκη τ' Ἀθάνα Πολιάς, l. 134), using cult titles that, in 409 BCE, would have immediately and unmistakably reminded an Athenian audience of their own civic religion. "Victory Athena" (Ἀθάνα Νίκη) personified triumphant Athenian imperialism and was worshipped in a small temple near the southwest corner of the Athenian acropolis. Similarly, "Athena the City Goddess" (Ἀθάνα Πολιάς) was housed in the Erechtheion on the north side of the acropolis and worshipped as the protector of the city and of Attica generally. When Odysseus mentions "Victory Athena, the City Goddess," he associates his own rhetoric, values, and intrigue against Philoctetes with the dominant political values and actions of contemporary Athens (Rose 1992: 305–6, n. 71, 309; cf. Rehm 2002: 154–5). Thus, in addition to the contrast in the play between the fifth-century, tragic Odysseus and the Odysseus of the *Odyssey*, there is a contrast in Sophocles' play between this fifth-century Odysseus and Philoctetes, whose movement from symbolic death to heroic rebirth and "return home" (νόστος, l. 1471) makes him, as I have said, a kind of epic Odysseus.

Philoctetes, Achilles, and Neoptolemus

Throughout *Philoctetes* there is a similar, programmatic contrast between the epic Achilles, whom Philoctetes resembles both in his self-defeating refusal to compromise with his hated enemies and in his need and capacity for friendship, and a late fifth-century, tragic Achilles in the person of Neoptolemus. Initially, Neoptolemus does not look like a late fifth-century figure when he rejects Odysseus' suggestion that he should lie in order to steal Philoctetes' bow, and when he associates himself with his father's traditional integrity, replying to Odysseus (ll. 88–9, 94–5):

I was born to do nothing by evil contrivance –
neither I myself nor, as they say, the one who sired me.
[...]
I prefer, O King, to fail
by doing well rather than to conquer by evil means.

A *scholion* on line 94 recognizes *Iliad* 9.312–13 as the source of the antagonism between the Achillean Neoptolemus' and Odysseus: "Sophocles introduces [Neoptolemus] speaking his father's speech: 'that man is hateful to me as the gates of Hades / [who

hides one thing in his heart and says another]” – lines that, in the *Iliad*, are pointedly addressed to Odysseus (Pappageorgius 1888: 353). Nevertheless, although he finds lying “shameful” (αἰσχρόν, l. 108), Neoptolemus quickly agrees to “put aside all shame and do it” (l. 120) for the sake of his own “profit” (κέρδος, ll. 111, 112) – a characteristically Odyssean motivation. His self-proclaimed “natural” reluctance to act “by evil contrivance” and his preference “to take the man by force / instead of deceit” (ll. 90–1), “to fail / by doing well rather than to conquer by evil means” (94–5), are no match for Odysseus’ sophistic reassurance that speech rather than action is what really counts in life (96–9) and for his assertion that he himself does not consider it shameful to lie, “if the lie brings salvation” (οὐκ, εἰ τὸ σωθῆναι γε τὸ ψεῦδος φέρει, l. 109). When Odysseus tells Neoptolemus that he cannot sack Troy without the bow, Neoptolemus gives in, using the kind of impersonal language that is characteristic of Odysseus throughout the play: “Then it would have to be hunted, if this is so” (θηρατέ’ οὐν γίγνοιτ’ ἄν, εἴπερ ὦδ’ ἔχει, l. 116; see Schein 1998: 293–307, esp. p. 302). A few lines later Odysseus tells him that, if he does this, he will be called “both clever and noble” (σοφός τε [...] κάγαθός, ll. 117, 119), a formulation that plays on the idiomatic Attic phrase “both fine and noble” (καλός τε κάγαθός), and Neoptolemus agrees to “put aside all shame” (l. 120), making clear the ethical distance between his fifth-century values and those of his epic father.

Neoptolemus turns out to be a most effective liar and wins Philoctetes’ friendship and trust as part of his successful attempt to gain possession of “the unconquerable weapons” (l. 78; see Belfiore 1994: 113–29). To the extent that his new solidarity with Philoctetes is grounded in Philoctetes’ old friendship with Achilles (l. 242), Neoptolemus’ betrayal of this solidarity is a betrayal of his own father and of the nobility he claimed to inherit (ll. 88–9). It is also a betrayal of the father–son relationship that has come to exist between Philoctetes (as a surrogate Achilles) and Neoptolemus, whom Philoctetes calls “son” or “child” 52 times during the play (Avery 1965: 285).

Eventually Neoptolemus escapes Odysseus’ hold on him, but it is significant that his shock and sympathy at the sight (and sounds!) of Philoctetes’ paroxysm and the moral quandary occasioned by his sense of having betrayed his own nature (ll. 895, 897, 902–3, 906) do not, at first, prevent him from holding on to the bow and justifying himself to Philoctetes on the impersonal, characteristically Odyssean basis that “a great necessity / compels these things” (πολλή κρατεῖ / τούτων ἀνάγκη, ll. 921–2; cf. Schein 1998: 303–4). Just as he was willing, earlier in the play, to use violence against a cripple, Neoptolemus still sees nothing wrong with forcing Philoctetes (against his will) to participate in the war for the sake of the Greek army and Neoptolemus’ own, prospective glory. Even after he returns the bow, Neoptolemus tries to evade personal responsibility for his actions by telling Philoctetes that his wound and sickness are the result of “divine fortune” (l. 1326) and then by invoking the prophecy of Helenus as a reason why Philoctetes should willingly go to Troy to be healed and win the “highest glory” (ll. 1344–7). Neoptolemus’ words are almost as complacent and self-serving as his statement to the chorus in the *parodos*, that Philoctetes’ sufferings, “if I have any understanding, / are divine” and that

there is no way it’s not the concern of the gods
that this man not draw against Troy too soon
the unopposable shafts of the gods,
until the time comes in which it is said
that the city must be destroyed by them. (ll. 192–3, 196–200)

– the time at which Neoptolemus himself will share in the glory of sacking the city.

Many readers think that Neoptolemus, by returning the bow to Philoctetes (ll. 1291–2) and by agreeing to take him home (l. 1402), returns to “the Achillean standard” from which he had departed (Knox 1964: 123; King 1987: 77). This is how Philoctetes himself understands Neoptolemus’ actions (ll. 1310–13):

You have shown, my child, the nature
 from which you sprung, not from Sisyphos as a father
 but from Achilles, who when he was among the living
 had the best glory, and now has it among the dead.

These lines, however, give one pause. They echo the passage in Book 11 of the *Odyssey* where Odysseus tells the Phaeacians how, in the Land of the Dead, he had told the “soul” (ψυχή) of Achilles that he was “mightiest among the dead,” just as the Argives had honored him, when he was alive, equally to the gods (11.484–5); to which the “soul,” according to Odysseus, famously replied that he would rather be alive and the hired laborer of a poor man than ruler of all the dead (11.489–91). The effect of Odysseus’ story is, first, to emphasize that Achilles is dead, while he himself is alive, and, second, to imply that his own kind of heroism, the heroism of a survivor, is better than that of Achilles, the heroism of a warrior who died young for the sake of “imperishable glory.” In lines 1310–13 Philoctetes clearly means to contrast the Achillean Neoptolemus favorably with the Sisyphian Odysseus, but he does so in language that defeats itself, in so far as it evokes Odysseus’ heroic supremacy in *Odyssey* 11 and thus undercuts Neoptolemus’ apparent return to “the Achillean standard.”

Neoptolemus’ ethical disposition remains ambiguous and problematic to the end of the play. For example, it has frequently been recognized since antiquity that Herakles’ warning to remain pious during the sack of Troy (1440–4) is a clear allusion to Neoptolemus’ notorious impiety in slaughtering Priam on the altar of Zeus (scholiast on 1441, in Pappageorgius 1888: 393; Easterling 1978: 39; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 302–3; Roberts 1988: 190–1; Kosak 2006: 63 n. 37). Moreover, because Neoptolemus’ pity and respect for Philoctetes seem, on the surface, so similar to Achilles’ for Priam in *Iliad* 24, this reminder of the son’s ruthless impiety toward the helpless king is troubling. If an audience or reader were to recall the unflattering story of Neoptolemus’ death at Delphi (see E. *Andr.* 1085–165, *Or.* 1654–7), the instability of his return to “the Achillean standard” would be still more evident. “If we follow through the *nostos* [return home] of Neoptolemus, there is no doubt where it leads: Delphi. The glory, health, and *soteria* [salvation] attained by Philoctetes are joined arm in arm with the shadow of the future which darkens Neoptolemus” (Taplin 1987: 76).

The meaning of Taplin’s phrase “arm in arm” can be seen near the end of the play, where Heracles addresses Neoptolemus and Philoctetes using the dual number: “Guard one another at Troy like two lions who feed in the same pasture, / this man, you, and you, this man...” (ἀλλ’ ὡς λέοντε συννόμω φυλάσσετον / οὔτος σὲ καὶ τὸνδ’..., ll. 1436–7). This conspicuous “epic” simile, the only one in the play and one of only two lion similes in the extant Sophoclean corpus (cf. *Aj.* 986–7), is apparently positive in its evocation of a heroic world and heroic values. It recalls, however, *Iliad* 10.297, where Odysseus and Diomedes go “like two lions through the dark night” on the spy mission during which they capture, deceive, and butcher the Trojan spy Dolon, and then proceed to slaughter the sleeping Thracian king, Rhesus, and his men and steal Rhesus’ horses. Unlike other two-lion similes in the *Iliad* (5.554–60; 13.198–202; 16.756–61), which emphasize the

courage or savagery of the warriors compared with the lions (Krethon and Orsilochos in Book 5, the two Ajaxes in Book 13, Hector and Patroclus in Book 16), this simile from *Iliad* 10 might come to the mind of a reader or spectator of Sophocles' play, because it introduces a story featuring the opportunistic and brutal actions of Philoctetes' two most hated enemies, Odysseus and Diomedes, who in Euripides' *Philoctetes* (431 BCE) had brought Philoctetes back from Lemnos to Troy (as Diomedes alone had done in the Cyclic epic, the *Little Iliad*). Thus, even in a passage that is supposed to present Neoptolemus in a favorable light, he does not entirely escape an association with the ethically ambiguous and unsavory Odysseus (Wolff 1979: 144–50).

This complex intertextuality opens up confusing problems of interpretation, just as the action of the play seems to exclude such problems from its “happy ending.” Presumably no reader or spectator would want to give up the identification with Neoptolemus, which has been carefully cultivated by the play's story of his apparently successful moral education into his inherent nobility (Weinstock 1931: 93–6). Nevertheless, the play also establishes him as an ethically compromised, fifth-century tragicomic version of Achilles, much as its Odysseus is a late fifth-century tragicomic version of his epic namesake. By contrast, Philoctetes is modeled ethically and heroically both on the epic Achilles, in his heroic intransigence, and on the epic Odysseus, in his dramatic movement from the virtual death of his lonely, Lemnian existence to his heroic rebirth and “return home” at the end of the play. Insofar as Philoctetes remains a kind of Achilles, true to his hatred of Odysseus and of the sons of Atreus, the play seems to end at 1397, with Philoctetes' insistence that Neoptolemus leave him to “suffer what he must suffer.” Or it might be thought to end 11 lines later, with the two departing together, after Neoptolemus has agreed to take Philoctetes home and Philoctetes has promised to use the weapons of Heracles to defend Neoptolemus against the Greek army (Hoppin 1990: 141–82).

Either of these two endings, while allowing Philoctetes to remain true to his Achillean self, would contradict the well-known myth according to which Philoctetes not only departed from Lemnos with Odysseus (or Diomedes), but shared in the glory of sacking Troy. The actual ending of the play, after Heracles' sudden appearance *ex machina* at line 1409, brings the action into conformity with this traditional myth by dispensing with Philoctetes' Achillean self and having him remain true to his identity as an epic Odysseus, while the Odysseus of the tragedy is nowhere to be seen. Heracles offers himself to Philoctetes as a pattern of redemption through heroic excellence achieved through toil and suffering, and this association with Philoctetes supersedes, as it were, the similar association of Heracles' heroic career with that of Odysseus at *Odyssey* 11.618–19.

Generically, the play is a romance rather than a tragedy and it ends problematically, as romance often does, leaving audiences and readers divided in their responses and unsure of their moral bearings (Greengard 1987: *passim*, esp. 88–106). The problematic quality of the romance ending is heightened by the presence, in *Philoctetes*, of Iliadic and Odyssean heroic models. In the epics themselves, these two models are in contradiction to and competition with one another, and the poems present themselves clearly as Achillean *kleos* poetry or Odyssean *nostos* poetry, respectively. Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, however, incorporates elements found in both these archaic poetic genres.

This complex situation is made still more difficult to interpret by the simultaneous presence in the play of what I have called fifth-century tragicomic and epic versions of both Achilles and Odysseus. In addition to the problems raised by the romance ending, these interwoven heroic patterns problematize traditional epic characters and values in light of modern ones and call into question modern characters and values in light of

their epic antecedents. Largely as a result of these epic complexities, *Philoctetes* has a distinctive ambiguity, which sets it apart from other Sophoclean tragedies and other Attic tragedies generally. It challenges audiences and readers to make sense of its intertextual relations with Homeric epic and to achieve interpretive clarity in the face of contradictory epic paradigms and of the opposition between these paradigms and those of late fifth-century Athens.

Guide to Further Reading

On Sophocles and Homer generally, see Pearson 1917, vol. 1: xxiii–xxviii; Knox 1964: 50–3, Cantarella 1970, Radt 1983: 197–202, Jouanna 2007: 187–94.

On the Homeric features of Ajax and Homeric intertextuality in *Ajax*, see Kirkwood 1965, Easterling 1984, Zanker 1992.

On the Homeric features of *Philoctetes* and on Homeric intertextuality in *Philoctetes*, see King 1987: 66–77, Perysinakis 1992, Davidson: 1995, Schein 2006.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Kirk Ormand for inviting me to contribute to this Companion and for his editorial advice, encouragement, and patience; and Nancy Felson for helpful criticism of an earlier draft. I also would like to thank the Institute of Classical Studies, London, in particular Richard Simpson, Managing Editor of the *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, for permission to draw extensively in the second part of this chapter on my chapter entitled “The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*: Generic Complexity and Ethical Ambiguity,” in Davidson, Muecke, and Wilson (eds.) (2006: 129–40). Finally, I am grateful to Manuela Tecusan for her helpful copyediting.

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Facing Up to Tragedy

Toward an Intellectual History of Sophocles in Europe from Camerarius to Nietzsche

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1 History of Interpretation as Intellectual History

Since Plato's incisive, though unsympathetic, analysis of "tragic poetry" as a dangerously powerful medium of a certain worldview and mentality, Greek tragedy in general and Sophocles in particular have generated a fascinating history of critical responses, intellectual engagement, and conceptualization that lasted well into late antiquity and began anew with the rediscovery of Greek tragedy in the early sixteenth century, evolving as one of the central contests in the history of Western thought.

Surprising as it may seem, an intellectual history of modern attempts to make sense of Greek tragedy, to come to terms with Sophocles' tragic vision, and, in doing so, to conceptualize the relationship between tragedy and life has never been fully written. We now know a great deal about the history of textual criticism, printing tradition, translation, poetic imitation, performance, and cinematic adaptation of Greek drama. But we still know astonishingly little about the ways in which Sophocles' plays were interpreted and discussed between 1500 and 1800 and the prominent role the debates on Sophocles and Greek tragedy played in the intellectual history of Europe. What is more, from the few studies that touch upon the history of interpretation, one usually gets the impression that the history of serious modern intellectual engagement with Greek tragedy only began, almost miraculously, in the nineteenth century, with Schelling and the Schlegel brothers – an opinion strongly endorsed by Peter Szondi in his influential *Essay on the Tragic* of 1961.

The Schlegel brothers and Schelling, however, were not the first to think about the meaning, purpose, and value of ancient tragedy. Nor were they the first to conceive of tragedy, both ancient and modern, as a central medium of exploration of man's place in the world and to use Greek tragedy in order to develop their own tragic theory and to conceptualize, or challenge, the category of the tragic as a fundamental and timeless feature of human existence. As we shall see, Schelling and the Schlegels stand not so much at the beginning as at the end of a complex intellectual debate that began in the early sixteenth century and has continued unbroken ever since. By the 1540s Sophocles and Greek tragedy in general were already the topic of intense discussion and disagreement throughout Europe. These early debates initiated two crucial developments which together not only have shaped both the entire reception history of ancient drama and the history of dramatic theory in Europe, but have also deeply influenced all subsequent critical approaches and responses to Greek tragedy. They still retain their influence today.

2 Aristotelization of Greek Tragedy: Joachim Camerarius 1534

Ever since their rediscovery at the beginning of the sixteenth century, attempts to make sense of Greek tragedy and of Aristotle's *Poetics* went hand in hand. Since Aristotle's normative theory was misunderstood to be a descriptive analysis and hence to present an authoritative key to understanding ancient drama, scholars and critics believed that they always had to refer to Aristotle's doctrines when interpreting Greek tragedies. At least, they always tried to corroborate their own readings by demonstrating that this was how Aristotle, too, saw the matter, even if this sometimes required a great deal of tampering with the *Poetics* to suit the argument.

This approach is already employed in the text that stands at the very beginning of modern Sophoclean criticism: the *Argumentum fabulae* by Joachim Camerarius, published in 1534 as an introduction to his commentary on *Oedipus Tyrannus* (fol. 9^r–11^v) and reprinted several times in various Sophoclean editions and translations during the sixteenth century. This earliest assessment of the play is intricately connected with a conception of tragedy that is based on some of the central categories of Aristotle's tragic theory. First, Camerarius defines tragedy as an imitation of momentous events entailing an unexpected and undeserved change of the tragic hero's fortune from good to bad that is designed to arouse fear and pity – a definition that does not link the specific tragic emotions to any moral purpose and cautiously avoids any explicit interpretation of *catharsis*. Second, since for Aristotle the emotional effect of tragedy must result from its plot structure, Camerarius categorically rejects those plays which show the workings of divine justice and where the wicked get what they deserve, because in such cases the spectator or reader could neither feel fear nor have pity. Closely connected to this is, finally, Camerarius' interpretation of Aristotle's concept of *hamartia*, the cause of the tragic hero's undeserved downfall. According to Camerarius, the tragic hero's *hamartia* had to be an involuntary crime committed out of ignorance or against his own will that would leave his moral innocence intact. This understanding of Aristotle's conception of tragedy serves here as a foundation for an interpretation of *Oedipus Tyrannus* as the best tragedy – that is to say, one that serves best to evoke fear and pity in the audience – because Oedipus, a morally good, honorable, and virtuous human being, forced by some

dark power of fate into misery he does not deserve, commits crimes unknowingly and against his own will that lead nonetheless to harrowing punishments (fol. 11^r).

That was in 1534. At the time, Aristotle's *Poetics* was still regarded by many as bewilderingly obscure and scarcely comprehensible. Its integration into the critical tradition was only about to unfold. The first reliable Latin translation, by Alessandro Pazzi, would only be published two years later, in 1536. The first commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, by Francesco Robortello, would appear 14 years later, in 1548. Yet, even at this early stage, interpretations of Greek tragedy and of Aristotle's theory of tragedy seem already inextricably intertwined. And this was only the beginning. It was not long before Pietro Vettori set out to analyze at length not just *Oedipus Tyrannus* but *all* of the preserved plays by both Sophocles *and* Euripides, with the help of the central categories of Aristotle's theory as he understood it (1540/50). Many others would follow in his footsteps. The flood of commentaries and learned treatises on the *Poetics* published in Italy in the second half of the sixteenth century not only eventually transformed Aristotle's theory into a strict set of rules to which modern playwrights had to adhere, but also gave modern scholars and readers a welcome, though inadequate and misleading, conceptual framework within which to view and judge ancient drama. By the end of the sixteenth century the validity and authority of Aristotle's theory as a principal interpretative tool and the only genuine key to understanding Greek tragedy was no longer questioned. When in March 1585 *Edipo Tiranno* was performed in Palladio's *Teatro Olimpico* in Vicenza, those who attended this first modern vernacular production of Greek tragedy could not but see the play through Aristotle's eyes and describe their impressions in terms of whatever each one of them believed to be Aristotle's doctrines (Pigafetta 1585; Riccoboni 1585). As we shall see, the resulting interdependence between interpretations of ancient tragedy and of Aristotle's *Poetics* proved to be a hermeneutical disaster.

3 Christianization, or the Denial of Tragedy: Philipp Melanchthon 1545

While the Aristotelization of both tragedy and tragic theory after Camerarius took place mainly in Italy, in the second crucial development – the process of Christianization of Greek tragedy – Protestant humanists played a central role, first of all Philipp Melanchthon. His manifesto entitled *Cohortatio ad legendas tragoedias et comoedias*, written in 1545, marks a pivotal moment in the history of interpretation of Greek tragedy.

The first half of the sixteenth century was still pervaded by the idea that tragedy was a warning representation of the mutability of unpredictable *fortuna*, and hence of the frailty of human happiness and the misery of human life. Jodocus Badius Ascensius, for example, defined tragedy in his *Praenotamenta in comoedias Terentii* of 1502, one of the most influential treatises on dramatic theory in the first half of the sixteenth century, as a “play composed in meter that mainly shows the fragility of human affairs” (fol. V^r). The tragic poet's principal duty was to demonstrate “*infelicitas & miseria humane vite*” (fol. V^r). In the dedicatory epistle to his voluminous edition of Seneca's tragedies published in 1514, Badius declared tragedies particularly beneficial to kings and rulers, who are to be reminded of misfortunes of humanity “as they see so many people fall from such a high throne down into such a low dust” (p. 252). Guillaume Bouchetel claimed in the preface to his translation of Euripides' *Hecabe* of 1544 that

tragedy was invented by the ancients to demonstrate to kings and rulers “*Vincertitude et lubrique instabilité des choses temporelles*” (p. 108).

Melanchthon opposed this understanding of tragedy in his manifesto of 1545. Drawing on a wide range of sources, including ancient and humanist moralizing traditions as well as Aristotle’s notion of the emotional effect of tragedy, Melanchthon claimed with religious fervor that the Greek tragedians did not write their plays for entertainment, let alone for kings and rulers to be warned of unpredictable misfortunes, but with the intention of forcing the souls of their fellow-citizens to keep their pernicious passions in check out of fear of God’s punitive justice. For in all their tragedies, he contended, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides went out of their way to bring to light the workings of divine providence, to reveal human vices and depraved passions as *the true causes* of human misfortunes and suffering, and to show the audience that just deeds would be rewarded in the end and crimes would always be punished. In representing the tragic end of a great hero as the terrifying, yet nonetheless just, punishment of crimes ensuing from his own vices, passions, and character flaws, tragic poets sought to make people believe that it was not unpredictable fate but divine providence that ruled the world, that there was an eternal spirit that always punished crime and protected the just – if not always, at least most of the time. In this way Melanchthon interpreted all of Greek tragedy as a uniform theodicy that warned of God’s punitive justice, a theodicy that was perfectly in agreement with the doctrines of the Christian church:

These events [*sc.* in Greek tragedies] impressed upon men *the causes of human misfortunes*, which they saw in these examples being brought about and exacerbated by *depraved passions*. And, just as Pindar [P. 2.40ff.] said that Ixion, tangled on the wheel among the dead souls below, cried out the following words repeated by Vergil, “Be forewarned! Learn Justice and not to scorn the Gods!” [Aen. 6.620]: Thus, *in all the tragedies, this is the main subject. This is the thought they wish to impress upon the hearts of every man: that there is some eternal mind that always inflicts severe punishments upon atrocious crimes*, while bestowing mostly a more tranquil path for the moderate and just. And although now and again accidental misfortunes can fall upon men – for there are many mysterious causes – still, *that fundamental, unmistakable principle cannot be dispelled: clearly the Erinyes and cruel misfortunes are always the companions of heinous misdeeds*. This thought persuaded many to temper their actions and ought to move us even more since we know that it was often delivered to the Church by the clear voice of God. (Melanchthon 1545a: 568)¹

Reprinted at least eleven times during the second half of the sixteenth century, Melanchthon’s *Cohortatio* was not only a powerful defence of Greek tragedy against its Platonist and Christian critics, but also a passionate appeal to provide interpretations of Greek tragedies that would reveal their true salutary meaning. For it had yet to be shown by the analysis of the surviving plays that in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides the tragic fortune of a great hero was, indeed, always presented as the consequence of a vice and depraved action he himself was to blame for, and therefore as God’s just punishment. Thus, scholarship was given its missionary purpose, and interpretation of Greek tragedy became a tool in the service of theodicy.

And Melanchthon did not rest content with general claims and appeals. In the same year of 1545, he gave a series of lectures on Sophocles at Wittenberg. Published one year later, by, and under the name of, his student Veit Winshemius, the lectures were designed to demonstrate how Greek tragedies ought to be read and interpreted. In his general introduction, Winshemius expounded the true meaning and moral purpose of Greek

tragedy as it was taught by Melanchthon (Melanchthon and Winshemius 1546 A2^r–[A7^r]). More importantly, he prefaced each of the translations with an interpretative essay written by Melanchthon for his own lectures. These were new, detailed interpretations of Sophocles' plays, in which Melanchthon tried to apply to Sophocles the conception of Greek tragedy developed in his *Cohoratio* and, in so doing, to corroborate it exegetically.

Melanchthon understood *Ajax* as a conflict between Ulysses as a modest and self-restrained politician and Ajax as a burly soldier who was driven by ambition, spite, and a fatal inability to tolerate an offence and who brought about his own downfall as a result of these vices (Melanchthon 1545b: 3^r = Melanchthon and Winshemius 1546: B2). In *The Women of Trachis* it was Heracles' own adulterous lust, *vaga libido*, that was responsible for his ruin (Melanchthon and Winshemius 1546: Y3^r–Y4^r). In his search for divine justice in *Electra*, Melanchthon had to focus on the idea of inherited guilt and family curse and to explain the events on stage as mere links in a long providential chain of catastrophes with which God had the family of Pelops pay for the murder of Myrtilus (Melanchthon 1545b: 31^f. = Melanchthon and Winshemius 1546: E7^r– E8^r). In *Antigone*, Melanchthon did not – unlike some modern critics – blame Antigone, but Creon. Although he refused to praise Antigone's disobedient behavior towards authority or to condemn Creon as a ruler who had to enforce his power by every means possible, Melanchthon did acknowledge that the tyrant Creon had to pay for his immoderate cruelty and stubbornness (Melanchthon 1545b: 71^f. = Melanchthon and Winshemius 1546: O1^r– O2^r).

So far, so good. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, however, Melanchthon seemed unable to discern God's justice at all or to prove Camerarius' interpretation wrong. As a result, he discreetly opted not to comment on the play. Thus, wretched Oedipus was made to wait for divine justice once again. Although Melanchthon's silence about the meaning of *Oedipus Tyrannus* would very soon prove significant, it did not in any way diminish the lasting success of Melanchthon's understanding of Greek tragedy or his providential reading of Sophocles. The volume published by Winshemius in 1546 (and reprinted in 1549 and 1551) was followed by a whole range of translations and bilingual editions, produced and distributed throughout Europe, in which Sophocles was relentlessly, though not always convincingly, subjected to the Christianization initiated by Melanchthon and denied the tragic sense of life he once seemed to have (Rataller 1550, 1570; Naogeorg 1552, 1558; Camerarius 1556; Lalamantius 1557; Bornemisza 1558; Codicillus 1583; cf. Stiblin 1562 and Riccius 1568).

4 Christianizing Aristotle, Searching for Oedipus' Guilt: Sophocles and the Development of the *Doctrine Classique*

Very different developments though they originally were, Aristotelization and Christianization eventually merged in the seventeenth century neo-classical dramatic theory, the *doctrine classique*. This became possible, however, only after Aristotle's *Poetics* underwent a Christianizing and moralizing re-interpretation of its own. This re-interpretation was generated by dozens of learned commentaries and theoretical treatises written in Italy during the second half of the Cinquecento which, while disagreeing on many key issues, all tried nonetheless to integrate Aristotle's treatise into the prevailing

critical tradition by eliciting from the text of the *Poetics* unwilling responses to their own theoretical and increasingly moralistic concerns. As a result, the notion of Greek tragedy envisaged by Melanchthon eventually seemed to align neatly with what was now widely thought to be Aristotle's tragic theory. Christianizing re-interpretations of Aristotle and Greek tragedy mutually reinforced each other. Ironically, the touchstone of the required unity of ancient practice and ancient theory was Aristotle's favorite tragedy, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*—the only play Melanchthon himself found impossible to accommodate in his anti-tragic vision.

The crucial issue in this complex process was the re-interpretation of Aristotle's concept of tragic *catharsis* as the moral aim of tragedy. Aristotle's reticent remarks on *catharsis* provoked a dazzling array of competing and contradictory interpretations in the second half of the sixteenth century. Only one of them, however, fit well into the increasingly influential theory prefigured by Melanchthon which claimed that the function of tragedy was to provide moral instruction through exemplary and deterrent representation of the workings of divine justice. Tragedy had to bring to light the justice of God by always punishing vice and rewarding virtue on stage. If the doctrine of what Thomas Rymer would later call "poetical justice" (Rymer 1678: 26) was to be found in Aristotle's *Poetics*, *catharsis* inevitably had to be transformed into a moral purgation of our souls from perilous vices, depraved passions, and character flaws which the spectators see to be the true causes of the tragic hero's downfall. Proposed by Maggi in 1550 and endorsed, among many others, by Benedetto Varchi, Giraldi Cinthio, Minturno, Lucio Olimpico Giraldi, Viperano, and Paolo Beni, this interpretation was eagerly taken up in the early twenties of the seventeenth century by Jean Chapelain, who, unconcerned about controversial philological details, made it – together with the compulsory representation of divine justice – one of the central dogmas of the neo-classical dramatic theory. From now on, the paramount *utilité* of tragedy, and the only aim of a tragic poet, consisted in *la purgation des passions vicieuses* (Chapelain 1623: 205).

This re-interpretation of *catharsis*, however, entailed in its turn a particular understanding of tragic *hamartia* as the cause of the tragic hero's downfall. Whoever accepted Maggi's and Chapelain's explanation of *catharsis* had to turn *hamartia* into a morally culpable action committed out of one's own vicious passions and character flaws from which the audience, struck by fear and pity, would be consequently purged. Although logically inevitable, this interpretation has proved most elusive. In the very first modern commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* published in Florence in 1548, Francesco Robortello cogently argued that tragic *hamartia* could only mean an involuntary action done through ignorance of particulars, because according to Aristotle's theory of action, which his theory of tragedy as *mimesis* of actions is grounded on, only this type of involuntary action would fulfill all the requirements set out in the *Poetics* for the *hamartia* of the ideal tragic plot (Robortello 1548: 129–32). Robortello's argument, supported, among others, by Castelvetro (1570) and Heinsius (1611), was as compelling as it was troubling. Not only did it imply that most of the surviving Greek tragedies simply did not fit Aristotle's formula, thus casting a shadow over the presumed universality of his theory as a whole. It also left the moral innocence of the tragic hero intact and was therefore absolutely incompatible with Maggi's and Chapelain's theory of *catharsis* and the doctrine of poetic justice, both of which depended on the causal nexus between the hero's moral character and his downfall.

Worse still, the problem was compounded by the ease with which Robortello's interpretation appeared in accord with Aristotle's paradigm for the ideal tragic plot,

Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Oedipus, who unknowingly and unwillingly killed his father and married his mother, seemed to provide an excellent, and obvious, example for the *hamartia* as an involuntary mistake committed out of ignorance of particulars. Yet, for Maggi's and Chapelain's theory to work, the plot of the tragedy which Aristotle regarded as the best had to reveal the punitive justice of God. Oedipus had to be morally responsible for his downfall. He had to be at least to some extent guilty and to fall into misery not because of his innocent ignorance, but because of his character flaws and vices. What was Oedipus' vice that Sophocles wanted the hearts and minds of the spectators to be purged from? What was his character flaw? And where on earth was divine justice in this tragedy? Thus, the search for Oedipus' guilt and God's justice in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, abandoned by Melanchthon and his disciples at Wittenberg, was bound to begin anew, and with much greater urgency, in the context of the Christianizing re-interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics*.

Yet, despite some desperate attempts, neither the sixteenth-century scholars and commentators nor the seventeenth-century critics were able to dismantle Robortello's restrictive explanation of *hamartia* or to dismiss Camerarius' interpretation of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In the last Renaissance commentary on the *Poetics*, published in 1613, Paolo Beni had to acknowledge openly that the problem was still dangerously unresolved. In 1640, la Mesnardière was still grappling in vain with the same question. The failure to provide consistent and compatible interpretations of *hamartia*, on the one hand, and of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, on the other, left the moralizing re-interpretation of the *Poetics*, which the neo-classical dramatic theory rested upon, precariously vulnerable to potentially devastating attacks.

This loophole was exploited by Corneille, who sought to debunk the moralizing interpretation of the *Poetics* and the rigid neo-classical rules drawn from it in his subversive *Discours de la tragédie* (1660). What fault, he asked, was Oedipus punished for? In fighting as a gentleman and man of courage, an *homme de coeur*, against an unknown who attacked him with superior force, Oedipus inadvertently killed his father. He is morally innocent and his *hamartia* is no doubt but a mere error made out of ignorance. From what vice, then, can his example possibly purge us? Consequently, since Aristotle considered *Oedipus Tyrannus* the best tragedy, he clearly did not expect from tragedy the edifying delivery of divine justice and could have hardly meant by *catharsis* a purgation of the spectator's soul from passions and vices. Is perhaps tragic *catharsis* as it was understood by Maggi and Chapelain an imaginary concept? For it is more than doubtful, contended Corneille, that such purgation has ever been, or will ever be, achieved by any play, whether ancient or modern, even though Corneille's own *Cid* – the very play that Chapelain and the French Academy severely criticized in 1637 for allegedly breaking the rules of what they believed to be Aristotle's infallible theory – would have been so much better suited for it than Sophocles' celebrated *Oedipus*. All of a sudden, the whole system of the neo-classical dramatic theory was collapsing like a house of cards.

It was only André Dacier who, in his learned and extraordinarily influential commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* published in 1692, sternly rebuked Corneille and reinforced the validity and authority of the rules of the *doctrine classique* by finally providing the missing link between Aristotle and Sophocles. Dacier drew on Aristotle's theory of action to redefine the *hamartia* of the perfect tragedy as an involuntary, yet nonetheless morally culpable fault resulting from one's own character flaws and vicious passions. Having taken the wind out of Robortello's sails, he then went on to discover divine justice in *Oedipus Tyrannus* after all. Following a suggestion already made by Vettori (1560), he

argued, and with some power, that Oedipus – in accordance with Aristotle’s *Poetics* – did not suffer innocently at all, but fell victim to his own vices and weaknesses in character. For it was not Oedipus’ ignorance, but his outbursts of anger as well as his pride, his curiosity, his imprudence and intemperance, so pervasively exposed by Sophocles during the dramatic action, that led to his earlier patricide and would now lead to his terrible but deserved ruin. By exposing Oedipus’ vices as the true causes of his misfortune, Sophocles, insisted Dacier, wanted the spectators and readers to purge these very vices from their wretched souls in order that they would avoid such catastrophes in their own lives:

Oedipus’ fault [i.e. *hamartia*] is the fault of a man who, being transported to anger by the insolence of a coach-man, killed some men only two days after the oracle told him he should kill his own father. He himself relates the action in Sophocles very naturally. This action alone sufficiently denotes *his character*, but Sophocles has given one by all his manners so conformable to this; and which answers so perfectly to Aristotle’s rules that he appears in every respect a man who is neither good nor bad, a mixture of virtue and vice; *his vices are pride, violence, anger, temerity, and imprudence*; it is not properly his parricide nor incest, which made him unhappy. Any punishment for those had been in a manner unjust since they were crimes involuntary, and committed without his knowledge; he fell not into those terrible calamities but *by his curiosity, rashness and violence* [...] *These are the vices which Sophocles would have us correct.* (Dacier 1692a: 192f.; trans. 1705: 213)

Thus, the Christianization of both Aristotle and Sophocles, which the neo-classical dramatic theory stood or fell by, was completed at last, and Camerarius was defeated with his own weapons: with yet another interpretation of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Innocent no longer, the Sophoclean Oedipus would from now on provide an enduring model for moralizing interpretations of Greek tragedy that seemed authorized by Aristotle himself and that has remained popular to this day with scholars and students alike.

5 Sophocles and the Crisis of the European Mind: *Querelle, Paganism, fatalité*

Yet by the time Dacier’s commentary was published, it was almost too late. Europe was already embroiled in an unprecedented intellectual upheaval that, generated by the rise of the New Philosophy, the scientific revolution, and the emergence of a new art of historical criticism, shook the foundations of traditional authority, thought, and belief, and ultimately resulted in a revolutionary transformation of almost every aspect of European culture. One of the defining intellectual contests entailed by the crisis was the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. Begun in France – officially on January 27, 1687, when Charles Perrault’s poem celebrating *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand* was read before the French Academy – but quickly engaging all Europe, the *Querelle* challenged everything Renaissance humanism and neo-classical dramatic theory stood for and eventually led to a radical re-interpretation and re-evaluation of Greek tragedy and ancient literature and culture in general.

Driven by the belief in the power of human reason and in the possibility of progress as well as by a new understanding of all human works as historical products, the *Modernes* rejected the absolute authority of the ancients, their models, their texts, and the rules drawn from them, arguing against blind admiration and servile imitation of antiquity and

asserting the technical, scientific, philosophical, religious, moral, and cultural superiority of the rapidly changing modern world. The *Modernes*' assault on antiquity and the classical tradition caused an uproar. What is more, it went hand in hand with a series of systematic, determined, and scathing attacks on paganism which, while pursuing diverse intellectual (and rhetorical) goals, nonetheless held invariably that, as Pierre Bayle puts it, there is "nothing more monstrous than the religion of the Pagans" (Bayle 1702: *s.v.* "Jupiter"). These attacks undermined the Christianizing interpretation of Greek gods forged in the Renaissance, resulting in a radical reappraisal of Greek religion and theology as a mythic and superstitious mentality of a primitive people, on a level with American savages (Fontenelle 1691–9: 30–32). In the ensuing fierce intellectual debates, which lasted more than a century, Greek tragedies, both as undisputed, universally acclaimed, unsurpassable masterpieces of the ancients and as powerful products of pagan religion and mentality, were bound to come under intense scrutiny. And since *Oedipus Tyrannus* played a paradigmatic role in both Aristotle's *Poetics* and the neo-classical tragic theory, it immediately became the target of choice for the *Modernes* as well as the last bastion of hope for the *Anciens*.

For the most part, the *Modernes* espoused the same conception of tragedy as Melanchthon, Chapelain, or Dacier, convinced of the utmost importance of moral utility and the doctrine of poetic justice. Yet they denied that this genuinely *modern* theory ever existed in pagan antiquity, claiming that it was neither endorsed by Aristotle nor adhered to by Greek tragedians. They implacably tried to expose the interpretations of Greek tragedy and Aristotle's *Poetics* developed by commentators and critics during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as an unfounded distortion and a profound misunderstanding. And they argued powerfully that in Sophocles' tragedies, absolutely alien to us, pagan, amoral, harmful, and anti-Christian, there was no divine justice at all; that the individual was only a blind toy in the hands of cruel, treacherous, merciless, and unjust pagan gods and an innocent victim of inevitable fate.

This intellectual onslaught on Greek tragedy was spearheaded in the early nineties of the seventeenth century by two prominent figures of the early Enlightenment: Saint-Évremond and Fontenelle. In his brief, yet breathtakingly iconoclastic essay *De la tragédie ancienne et moderne*, published in 1692 – the same year as Dacier's commentary – Saint-Évremond challenged fearlessly everything Melanchthon and Dacier stood for. Pointing out the immense advances in knowledge achieved by modern science and philosophy, he dismissed Aristotle's *Poetics* as an excellent, yet outdated book of little value for contemporary dramatic theory. Insisting on profound cultural and religious differences between pagan antiquity as the age of superstition and Christian modernity as the age of reason and justice, he denounced Greek tragedy as a medium of the unspeakably cruel and barbaric pagan religion, designed merely to instill in the audience a superstitious fear of unjust and impious gods – and therefore detrimental to morality and virtue, alien to our religious beliefs and moral values and hence completely unsuitable for the modern stage:

[S]hould a man translate even the *Oedipus*, the best performance of all Antiquity, into French, with the same spirit and force as we see it in the original, I dare be bold to affirm that *nothing in the world would appear to us more cruel, more opposite to the true sentiments which mankind ought to have.* (Saint-Évremond 1692: 182; trans. 1714: 110)

Saint-Évremond did not go into much detail here, but Corneille's nephew Fontenelle explained in his *Réflexions sur la Poétique* of 1691 why exactly the plot of the *Oedipus*

Tyrannus, which Aristotle declared to be the best, was in fact the least suitable for a good tragedy, as well as why Sophocles' tragedy, which the *Anciens* proclaimed to be the finest play ever written, was actually the worst and most useless of all: The story of Oedipus, who falls into misery neither through his own fault nor because of his own character but "by a pure fatality" (*fatalité*), is a depressing story of an innocent man "wiped out by a bolt of lightning":

One brings away from Oedipus, and from other plays that resemble it, *only a disagreeable and useless conviction of the miseries of the human condition.* (Fontenelle 1691: 141)

These subversive insinuations were quickly followed by a series of most comprehensive and detailed attacks. In his highly provocative book *The Antient and Modern Stage Survey'd* of 1699, James Drake was determined to prove that "the modern stage" was "infinitely preferable to the Athenians." The starting point of his deconstruction of the Christianizing interpretation of Greek tragedy is a lengthy re-assessment of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Drake 1699: 126–47). For Drake, there was not a word of truth in the whole interpretation devised by Dacier and other critics, who tried in vain to "raise a *Christian Moral* upon a *Pagan* bottom" (p. 147). For the only moral one could draw from this acclaimed ancient tragedy – and from many other Greek tragedies as well – was the irresistible power of fate and the injustice and villainy of the divine providence:

Oedipus is made [*sc.* by Sophocles] Virtuous, Just, and Wise, but *unhappy thro a Fatality, against which his Virtue is no security*; Justice requires that he shou'd be rewarded and encouraged, but Providence will have him afflicted, and punisht with extremity of Rigour. Can anything be more disserviceable to Probity and Religion, than these Examples of Injustice, Oppression and Cowardice in their Gods? (p. 199)

Abbé Jean Terrasson, too, vehemently disagreed with Dacier in his most radical *Dissertation critique sur l'Iliade d'Homère* of 1715, which was designed to apply to literature and literary theory the spirit of the New Philosophy (Terrasson 1715, vol. 1: iij) and to establish a *new* system of the art of poetry, that would be founded not upon arbitrary rules drawn from ancient texts, but upon the principles of reason. Dealing at length not only with the perilous pagan theology and highly questionable moral values of the *Iliad* but also with Greek tragedy and tragic theory (pp. 144–262), piling argument upon argument, Terrasson methodically dismantled Dacier's interpretation of *catharsis* and *hamartia* and dismissed his reading of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* as an untenable falsification. This pagan play, he insisted, was extremely impious and harmful to modern readers because Sophocles' dramatic intention was clearly to make people believe that, if a man is destined by the Gods to commit a crime, virtuous though he may be, he will inevitably be led to commit it against his own will:

But I am of a very different opinion from Mr. D[acier] as to Oedipus's character, and think that even in *the intention of Sophocles* he was one of the most virtuous persons the Ancients ever brought upon the stage. *The poet's design was to teach us that whenever a man is destin'd by the Gods to commit a crime, he is necessarily and unavoidably engaged therein, and even by those very methods and means he takes to avoid it. Most of the pagan authors, especially the tragic poets, are full of this impious notion:* and to confirm it the more, Sophocles chose an excellent prince, full of horror of vice, and love of virtue. And he had esteemed the person who in his time should have said Oedipus was really vicious, or could have possibly avoided the crimes

and misfortunes [that] were denounced him by the oracle, as *his chief enemy, and the great corrupter of the principle design and moral of his tragedy*. (Terrasson 1715, vol. 1: 188; trans. 1722–5, vol. 1: 204–5)

Having unmasked the shockingly amoral and anti-Christian character of Greek tragedy, the *Modernes* demanded that modern poets produce new, contemporary Oedipus tragedies that would be rid of the monstrosity and absurdity of pagan theology and *truly* display all those edifying features Melanchthon and Dacier were *erroneously* trying to read into Sophocles' rotten plays (see Terrasson 1715, vol. 1:193f.). It was these demands for a new, undeniably guilty, and thus deservedly punished, Oedipus that Fr. Melchior de Folard's *Edipe* (1722) and Houdar de la Motte's *Edipe* (1726) were designed to satisfy.

The *Anciens* responded to these unrelenting attacks by shifting ground and employing new hermeneutical principles. In his voluminous *Théâtre des Grecs* published in 1730, the Jesuit Pierre Brumoy lamented the fate of the Greek tragedians, who “suffered most in the war that still goes on among the Ancients and Moderns,” and appeared to be seeking reconciliation (Brumoy 1730, vol. 1: ii). While acknowledging the foreignness of the pagan beliefs and customs of ancient Greeks and the profound cultural and religious differences between the ancient and the modern world, he urged modern readers “to forgive their [*sc.* the Greeks'] tragic poets for having imitated nature, such as they saw her in their own times” and to look at Greek tragedies as historical products of their own time and culture that should not be judged by modern criteria, but understood on their own terms (p. xii). In order to be able to discover the universal beauty and truth hidden behind the foreign façade of pagan Greek culture, we ought to follow the principle devised by Dubos and “transform ourselves, as it were, into those for whom the poem was written” (Dubos 1719, vol. 2: 245) – or, as Brumoy himself puts it, to “become an Athenian as much as those whom the poet intended to entertain” (Brumoy 1730, vol. 1: xj f.). These were admirable principles of historical criticism; yet, when Brumoy sets out to put his relativist historicism into practice, it very quickly proves to be only a means of salvaging the traditional Christianizing interpretation of Greek tragedy and Aristotle's *Poetics*. For the universal meaning and value he sought to find in Greek tragedy turned out to be still the deterrent representation of divine justice and the resulting salutary purgation of the audience from vicious passions. In the paradigmatic *Réflexions sur l'Edipe*, which open a series of interpretative essays on individual plays, Brumoy did not eschew confronting directly the question of Oedipus' guilt as what “in the opinion of many” was the fundamental, insurmountable flaw of Sophocles' masterpiece:

What is the crime of Oedipus? [...] *If there be any crime, it is Apollo, and not Oedipus, who is guilty*. Yet it is Oedipus who suffers for this crime. And by what a dreadful punishment! (Brumoy 1730, vol. 1: 95; trans. 1759, vol. 1: 76)

There was no denying for him that pagan theology – bizarre, appalling, and wrong – plays a disturbingly central role in Sophocles and in Greek tragedy in general and that inevitable destiny is “the soul of all that passes here” (Brumoy 1730, vol. 1: 96). In order to be able to appreciate Sophocles, we ought not, declared Brumoy, to condemn this absurd system but to “adopt” it “for a few moments” (p. 97). Adopting the pagan system, however, meant little more than turning a blind eye to “this strange theology” and to imagine that it is simply not there. It is true: Oedipus acts in ignorance and the involuntary crimes for which he is punished are “ratified by Fate.” But he is still not free from guilt, for he still commits murder and his moral character leaves much to be desired.

“Choleric, irascible, and curious in excess,” he has the vices of a private man as well as those of “an imprudent King.” Having dispensed with pagan theology in this manner, Brumoy felt justified in the end to return to Dacier’s interpretation of both Sophocles and Aristotle’s *Poetics* and to claim that Oedipus’ misery

excites in us [...] *compassion for Oedipus, and fear of the Gods, who punish even involuntary crimes in a person who is not wholly free from guilt.* Hence arises that sympathetic concern for ourselves blended with our compassion; *which restrains us from committing the same faults that we see are productive of such fatal consequences. This is the pure doctrine of Aristotle, or rather that of nature, or true wisdom.* (Brumoy 1730, vol. 1: 97f.; trans. 1759, vol. 1: 76f.)

The position of the *Anciens* was taken one step further by Charles Batteux, who succeeded Terrasson as professor of ancient philosophy at the Collège Royal in 1750. The emotionalist theory of tragedy developed in his *Principes de la littérature*, published in 1747–50 and significantly expanded in 1753 and in 1764, opened up the possibility to see Greek tragedy and its paradigm, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in a new light (Batteux 1747–50, vol. 4: 271–389). Although still thinking very much in Aristotelian terms, Batteux saw the moral aim of tragedy, and the meaning of *catharsis*, no longer in the purgation of our souls from vicious passions, but in the enlargement of our sensibility through the exercise of fear, pity, and other sad emotions. To provoke the required emotional response in the audience, tragedy did not need to bring to light the workings of God’s justice any longer. On the contrary; for Batteux, the aim of tragedy could best be achieved if, in a heroic and touching action, a virtuous person like Sophocles’ Oedipus is destroyed “by an irresistible *fatality*, to which all mankind is alike subject” (Batteux 1747–50, vol. 4: 284f.). This new conception of tragedy allowed Batteux to embrace the interpretation of Greek tragedy developed by the *Modernes*, yet at the same time to reject their criticism as unjustified by reclaiming for Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and Greek tragedy in general, timeless value and meaning as an emotionally pleasurable and beneficial representation of the universal *malheurs de l’humanité*:

In him [*sc.* Oedipus] *we see a man born under [an] unhappy planet, constantly pursued by his fate, and led into the greatest misfortunes by a train of seeming successes.* I cannot be of opinion with one of our greatest wits that this catastrophe is a “bolt of lightning” that creates horror [Fontenelle 1691: 141, see above]; it appears to me rather a representation *of the miseries incident to humanity*, which affects us with dread and apprehension. *Where is the man, who, if unfortunate, does not attribute at least the most part of his misfortunes to his unhappy star? We are all of us fully persuaded that we are not masters of our own destiny;* but are guided by a superior power that very often over-rules us; *in which respect the story of Oedipus is only an assemblage of misfortunes, of which the cause has one time or other, and in some degree, been experienced by the greatest part of mankind. Hence the man, conscious of his own weakness and ignorance of futurity and full of the sense of an over-ruling deity, does, in beholding this piece, tremble for himself, and lament Oedipus [...]* (Batteux 1747–50, vol. 4: 317f.; trans. 1761, vol. 2: 300f.)

Although Batteux’s innovative thoughts, endorsed in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* by Louis de Jaucourt in 1765 and developed further by von Schirach in 1769, did have a considerable impact, they could not allay the prevailing moralistic concerns shared by the majority of both the *Anciens* and *Modernes*. Only very few of them were prepared to believe that a dramatic representation of the destruction of an innocent human being through divine will and inevitable fate could be anything but amoral, shocking, and harmful. The

Querelle was bound to continue. In 1761, Louis Dupuy was still combating the increasingly popular, yet in his opinion absolutely wrong view that Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* did not fulfill “*une condition essentielle à la tragédie*” that virtue should be rewarded and vice punished and was therefore morally useless, unholy, and disrespectful to God. And in his commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, published in 1771, Batteux himself caved in to the moralistic demands and, in a sudden change of heart, rediscovered the doctrine of poetic justice in Aristotle as well as Oedipus' character flaws in Sophocles, thus undermining the very foundations of his own tragic theory (Batteux 1771: 257–9).

In the meantime, the arguments brought forward by the *Modernes* were systematically reinforced and expanded, this time not from a Christian but an explicitly *deistic* point of view, by Jean-François Marmontel, a prominent critic and a close friend of the radical *philosophes* d'Holbach and Diderot. With his monumental and most influential *Poétique française* published in 1763, Marmontel intended to replace Aristotle's *Poetics* as the mouthpiece of ancient tragedy with a modern dramatic theory. Marmontel was convinced of fundamental and unbridgeable differences between Greek tragedy and modern drama. The moral end of modern tragedy, in which human beings are free and responsible for their lives, where virtue prevails and crimes are punished, is moral improvement, *correction des mœurs*. The only lesson of ancient tragedy – in which human beings are but blind victims of the gods and of chance, where everything is driven by fate or by the will of the gods, often bizarre, unjust and cruel, where it is commonly innocence and goodness that give way while crime emerges victorious – is the demoralizing notion of man's vulnerability to the *fatalité* and superstitious fear of undeserved, yet inevitable suffering at the hands of treacherous gods (Marmontel 1763, vol. 2: 102). While dismantling moralizing interpretations of Greek tragedy, Marmontel never grew tired of ridiculing all those who “take so much care in searching out the vices” of Oedipus and would “bleed everything dry to blacken” this good, courageous, and evidently innocent king (p. 110).

The controversy continued almost unabated until the end of the eighteenth century. Nothing could make the defenders of Greek tragedy stop searching for Oedipus' guilt. Marmontel's views, however, became increasingly influential in the second half of the eighteenth century and were embraced, among others, by Beaumarchais in his programmatic “*Essai sur le drame sérieux*” (1767) and by Lenz in his *Anmerkungen über das Theater* (1774), an important manifesto of *Sturm und Drang* drama. And it was Marmontel who was asked by Diderot to write a new comprehensive article on *tragédie* for the *Supplément à l'Encyclopédie* published in 1777. The authoritative and widely read text reflects the profound transformation the understanding of Greek tragedy underwent during the long eighteenth century. Ideas which in 1690s seemed breathtakingly new, provocative, and subversive are conveyed here confidently and firmly as common, impartial, and undisputed *knowledge*. Ancient and modern tragedy, asserted Marmontel, have very little in common because they represent two different systems (Marmontel 1777: 1087–9). The ancient system is the “*système de la fatalité*.” In Greek tragedy, innocent human beings fall invariably into misery through “*le caprice aveugle & tyrannique de l'inflexible Destinée*” (p. 1091). The modern system, conversely, is the “*système des passions actives*.” In modern tragedy, edifying and infinitely superior morally, the cause of the tragic hero's downfall lies in his character, his own imprudence, passions, and vices. Modern drama is therefore the tableau “*des malheurs & des crimes de l'homme esclave de ses passions*,” whereas the Greeks brought on stage “*le tableau des calamités de l'homme esclave de la destine*” (p. 1089). As the paradigm for the ancient system of fatalist and morally useless tragedy, Marmontel, of course, invokes

again Sophocles' Oedipus, – a blind victim of the cruel gods of paganism and inexorable fate (pp. 1091–3). But the *Querelle* was not over yet.

6 *Querelle* Recast: From Schelling to Nietzsche

It was precisely this de-Christianizing, fatalist understanding of pagan Greek tragedy developed and expounded by the *Modernes* during the Enlightenment that after the French Revolution was to be taken over and radically re-evaluated in the light of Kant's *Third Critique* by Schelling and the Schlegel brothers. Intimately familiar with the eighteenth-century debates, they were hoping to succeed where Batteux ultimately failed and to overcome the inconclusive *Querelle* within the framework of a new philosophy of tragedy that imparted to Greek tragedy as it was understood by the *Modernes* positive value and meaning (Schelling 1795; F. Schlegel 1795–97: 309–29). In their new conception of tragedy as representation of “the struggle between freedom and necessity,” the Sophoclean Oedipus as he was interpreted by Fontenelle, Drake, Terrasson, and Marmontel – “a mortal, preordained by fate for guilt and transgression, struggling against fate and fleeing that guilt, and nonetheless frightfully punished for a transgression that was actually a work of fate” (Schelling 1795: 106f.; 1802–3: 696) – could become again the only genuine tragic hero, and Sophocles the father of the only truly tragic tragedy: the tragedy of fate.

This fatalist interpretation caused, in its turn, a ruckus in classical scholarship. There is a certain irony in the fact that the intellectual controversy that was fought out during the long eighteenth century in the context of the monumental *Querelle* repeated itself during the nineteenth century as an endless scholarly debate in the newly established classical *Altertumswissenschaft*. In dozens of books and articles published during the nineteenth century, scholars took strenuously to recuperating the Christianizing understanding of both Sophocles and Aristotle's *Poetics* developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by generations of commentators and critics, from Melanchthon to Dacier, and obstinately defended by the *Anciens* during the eighteenth century (see e.g. Hoffmann 1832; Wilbrandt 1836; Geffers 1850; Vetter 1885).

It was only Jacob Burckhardt and young Friedrich Nietzsche who, in the early 1870s, advanced an uncompromising understanding of Greek literature and culture that neither followed Plato and his Christian followers in condemning Greek tragedy as a dangerous medium of a perilously wrong theology and worldview, nor attempted to defend Greek tragedy against Platonist and Christian accusations by means of its moralizing re-interpretation on Platonist or Christian terms, but tried to face up to the view of the world and human life that emerges from Greek tragic poetry and that Plato was so vehemently opposed to as a dark, yet nonetheless genuine and universal, insight into the human condition. At the heart of their daring, and explicitly anti-modernist, visions of Greek culture lay the notion of “Greek pessimism” – of the grim view of the universe and man's place in it that, as Burckhardt has shown (Burckhardt 1872–85, vol. 20: 349–95), looms large in pre-Platonic Greek literature and thought and has found its most radical expression in the paradoxical, chilling wisdom that for all human beings it is by far the best not to be born and the second best to die early (Burckhardt 1872–85, vol. 20: 372f.; Nietzsche 1870: 80; 1872: §3). In this context, Sophocles will become the pessimist poet par excellence, and his Oedipus – the man who lived too long from the very moment of his birth, the man for whom it would have been by

far the best never to have been born – will return at the dawn of the twentieth century as Nietzsche's paradigm for the tragedy of human existence.

The history of interpretation of Sophocles and Greek tragedy in general is a central and fascinating part of the intellectual history of Europe in its own right. For a student of Greek tragedy, however, it is at the same time more than a captivating genealogy of errors. It is the history of a debate that still continues today and that we all are participating in when reading Sophocles. For better or worse, many lines of inquiry initiated in the Renaissance, many attempts to come to terms with Sophocles' tragic vision made by generations of thinkers from Camerarius to Nietzsche, are still with us. In one way or another, our own approaches to Greek tragedy, the questions we ask and the answers we seek, often turn out to be the product of the history of its interpretation. By exploring the intellectual history of Sophocles' plays in Europe we can discover what we can think both of Greek tragedy and ourselves.

Guide to Further Reading

The intellectual history of interpretation of Sophocles in Europe is a vast and largely neglected field; many sources are not easily accessible, and a great deal of relevant scholarship is written in languages other than English. Many of the developments sketched in this chapter have been discussed in detail in my *Die Suche nach der Schuld* (2004: 13–240). On various other aspects of the reception history of Sophocles, see Mueller (1980), Steiner (1984), Biet (1994), Mastrocola (1996), Daskarolis (2000), Mastroianni (2004), Hall and Macintosh (2005), Walton (2006), Borza (2007), Macintosh (2009), and Winkler (2009).

On ancient responses to Greek tragedy, see Halliwell (2005). On the theory of tragedy in the Middle Ages, see Kelly (1993). On the Christianization of ancient religion and mythology in the Renaissance, see Seznec (1953), Bull (2005), and Brumble (2007). For a detailed analysis of the moralizing critical tradition resulting in the doctrine of “poetic justice,” see Lurje (2004: 28–65). On Melanchthon's approach to Greek tragedy and his lectures on Sophocles, see Ritoók-Szalay (2001), Roling (2004), and Lurje (2004: 94–108). For the history of interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the Renaissance, see Weinberg (1961), Hathaway (1962), Herrick (1965), Tiegerstedt (1968), Javitch (1999), and Lurje (2004: 13–91). On the development of the neo-classical dramatic theory in France, see Bray (1927), Phillips (1980), Lyons (1999), and Civardi (2004). For the history of interpretation of *hamartia*, see Lurje (2004: 79–91 and 278–386).

On the intellectual history of the early Enlightenment in general, see the seminal works by Hazard (1935) and Israel (2001 and 2006). On the *Querelle*, see Rigault (1856), Levine (1991), Grell (1995), Patey (1997), Fumaroli (2001), as well as Hartog (2005) and Edelstein (2010). On the debates on ancient pagan religion, theology, and mythology in the early Enlightenment, see Manuel (1959), Whelan (1989), Grell (1995: 359–85), Poulouin (1998), Boch (2002), and Gisi (2007). While the controversy over Homer has been studied in detail (Hepp 1968: 521–755; Levine 1991: 120–244), the role of Greek tragedy in the *Querelle* remains largely ignored; for a preliminary analysis,

see Lurje (2004: 138–225). On the theory of tragedy in the eighteenth century, see the fundamental study by Martino (1972), as well as Davis (1967), Mattioda (1994), Novak (1997), and Osborne (1997).

On Schelling and the Schlegel brothers, see Szondi (1961), Bauer (1964), Behler (1979), Courtine (1993), Arac (2000), Simpson (2000), and Schmidt (2001). On their understanding of Greek tragedy in the context of the *Querelle* and the response of the nineteenth-century scholarship to it, see Lurje (2004: 226–40). On J. Burckhardt, see Murray (1998), Gossman (2000), and Burckhardt and Gehrke (2006). On Nietzsche, see Henrichs (2005) and Porter (2005), with further bibliography, as well as Müller (2005). On the central, though largely neglected role of Greek pessimism in Burckhardt and Nietzsche, see Lurie (forthcoming).

For recent attempts to recuperate the Christianizing interpretation of Sophocles and Greek tragedy in general with the help of a moralizing re-interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, see the works by E. Lefèvre and Arbogast Schmitt and his school (Thiel, Pietsch, Radke, Kappl et al.).

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Alan Bowen, Carl Joachim Classen, Anthony Ellis, Lionel Gossman, Constanze Güthenke, Stephen Halliwell, Jonathan Israel, Irving Lavin, James Livingston, Thomas Maissen, William G. Thalmann, and Don Wyatt for their most helpful comments and suggestions.

Note

1 The emphases in all displayed quotes have been added by the author.

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Virginia Woolf, Richard Jebb, and Sophocles' *Antigone*

Denise Eileen McCoskey and Mary Jean Corbett

I'm not at all pleased with Jebb by the way, he never risks anything in his guesses: his sense of language seems to me stiff, safe, prosaic and utterly impossible for any Greek to understand. Now surely they launched out into flowering phrases not strictly related, much as Shakespeare did. Jebb splits them up into separate and uncongenial accuracies.

Virginia Woolf, letter to Saxon Sydney-Turner, February 25, 1918

I Introduction

Writing to Saxon Sydney-Turner in February 1918, Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) announced that she had begun to read Sophocles' *Electra*, which had inspired her “plan to read all Greek straight through”; wondering “Why doesn't one?” she added wryly, “I suppose life's too short or too merciless for such felicity – what with the trains going so early, and human nature being so imperfect” (Woolf 1976: 220). Such juxtaposition of ancients and moderns, playful at times, probing at others, recurs throughout her writing, as does her exploration of specific claims that English readers made about the Greeks. As early as 1906–7, after her first visit to Greece, Woolf created “a lively and vibrant vision of classical culture” in her “Dialogue upon Mount Pentelicus” (de Gay 2006: 77). Representing a group of English tourists in Greece, Woolf writes that they would have eschewed the label “tourist”: “Germans are tourists and Frenchmen are tourists but Englishmen are Greeks. Such was the sense of their discourse, and we must take their word for it that it was very good sense indeed” (Woolf 1989: 63). While she parodies this appropriation of the Greeks, Woolf embraces a more personal affiliation with antiquity at other points in her writing, reflecting her “sense of the continuation of classical Greek culture into the present” (de Gay 2006: 207). The unrealized plan of reading “all Greek straight through” suggests Woolf's shifting but persistent engagement with ancient Greek and ancient Greek literature, particularly with Sophocles' *Antigone*.

Aware of her own constantly evolving view of the Greeks, Woolf similarly aimed to calibrate the relations between ancient texts and modern interpretations. In the same letter to Sydney-Turner, who had earned a double first in the Classical Tripos at Trinity College, Cambridge (Fowler 1999: 220), she expressed her reactions to the manner of editing that Sophocles' plays had received at the hands of the late Sir Richard Claverhouse Jebb (1841–1905), whose multi-volume edition had become the standard since its publication (1883–96). Deeming Jebb too safe, someone who “never risks anything in his guesses,” Woolf found fault with his plodding treatment of the text; the Greeks must have expressed themselves, she asserts, more like Shakespeare did, in “flowering phrases not strictly related.” Where Jebb sought strict closure of meaning, Woolf wanted the Greek text to remain open and allusive. She advocated close scrutiny of the text, admitting: “my feeling always is that one can’t read too carefully, or attach enough weight to every line & hint.” Woolf questioned the ways in which Jebb’s treatment sought to master the Greek and thus jarred with her own more impressionistic sense of its meanings: “There does, however, remain the question of reading the wrong emotions into the text. I am generally humiliated to find how much Jebb is able to see; my only doubt is whether he doesn’t see too much.” Summing up, she confessed: “Finally, the particular charm of Greek remains as strong & as difficult to account for as ever” (Woolf 1977: 184).

In this chapter we examine both Woolf’s engagement with “the particular charm of Greek” and her ambivalence toward the classical scholarship of her day, the “too muchness” of Jebb in relation to Sophocles. Coming to Greek as something of an “outsider,” Woolf would use that term in her late writings, such as *Three Guineas* in 1938, to indicate her distance from the patriarchal heritage that had denied all women – and most men – any share in the benefits of university education. To be an outsider, however, is not purely negative in Woolf’s view: it entails a certain difference of perspective and potential freedom from the “unreal loyalties” (Woolf 2006: 94) that insiders – in this case, professional scholars – are obliged to uphold. But we propose, perhaps surprisingly, that Woolf might well have found a partial ally against the narrowness of contemporary classical scholarship in the occasional writings and public lectures of Richard Jebb, who was himself a kind of outsider, expressing persistent criticism of what the field of classics had become at the hands of its “professionals.”

It is perhaps no accident that the interests of Woolf and Jebb intersect with Sophocles, and especially with his heroine Antigone, who poignantly, like Woolf, calls herself an “outsider” (in line 868 of the play, she uses the Greek word *metoikos* – a category akin to “legal alien,” i.e. one foreign to the city, but allowed to dwell there). Woolf’s and Jebb’s respective engagements with the *Antigone* prove fruitful terrain for witnessing the diverging paths the Victorian male editor and the modernist female writer took to Sophocles’ text, as well as the different meanings each one made of its heroine. In accord with Victorian ideals of femininity, Jebb’s Antigone exemplifies tenderness and selflessness, qualities so central to his reading of the character that they require aggressive editorial decisions to remain intact. In *Three Guineas*, her critical interrogation of the patriarchal intersection of family and state, Woolf deploys Antigone as an heroic rather than a womanly figure, whose resistance to Creon’s tyranny lands her “not in Holloway,” where militant suffragettes were imprisoned in the 1910s, “or in a concentration camp, but in a tomb” (Woolf 2006: 167). Where Jebb seeks to authorize a distinctly romanticized reading of Antigone, Woolf aims to liberate her voice from that rocky vault, in service of an egalitarian ideal that Jebb might well have supported.

2 Knowing Greek: Classical Education and English Society

Addressing the current position of classical studies in a speech at Mason College in 1893, Richard Jebb, Regius Professor of Greek at the University of Cambridge from 1889 to 1905, painted a strikingly rosy picture. Noting that “within the last thirty or forty years” there had been a “growth of literature tending to popularise, without vulgarising, the classics” and “a number of good English translations” (Jebb 1907a: 615), he pointed as well to the proliferation of public interest in classical art, generated by both a series of exciting archaeological discoveries and increased travel to the Mediterranean (p. 616). He lamented that Britain had fallen behind France and Germany in establishing a permanent research center in Athens, but he praised the British School’s early efforts and commended the British Museum’s status as a major center of study, a position greatly fostered by the acquisition of the Elgin marbles in 1816 (p. 616). These developments, Jebb believed, had made classics stronger than ever in England: “It may fairly be said that classical studies are now, on the whole, more efficient in this country than they ever were; they are at many points deeper; they are more comprehensive; and they are more in touch with the literary and artistic interests of the day” (p. 619).

After his early schooling at Charterhouse, Jebb, the son of an Irish barrister and a clergyman’s daughter, had entered Trinity College, Cambridge in 1858, where he later served as a classics don from 1863 to 1875. Following a turn as chair of Greek at Glasgow, he returned to Cambridge in 1889 to assume the position of Professor of Greek; three years later he took a seat representing Cambridge in Parliament. Although he had attained the elite male education and professional prestige that Woolf would sometimes mock, Jebb did not hesitate to criticize the field of classics in his public speeches. In fact, classical education and its role in the modern curriculum had been a subject of public debate throughout the nineteenth century, as part of the pressure for educational reform. The University of Cambridge had instituted a new version of the Classical Tripos in 1879, expanding the nearly exclusive focus on Greek and Latin to include examination in “subdisciplines” like philosophy and archaeology (Beard 2001: 89–90). Cambridge likewise played a central part in the debate, which raged from 1870 to 1919, about whether Greek should be “compulsory” for university admission (Raphaely 1999: 71).

Despite such challenges, Jebb confidently asserted at Mason College that “the classics will keep their place in our system of liberal education”; indeed, he went on to suggest, “their true claims are now more generally understood” (Jebb 1907a: 619). Like many of his contemporaries, he believed in an essential link between ancient Greece and modern Europe. The “Greek mind,” he proclaimed, was the “great originating mind of Europe”: “if we desire to study antiquity itself, to see how ideas have been evolved, to understand, in short, the earlier chapters of our own history, then we must needs go to the mental records of our European ancestors” (p. 620). Jebb similarly professed that ancient literature had “moulded, or at least helped to inspire, almost all the best writing of the modern world.” While these “claims” drew a direct line between antiquity and modernity, Jebb also recognized a difference of language that prevented complete transparency between the two eras: “In a modern language, living authority can decide questions of usage or idiom; Greek and Latin, in which there is no such resource, make a more exacting demand on the learner’s nicety of judgment” (p. 621). This need for active involvement was a singular advantage of studying ancient languages: “It is good

to have in our literary education at least one large subject rich in problems which excite curiosity but do not admit of any certain solution” (pp. 621–2). Illustrating well this precise dynamic – the simultaneous allure and elusiveness of ancient Greek – Woolf, having just finished Sophocles’ *Ajax*, wrote: “there is at least one passage of great beauty although I find it can be read 20 different ways” (Woolf 1975: 378).

Jebb believed that such an experience should be more widely available, and he endorsed a range of reforms. Addressing the London Branch of the University Extension Movement in March 1893, he praised its role in increasing access to the study of Greek. “It would be,” he suggested, “a notable and fruitful result if, as these new classes seem to promise, the interest felt in the Greek language should grow into anything that could fairly be described as popular interest” (Jebb 1907c: 575). Jebb enthused that “the intellectual pleasures tasted by the scholars of the Renaissance would be enjoyed anew by large numbers among us, to whom the charm of Greek literature, inseparable as it is from that of the Greek language, would come with all the joy of a discovery” (p. 578). Explaining why he thought students would fasten on Greek, Jebb invoked the attraction he, too, had felt: “I rest this belief on the peculiar charm of the Greek language, and on the peculiar way in which the charm affects learners, almost from the beginning – as I know from my own experience” (p. 576).

Whether “peculiar” or “particular,” Greek’s charm affected Woolf as surely as it did Jebb, albeit for different reasons, and she, too, framed public arguments on behalf of sharing it with those who had historically been deprived of educational opportunity. In “The Leaning Tower,” a paper read to the Workers’ Educational Association in 1940, Woolf criticized the elitist bias of the English system, which “had crammed a small aristocratic class with Latin and Greek and logic and metaphysics and mathematics” (Woolf 1967: 180). She argued that the Greeks and other writers adamantly stood against such exclusivity:

Nor let us shy away from the kings because we are commoners. That is a fatal crime in the eyes of Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Virgil, and Dante, who, if they could speak – and after all they can – would say, “Don’t leave me to the wiggled and gowned. Read me, read me for yourselves.” They do not mind if we get our accents wrong, or have to read with a crib in front of us. (p. 181)

Elaborating her conception of “the common reader,” Woolf invites her audience of ordinary people to read for themselves, even as she notes the cultural coding of the classics as the province of “the wiggled and gowned.” It was not the ancient writers, she asserted, but modern universities that enforced rigid technical correctness, and training in linguistic precision had become their exclusive stock in trade.

Though Jebb – who had proposed in another 1893 speech that English universities contributed to the nation “by forming characters in which at least some measure of liberal education has been combined with manliness” (Jebb 1907e: 604) – advocated widened exposure to the classics, his appeals for greater access did not mention the possibility of women’s university admission, a question very much in the air at places like Cambridge and Oxford. Indeed, by the time Jebb linked “liberal education” with the pursuit of “manliness,” university education for women was already a going – if still highly controversial – concern. London institutions of higher education for women included Queen’s College and Bedford College, established in the 1840s, and the University of London, where women were admitted on equal terms with men starting in 1878. Girton was founded at Cambridge in 1869 by Emily Davies and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, and Newnham – later to become the base of the classicist Jane Harrison, who haunts Woolf’s

fictionalized women's college in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) – followed in 1871; the 1870s also saw the birth of Somerville and Lady Margaret Hall at Oxford.

Unlike many of her female peers and her own brothers, Woolf completed relatively little formal academic study, though she received an “extraordinary informal education between the ages of thirteen and about twenty-eight” (Gordon 1984: 69). Her mother Julia Stephen first taught her a range of subjects, including history, French, and Latin (pp. 73–84); throughout her adolescence she had the run of her father Leslie's extremely fine library. As for many a Victorian sister, her elder brother, Thoby, provided both access to and inspiration for her study of the classical world. In this regard Woolf's means for “knowing Greek” differ from the means of both her university-trained contemporaries and those women “on the margins of academia [...] (who) became an important medium for classical transmission, mediating between the professionalization of classical scholarship and the popularization of ‘Classics’” (Prins 2006: 592). Ironically, then, at an historical moment when young Englishwomen had unprecedented opportunities to pursue higher education, Woolf did not come to Greek in the ways that they did, in part because “the kind of teaching offered by the new kind of academic girls' schools did not necessarily appeal to parents from upper-class, clerical, or university backgrounds” such as Woolf's, “who continued to educate their daughters mainly at home” (Hurst 2006: 81).

Woolf began the study of Greek at the age of 15, with George Warr, “one of the founders of the Ladies Department of King's College” (Lee 1996: 141) where she also took some classes between 1897 and 1901 (Kenyon Jones and Snaith 2010); she continued her lessons with Clara Pater, sister to the well-known Walter Pater. In 1905, when she began to work with Janet Case, she undertook more systematic study. With Miss Case, “who refused to allow her to seize the sense of a sentence, ignoring grammar,” she “began a new regime, studying alone each morning in her bedroom,” with “the Greek lexicon [...] always [...] open” on a table (Gordon 1984: 84). Woolf's diaries, letters, and notebooks attest to her continued close reading of a wide range of Greek texts, including *Oedipus at Colonus*, the *Trachiniae*, the *Poetics*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Ajax*, *Electra*, the *Symposium*, and the *Odyssey* (Fowler 1999: 220–2; Nagel 2002). Indeed, she read the *Antigone* many times: already in July 1901 she professed the desire to read it again, this time in “Jebbs Sophocles” and with Thoby's “invaluable advice” (Woolf 1975: 42). In 1919, during a period of intensive re-reading of the Greeks that informed the writing of *Jacob's Room* in 1921, of *Mrs Dalloway* in 1925, and of *The Common Reader* in 1925, she asked Sydney-Turner to bring a copy of the *Antigone* to dinner (Woolf 1976: 318). She was reading the play again in 1932 (Silver 1983: 68), and two years later succinctly recorded in her diary: “Reading *Antigone*. How powerful that spell is still – Greek, an emotion different from any other” (Woolf 1982: 257).

In “On Not Knowing Greek,” Woolf reflects at greater length on the “spell” the language casts. Claiming that it is impossible for moderns to “know Greek” fully, she perspicaciously writes:

All the more strange, then, it is that we should wish to know Greek, try to know Greek, feel for ever drawn back to Greek, and be for ever making up some notion of the meaning of Greek, though from what incongruous odds and ends, with what slight resemblance to the real meaning of Greek, who shall say? (Woolf 1994: 38–9)

Like Jebb, she remarks on the difficulty of apprehending meaning in a distant tongue: “We can never hope to get the whole fling of a sentence in Greek as we do in English”

or to decipher “all those minute signals by which a phrase is made to hint, to turn, to live” (p. 48). “Translators,” moreover, “can but offer us a vague equivalent; their language is necessarily full of echoes and associations” (p. 49) of their own time – as when the late Victorian translator Mackail evokes the *fin de siècle* just by choosing the adjective “wan.” Juxtaposing lines 151–2 of the *Electra* in the original Greek with Jebb’s translation of them, Woolf pointedly writes: “even by the most skilful of scholars,” “the subtler stress, the flight and the fall of the words,” cannot be duplicated (p. 49).

If “it is the language that has us most in bondage; the desire for that which perpetually lures us back” (p. 48), then the wish to “tear away the veil which still separates me from the Greeks” (Woolf 1992: 250), as Woolf wrote in 1905, was to remain equally strong. That the study of Greek required active procedures on the part of the student – to use modern parlance, ancient Greek literature was a “writerly” text – was, then, part of its inestimable value for both Jebb and Woolf. The possibility of such engagement invited a range of interventions from male and female readers of different educational backgrounds, who could interpolate their own ideas and desires into the texts and, in effect, create their own Greeks. As for Jebb’s ideal student, then, Woolf came to see that the very persistence of “the veil,” frustrating as it could be, signified an opportunity for creative invention.

3 Knowing the Ancients: The Classical Scholar at Work

In “A Dialogue on Mount Pentelicus” Woolf parodies her English “tourists,” who insist on experiencing modern Greece not as it presents itself to them, but as they have learned it in school. Inspired by the setting, the young men “not only shared their wine with the escort of dirty Greek peasants but condescended so far as to address them in their own tongue as Plato would have spoken it had Plato learned Greek at Harrow” (Woolf 1989: 64) – an address the Greek “peasants” unsurprisingly fail to understand. While the scene “subtly undermines the value of a university education” by reporting its male characters’ “failed attempts to communicate with the locals” (de Gay 2006: 77), it also reveals some of the ways Jebb diverges from Woolf’s stereotype of the educated male elite. For, student of classics though he was, Jebb not only learned modern Greek, but also delivered two speeches on modern Greece at the Philosophical Institute of Edinburgh. Examining the status of Greece since its independence in 1832, he noted that “(f)oreign observers of Greek affairs are, broadly speaking, of two classes: those who think that Greece has a future, and those who further think that she may be allowed to have a present” (Jebb 1880: vi) – a far cry from Woolf’s classics students, whose eyes remained firmly focused on the Greek past.

Broad in his interests, Jebb was less than universally admired by his peers; indeed, the master of Jebb’s own college once allegedly declared: “(w)hat time he can spare from the adornment of his person he devotes to the neglect of his duties” (Annan 1999: 240). Jebb’s expansive approach to intellectual life seemed to work against his reputation as a classical scholar. The German classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf “regard[ed] Jebb as a ‘scholar to whom the humanities’ (the English word is used) mean more than critical scholarship (*Wissenschaft*)” (Brink 1985: 147). A. S. F. Gow, who had been an undergraduate at Cambridge, wrote that Jebb “was not an eccentric; he was a Knight, an M.P., a friend of Tennyson, and as a scholar, not so distinguished as his contemporaries

thought, but still distinguished” (quoted in Brink 1985: 144). Jebb, in turn, was quite critical of his own discipline, especially given what he perceived as its increasing move toward specialization. Suggesting in one speech that “(t)he new tendency which has come into classical studies during the last forty or fifty years might be described [...] as the spirit of science” (Jebb 1907d: 548), Jebb warned “that the prevalent intellectual bent of the age often pushes the love of technicality, regarded as a sign of superior knowledge, unnecessarily far” (p. 554).

Jebb was particularly concerned about the mode of textual criticism that characterized the era, pointing to the ways it privileged greater technical training. For Jebb, sound textual criticism went beyond the display of technical acumen – it required the intervention of the editor’s own taste and judgment as well:

The textual critic who is seeking to amend a corrupt passage may have full command of everything that palaeography can tell him, and of all the particular facts concerning the MSS. of his author; he may also be a perfect grammarian; but what will these things avail him unless he also has an adequate sympathy with his author’s mind, and unless his procedure is controlled by the literary taste which such an insight bestows? (p. 555)

In other words, for Jebb, “knowing Sophocles” – identifying with the author via shared literary taste and sensibility – was as important as “knowing Greek.”

In one of Woolf’s extended fictional portraits of a male classicist, the increasingly “scientific” approach to the classics that Jebb had lamented is implicitly critiqued. The opening section of *The Years* (originally published in 1937), set in 1880, portrays Edward Pargiter reading the *Antigone*, of which he will publish a translation decades later, while prepping for exams at Oxford. Edward has a specific goal: to achieve high enough marks to win a fellowship that will keep him in Oxford for the rest of his career. He thus attacks the *Antigone* with surgical scrutiny:

He caught phrase after phrase exactly, firmly, more exactly, he noted, making a brief note in the margin, than the night before. Little negligible words now revealed shades of meaning, which altered the meaning. He made another note; *that* was the meaning. His own dexterity in catching the phrase plumb in the middle gave him a thrill of excitement. There it was, clean and entire. But he must be precise; exact; even his little scribbled notes must be as clear as print (Woolf 2008: 47).

Sophocles’ play is Edward’s particular intellectual passion, as Woolf indicates in an earlier manuscript version of the novel, *The Pargiters*:

[W]hen he opened the *Antigone* he could read it not only without opening a dictionary; he knew every word, but he also knew a mass of other facts; who had used the word besides Sophocles, & where; & how Sophocles himself had used the same word with a different meaning elsewhere. (Woolf 1977: 63)

This stringent scholarly ideal, however, stifles his appreciation of the language: “Greek words had [...] an indescribable combination of hardness & velocity as though – but Edward always checked himself when he felt the temptation to illustrate sensual feelings in images. Scholarship must be exact above all things” (p. 64). The scholarly drive to capture or pin down meaning that Jebb associates with contemporary textual criticism overrides the sensuous charm of the language.

Whatever its benefits for scholarly rigor, such exactness exacts its costs from Edward's body and spirit in *The Years*. Only after he recalls his military father's advice about preparing for battle – “‘You can't drive a bayonet through a chap's body in cold blood'” (Woolf 2008: 48) – does he relax by drinking some wine, which “seemed to press open little dividing doors in his brain. And whether it was the wine or the words or both, a luminous shell formed, a purple fume, from which out stepped a Greek girl; yet she was English” (pp. 48–9). Conflating his cousin with Sophocles' heroine in a “luminous” vision of chaste womanhood – for “[s]he was both of them – Antigone and Kitty” (p. 49), Edward reserves sensual indulgence for leisure time, suppressing the erotic feelings that Greek feeds. Upon Edward's final appearance in the novel, almost 60 years later, Woolf conveys the effects of this choice in bleak terms. Having achieved success, “[h]e had the look of an insect whose body has been eaten out, leaving only the wings, the shell” (p. 384); most damningly, he resembles “a blue-eyed horse whose bit no longer irked him. His movements were from habit, not from feeling” (p. 385). From the perspective of his nephew, Edward is “a priest, a mystery monger [...] [a] guardian of beautiful words” (p. 388).

Yet among the “beautiful words” that Edward speaks in this episode is line 523 of the *Antigone*, translated by Jebb as “'tis not my nature to join in hating, but in loving” – a line to which Woolf would again allude in *Three Guineas* (Woolf 2006: 98). Asked to translate the line, he refuses. In *The Years*, North infers that his uncle “can't say what he wants to say; he's afraid,” but Edward glosses his resistance in a manner that Jebb might have understood: he “shook his head. ‘It's the language,’ he said” (Woolf 2008: 393). Despite looking “as if [his face] had been left out on a frosty night and frozen over” (p. 385), the professional classicist still evinces a silenced, sensuous appreciation for Greek. Although one might interpret in various ways his refusal to translate, the simple claim that “it's the language” both recalls Woolf's statement in “On Not Knowing Greek” that “the flight and the fall of the words” (Woolf 1994: 49) defy translation and anticipates her somewhat uncharitable remark in *Three Guineas* that Jebb's “English rendering” of this line is “lame” (Woolf 2006: 98).

By contrast, when his younger cousin Sara, lying in bed at home alone one night, skims Edward's *Antigone* in the “1907” section of *The Years*, her “outsider” reading of it is decidedly un scholarly and imagistic:

At first she read a line or two at random; then, from the litter of broken words, scenes rose, quickly, inaccurately, as she skipped. The unburied body of a murdered man lay like a fallen tree-trunk, like a statue, with one foot stark in the air. Vultures gathered... Quick, quick, quick with repeated jerks they struck the mouldy flesh... Then in a yellow cloud came whirling – who? She turned the page quickly. Antigone? She came whirling out of the dust-cloud to where the vultures were reeling and flung white sand over the blackened foot... Then behold! there were more clouds; dark clouds; the horsemen leapt down; she was seized; her wrists were bound with withies; and they bore her, thus bound – where? (Woolf 2008: 127–8)

As Rowena Fowler comments on this passage, “Woolf puts together ‘from the litter of broken words’ a powerful re-enactment of the whole play in less than a page” (Fowler 1999: 225) via the mind of a young woman excluded not only from the university, but also, owing to a slight physical disability, from the marriage market; like Edward and many other central characters, Sara will never marry. Her further paraphrase of the play's

action implies a parallel between Antigone's situation and her own: "She was buried alive. The tomb was a brick mound. There was just room for her to lie straight out. Straight out in a brick tomb, she said"; "[s]he laid herself out, under the cold smooth sheets" (Woolf 2008: 128), "lying straight and still" (p. 141), on her doctor's orders.

Occupying what Woolf elsewhere in *The Years* terms the "borderland between life and death" (pp. 21, 24), Sara "knows" Antigone in a radically different way from her cousin; this passage in particular, in which she fixes on the play's violence, illustrates something of her critical distance from the doings of the patriarchal world around her. Sara makes the play her own, however, not just in the parallel that Woolf creates between her and Antigone – both "buried alive" by their respective situations – but also in the way she approaches the text, free to eschew the protocols of scholarship and to take imaginative leaps. With much less investment in the "unreal loyalties" demanded of classical scholars than her cousin has, she translates the play from her outsider position, as did Woolf in the face of Jebb's creation of Antigone as an ideal for Victorian womanhood.

4 Knowing Antigone: Jebb's Sophocles and Woolf's *Three Guineas*

Since its publication, Jebb's Sophocles has cast a long shadow; as Dawe writes, "Jebb's commentaries, dated and flawed in some respects as they may be, remain the yardstick by which all subsequent ones are measured. For a hundred years or so the only criterion of merit for an editor of Sophocles is how far short of Jebb's his performance falls" (Dawe 1990: 241). Jebb provided not only Greek texts and commentaries for Sophocles' seven surviving plays, but also introductions, appendices, and English translations – a comprehensive approach that put into practice his desire to widen access to Greek literature. As the contemporary reviewer M. L. D'Ooge phrased it:

The twofold aim [...] of this great edition is first to furnish the classical student with all the apparatus essential to a thorough and critical appreciation of the Greek dramatist, and secondly, to give the non-classical student the interpretation of the work of a master-poet at the hands of a competent critic, and by such an interpretation to stimulate him to seek a *first-hand* knowledge of the poet. (D'Ooge 1888: 485)

The volume containing *Antigone* first appeared in 1888, followed by a second edition in 1891 and a third in 1900; an abridged version appeared in 1902. Such was the impact of Jebb's edition, and of the *Antigone* in particular, that, by 1913, the author of "A Working Library for Students of Classics" could grant Jebb unequivocal authority when it came to Sophocles, noting: "each tragedy edited separately; best in any language [...] *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* should be read first" (Husband 1913: 61).

As D'Ooge succinctly put it, the principle governing Jebb's editorial method was to "present the work of Sophocles 'both in its larger aspects and at every particular point' as it appears to his mind, free from ambiguity" (1888: 484). Thus, while Jebb could proclaim the study of ancient languages advantageous precisely because they did "not admit of any certain solution" in his speech at Mason College, his role as editor demanded that he present definitive "solutions," in other words, that he foreclose the openness of Greek that he extolled elsewhere. Weighing the moral dilemma at the play's center, Jebb was equally unambiguous as editor; in contrast to previous readers, like Hegel, who had

found both Creon's and Antigone's positions justifiable (Jebb 1900: xxi), Jebb concluded that "the right is wholly with [Antigone], and the wrong wholly with her judge" (p. xxii). Although he asserted that Creon "is doing a monstrous act" (p. xxv), however, Jebb's condemnation lacked the intensity that Creon would attract in the twentieth century, especially in the wake of successive world wars – and even from Woolf herself.

Antigone resides at the heart of Jebb's edition. Insisting that "[t]he character of Antigone is a separate question from the merit of the cause in which she is engaged," Jebb devotes considerable space to determining "what manner of woman she is" (p. xxvii); he praises her in his preface as "the noblest, and most profoundly tender, embodiment of women's heroism which ancient literature can show" (p. v). Later, Jebb identifies "[t]wo qualities [...] at the basis of her character": "enthusiasm, at once steadfast and passionate for the right, as she sees it," and an "intense tenderness, purity, and depth of domestic affection" epitomized by her devotion to her dead brother Polyneices (p. xxvii). Jebb, who voted for the Women's Suffrage Bill in 1897 (C. Jebb 1907: 320), had presumably witnessed the difficulty with which Victorian women trod the razor's edge of satisfying both their "enthusiasm for the right" and their "domestic affection," and he pointedly seeks to shield his heroine from the stereotypes attached to women who dared enter the public world. Most conspicuously, Jebb labors to establish an Antigone who is tender and self-sacrificing rather than one who might be considered "ruthless" and "direct," as Woolf argued for Sophoclean characters generally (Woolf 1994: 42).

Considering the painful conflict between Antigone and her sister Ismene, Jebb forcefully defends Antigone against charges that she is "too stern and hard" when she refuses to allow Ismene to share her punishment for burying their brother, positing instead that Antigone's attitude toward her sister is partially driven by an attempt to save Ismene's life (Jebb 1900: xxix). Beyond discussion of the "spiritual division" that accrues from the sisters' conflicting responses to Creon's edict, however, Jebb gives little attention to the ways Antigone longs for, and becomes defined by, other members of her family, including her father Oedipus, whose incestuous acts have indelibly marked her. More surprisingly perhaps, although he credits Antigone with adhering to certain "universal" principles in burying Polyneices, he does little to probe the richness of their sibling bond, the emotions that might drive Antigone's pious devotion to her brother's corpse. Instead, Jebb seeks to establish the traces of a significant, if manifestly impossible, romance between Antigone and Creon's son, Haemon.

That Antigone is positioned to marry Haemon in the world of the play is uncontroversial; indeed, Sophocles was not the first to suggest such an engagement (Ormand 1999: 80). Jebb's insistence on the emotional centrality of the relationship, however, requires some dexterity, given what is generally seen (at least by modern readers) as "Antigone's complete disregard" for the young man (Ormand 1999: 80). Anticipating this perception – one based on her silence on the matter of Haemon – Jebb suggests that Sophocles generally avoided referring to the "closeness of affection" between Haemon and Antigone in order "to portray Antigone as raised above every selfish thought, even the dearest, by the absorbing and inspiring sense of her duty to the dead, and to the gods" (Jebb 1900: xxx). Even more tellingly, although Jebb was generally restrained in his treatment of Sophocles' text – a stance notable in an era when "conjectural criticism was at full flood" (Dawe 1990: 243) – he opts to assign line 572, an exclamation to "beloved" Haemon that his father dishonors him, to Antigone rather than to Ismene, an attribution counter to the manuscript tradition. Explaining that "[t]o me it seems certain that the verse is Antigone's and one of the

finest touches in the play is effaced by giving it to Ismene” (Jebb 1900: 110), Jebb expands on its significance a little later: “[t]his solitary reference to her love heightens in a wonderful degree our sense of her unselfish devotion to a sacred duty”; in other words, this solitary eruption of her feelings for Haemon underlines Antigone’s otherwise unexpressed preference for principle over personal fulfillment. Virginia Magboo, sensing the strain, rightly suggests that Jebb’s editorial decision here is circumscribed by the “nineteenth century idealization of womanhood,” parenthetically asking, “what good woman in Jebb’s day would not be most concerned about her betrothed?” (Magboo 1974: 397).

More dramatically, Jebb’s attempt to make Antigone conform to his notion of the “womanly” norm leads him to argue for the excision of an entire passage late in the play. That Jebb was generally dubious about aggressive editing seems indicated by his comments in the preface to *Oedipus at Colonus*, where he had written disparagingly of the tendency among German scholars to “identify” later interpolations in Greek texts as a way of proving their “originality” among “a crowded profession” (Dawe 1990: 243–4). Removal of lines 904–20, in which Antigone professes priority of the sisterly and brotherly bond over wife and husband or mother and child, had first been suggested by A. Jacob in 1821; later on Goethe infamously called Antigone’s argument “*ganz schlecht*” (“completely inferior”; Jebb 1900: 259). Yet there are considerable hurdles to overcome when arguing for its later addition to the play. For one, the same argument is articulated by the wife of Intaphernes at Herodotus 3.119, a text that is roughly contemporary with Sophocles. So, too, approximately a century later, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* includes this precise passage in its discussion of the play (1417^a32–3).

But, if left in place, Antigone’s argument for giving greater precedence to the children of her parents over any husband or children of her own would clearly repudiate the hierarchy of relationships Jebb has so carefully constructed, and, like many classical scholars, he simply refuses to take that argument seriously. Instead, Jebb claims that, by attaching conditions to her act – by professing the “astonishing view” “that if Polyneices had not been a relative unique in his own kind, she might have thought twice” (Jebb 1900: 260) – Antigone lets her “feet slip from the rock on which they were set.” In effect, by making her act contingent on the type of kinship involved, Antigone yields “that which, throughout the drama, has been the immovable basis of her action, – the universal and unqualified validity of the divine law” (p. 259). Fueled by Jebb’s edition, debate over these lines has continued to trail discussions of the play, especially among classicists, and Jebb’s role has remained paramount; indeed, in 1947, the argument to remove the lines could still be attributed to him. Thus, R. E. Wycherley notes that “the authority of Jebb’s powerful condemnation still turns the balance against the lines for the average reader or student” (Wycherley 1947: 51). Wycherley, responding to Jebb, did not “defend” the logic of Antigone’s argument so much as see in the speech Sophocles’ attempt to represent a young woman’s desperate turn to “whatever argument offers itself to her distraught mind,” even one that was only “sophistical and crude.” So, even when, *pace* Jebb, the lines are allowed to stand, a negative valuation persists: in taking the sibling relationship as primary, Antigone is confused at best, unprincipled at worst.

Still, if Antigone’s feet can be said to “slip from the rock” when articulating a sense of family priority that disquiets Jebb and others, at least she is not yet buried beneath it. And these lines, however questionable to Jebb, have been central to much feminist criticism of *The Years*, which has proceeded in relative ignorance of, or indifference

to, this crux. Critics have persistently noted that *Antigone* is a key intertext for the novel, with Woolf's experience of incestuous sexual abuse at the hands of her half-brothers forming a powerful biographical referent. Like the wounded children of Oedipus, many of *The Years'* central characters, "buried alive" or not, neither marry nor bear children. The conventional marriage plot, to which the Victorian Jebb was so devoted, almost entirely disappears from the action of the novel, not just because "Woolf simply refuses to portray courtship and marriage as the major events in a woman's life" (Gottlieb 1983: 220), but also because "the sister-brother relationship becomes the female-male relationship of importance" (Swanson 1997: 30-1) in the text. Although fraught with gendered conflict, sibling ties persist across time and maintain their intensity; Woolf decenters the primacy of marriage, which Jebb takes for granted, by representing her major characters in their intergenerational relations to one another.

Yet Woolf uses *Antigone* not only to emblemize the priority of the familial bond, but also to demonstrate the implication of the familial in the political: that Creon is not only the ruler, but *Antigone's* uncle, albeit on the mother's side, is demonstrably salient to Woolf's analysis of private and public tyranny in *Three Guineas*, as practiced by fathers, brothers, and uncles at home and abroad. With Woolf arguing that "we are not passive spectators doomed to unresisting obedience" (Woolf 2006: 168), the *Antigone* of this anti-war polemic is not a bride of death, sacrificing her own desire so as to perform a sacred duty to a brother, as Jebb would have it. She is instead a figure who, "with neither capital nor force behind her," disobeys "the voice of Creon, the dictator" (p. 167), standing up to his assertions of masculine privilege and to his violation of both sacred rites and – to frame this in the dominant discourse of Woolf's time – political rights.

As Woolf imagines them, the daughters of the nineteenth century, who opposed their fathers' wishes at home as well as their exclusion from education and the professions, "wanted, like *Antigone*, not to break the laws, but to find the law" (p. 163). Whereas Jebb sees *Antigone's* burial of Polyneices as marking her adherence to "the universal and unqualified validity of the divine law," Woolf assimilates her action, which she casts as arising from "*Antigone's* distinction between the laws and the Law" (p. 98), to that of such liberal feminist Victorian reformers as Josephine Butler: "our claim was no claim of women's rights only [...] it was larger and deeper, it was a claim for the rights of all – all men and women – to the respect in their persons of the great principles of Justice and Equality and Liberty" (Butler, quoted in Woolf 2006: 121). Woolf's *Antigone*, then, enounces from her "outsider" position "a claim" on the benefits of what Woolf sometimes ironically called "civilization," benefits that included access to university education and professional opportunity. However distant she may appear from Jebb's selfless *Antigone* – who, after all, also evinced an "enthusiasm, at once steadfast and passionate for the right" – Woolf's *Antigone* is, to some extent, the other side of the same late Victorian coin.

5 Conclusion

Situated within the broader context of late Victorian and early modernist culture, a critical analysis of Jebb's and Woolf's varied readings of Greek literature and language, as we have begun to indicate here, reveals the significant force of changing cultural

assumptions in shaping the meanings the two make of the *Antigone*. Moreover, as each calls attention to entrenched barriers to accessing and knowing Greek from their respective positions as professional scholar and artist–critic, they also tend to erase their own relative privilege in the process, Woolf’s case being particularly problematic from the point of view of those who would challenge her claim to “outsider” status. Rather than rest comfortably in the dualism between insiders and outsiders, we prefer simply to acknowledge the ambiguity and uncertainty that attend these positions as well as the ambivalence that they fail to register.

So, also, instead of resolving another dualism suggested by our analysis, we conclude by merely reiterating the two different ways of “knowing” *Antigone* suggested by two of her most avid readers – readers who shared certain ideals about privilege and the limits of classical scholarship, even as they sought to invest *Antigone* with radically different meanings. Although he recognized the necessity and beauty of Greek’s distance from the present, Jebb ultimately felt drawn to define the meaning of Sophocles’ text in ways that would make Sophocles’ heroine seem “profoundly tender” and so would protect her from his Victorian contemporaries, whom he feared might see *Antigone* only in terms of an indecipherable coldness or failed femininity rather than her nobility. Woolf, on the other hand, remained more comfortable leaving the veil in place and viewing *Antigone* – her drives, her passions, and her terrors – through its gauzy filter, using the refracted shape to imagine for *Antigone* and ourselves a better, more just, but never quite identical, world. We are, after all, not Greeks, only tourists in that world. Yet Woolf, who on her second and final trip to Greece imagined meeting her own younger self descending the Acropolis (Woolf 1982: 90), might be the first to approve of our perpetual desire to revisit a certain young woman in a far-off land and to bring back home with us the many souvenirs of time well spent.

Guide to Further Reading

Stray suggests that Jebb would benefit from a “fresh look” but notes the paucity of discussions of his contribution to the field and the generally dismissive attitudes toward his work (1999: xii). In addition to Jebb’s published speeches (1880, 1907), an assessment of his scholarship and criticism by his contemporary, A. W. Verrall, appears in C. Jebb (1907); see also brief accounts in Brink (1985: 143–8) and Dawe (1990). For a fuller discussion of classical education at Cambridge, see Stray (1999) and Smith and Stray (2001). On women’s classical education and scholarship in England in the nineteenth century, see Breay (1999), Hardwick (2000), Hurst (2006), and Fiske (2008); on Jane Harrison specifically, Peacock (1988), Passman (1993), and Beard (2000). Winterer (2009) discusses women’s classical education in the US during the same era. For the history of *Antigone*’s reception, begin with Steiner (1984). For more on the complexity of Woolf’s engagement with Greek, see Lamos (2006), and for Woolf’s reading of *Antigone* specifically, see Joseph (1981), Marcus (1987), Hanson (1997), Swanson (1997), and Corbett (2008). Jebb’s editorial treatment of Sophocles was informed by his publication of Sophocles’ Laurentian manuscript, “L” (Jebb and Thompson 1885). His arguments against lines 904–20 of *Antigone* continue to influence classicists’ response to the play. To sample the evolving debate, see Murphy (1918), Agard (1937), Wycherley (1947), Murnaghan (1986), Neuburg (1990), and Cropp (1997). The recent Cambridge edition of *Antigone* notably keeps the passage in and assigns line 572 to Ismene (Griffith 1999).

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Freud and the Drama of Oedipal Truth

Richard H. Armstrong

1 Introduction

Freud's reading of the myth of Oedipus, based largely on the form in which it appears in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, became so influential in the twentieth century that some classical scholars have felt a holy calling to dismantle it in the name of philology, historical particularity, authorial intention, and other sacred assumptions. Jean Pierre Vernant's article "Oedipus without the Complex" (Vernant 1990: 85–111) is a good example of such animus. He charged Freud essentially with scientific laziness on account of his being unwilling to do the hard work of interpretation that a scholar is compelled to perform. The meaning of *Oedipus Tyrannus* according to the Freudian camp is universal and obvious once seen in the light of psychoanalysis, Vernant complains; but this meaning "is not the meaning sought by the Greek scholar or the historian, the meaning present in the work, contained in its structures, a meaning that must be painstakingly reconstructed through a study at every level of the message that a legendary tale or a tragic fiction constitutes" (p. 86). Vernant combats Freud's apparently ahistorical reading in the name of a historical psychology that "takes as its starting point the work itself as it comes to us, in its own particular form" (p. 86; and see also Leonard 2005: 38–68).

What is at stake in such a struggle over a literary text nearly two and a half millennia old? On Freud's side, we see the conflict concerns "a light of undreamt-of importance on the history of the human race and the evolution of religion and morality" (Freud 1953: 263 n. 2). Others object that all that really hangs in the balance is the validity of a dubious theory of human development; namely the Freudian Oedipus complex (on which, see Simon and Blass 1991). Regardless of one's position in this controversy, the fact I will address is that Sophocles became drawn into the Freudian orbit at the turn of the twentieth century in a manner that justifies our attention to this phenomenon as

a key instance of Sophoclean reception, if nothing else. The psychoanalytic interpretation gave *Oedipus Tyrannus* a new lease on life as a paradigmatic drama not merely in its form (as in Aristotle's *Poetics*), but in its hidden substance. When a memorial plaque with Sophoclean verses was raised on the site of the "split road" (*schiste hodos*) leading from Delphi in 1996, those officiating at this ritual were the President Elect of the International Psychoanalytic Association and the President of the Hellenic Psychoanalytic Association (Hartocollis 2001: xviii). The Freudian commitment to Sophocles is certainly more than an intellectual cargo cult; it represents a major inroad of the Greeks into modernity as much as a royal road of modernity into ancient Greece, and it is still worth a good tussle at the crossroads.

If there is a polemic in this chapter, it will be to contend that classicists must now apply their own loyalty to "historical psychology" toward understanding the evolution of Freud's interpretation itself, and not just to use Freud as a straw man in order to assert the greater validity of their discipline. Not only does this historical approach to Freud become humanely interesting, but it also reveals that Freud's reading is both more resilient to criticism than commonly thought and more historically nuanced from the outset than his critics realize. But I do not wish to vindicate Father Freud here; I want rather to point out that philology itself has more to gain by incorporating psychoanalysis as a part of its own history at this stage. As I have argued elsewhere, Freudian psychoanalysis was deeply influenced by the philological and historical sciences of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Armstrong 2005). The refusal to integrate the Freudian reading of Sophocles into our cultural history can lead to embarrassing declarations, as we can see in Vernant's case. He proclaimed the true meaning of tragedy lies in its historical emergence at a time when "man begins to try himself out as an agent who is more or less autonomous in relation to the religious powers that dominate the universe, more or less master of his own actions and more or less in control of his political and personal destiny" (Vernant 1990: 89). The historical and political moment of Athenian tragedy, therefore, leads to some anxious questions about human agency:

To what extent is man really the source of his actions? Even when he seems to be taking the initiative and bearing the responsibility for them does not their true origin lie elsewhere? Does not their significance remain to a large extent hidden even from the one who performs them so that it is not so much the agent that explains the action, rather the action that, by revealing its real meaning after the event, reflects light upon the agent's nature, revealing what he is and what in actual fact he has unwittingly done. (Vernant 1990: 89)

How could Vernant have missed that these questions are *pre-eminently* psychoanalytic? Tragedy, Vernant held, arose when a particular gap emerged between the world of heroic myth and the culture of the *polis*, which in many ways challenged and repudiated the values and social structures of those myths.

The particular domain of tragedy lies in this border zone where human actions hinge on divine powers and where their true meaning, unsuspected by even those who initiated them and take responsibility for them, is only revealed when it becomes a part of an order that is beyond man and escapes him. (Vernant 1990: 27)

If we substitute "nature" for "divine powers," we see just how quickly Vernant's view is compatible with the Freudian position he was so quick to reject.

2 “A single idea of general value...”

Freud's first reading of Sophocles was, as with most people, a compulsory feature of his school curriculum. In June 1873 Freud was in his last weeks of *Gymnasium*, the classical high school that was the essential gateway to any university education – in Freud's case, medical school (see Armstrong 2010). Sophocles was the only tragedian officially read in his school, and we know from the records that *Ajax* and *Antigone* were on the reading list. We also know that, when he sat for his *matura* examination (the “martyrdom,” as he joked, required in order to graduate), he was presented with a passage of *Oedipus Tyrannus* to translate, specifically lines 14–57, the speech of the Priest of Zeus to Oedipus (E. Freud 1992: 4–5). Of the boys taking the exam, he alone ranked “good” in this exercise – though not “excellent” – because he had read the work on his own beforehand. There is nothing in the account of this experience that he later wrote to his friend Emil Fluss to suggest anything but a young man's impatience with the perfunctory nature of compulsory exams.

One's youthful reading has a curious way of lying latent for many years, only to erupt again with a newfound importance. Indeed, 61 years later, Freud reflected on his retentive memory when it came to the *Gymnasium* curriculum: “I have always been proud of how much Greek I have remembered (choruses from Sophocles, passages from Homer)” (E. Freud 1970: 71). The eruption that concerns us, however, occurred 24 years after his graduation, in the midst of a tremendous crisis in his clinical work. During the period 1895–7, Freud treated hysterical patients and developed the hypothesis that repressed memories of sexual molestation in childhood were the cause of psychoneuroses (the “seduction theory”) (Izenberg 1991; Eissler 2001; Esterson 2002). But subsequently he came to see great difficulty in verifying all such tales of abuse, and, while conducting his own self-analysis, he also came to realize that, if they were true, even his own father would be implicated. Moreover, he came to have incestuous dreams about his daughter Mathilde that he was clearly in a hurry to discount (Masson 1985: 249; cf. Eissler 2001: 183–9). In a move that some have subsequently criticized as “an assault on truth” (Masson 1984), Freud gradually abandoned his seduction theory. Now perplexed that there was no certain way to sort out fact from fantasy in a patient's early memories, he found his dreams of a scientific breakthrough shattered. He confessed to his friend Wilhelm Fliess that “[t]he expectation of eternal fame was so beautiful, as was that of certain wealth, complete independence, travels, and lifting the children above the severe worries that robbed me of my youth. Everything depended upon whether or not hysteria would come out right” (Masson 1985: 266).

I dwell on Freud's state of mind here because it helps us to frame his clear identification with Oedipus, as the latter falls into place over the next 45 days (see also Rudnytsky 1987: 54–89). He had hoped to win a secure future at a stroke, through an act of keen intelligence: solving the riddle of hysteria. His initial elation collapsed in the face of recalcitrant data – and of patients, who did not seem to get well. Over the following weeks he burrowed ever deeper into his self-analysis, which in a crucial letter of October 15 he describes as “the most essential thing I have at present and promises to be of the greatest value to me if it reaches its end” (Masson 1985: 270). He dug up a variety of things from his past that appeared in his dreams and associations, including incidents of childhood cruelty, seeing his mother naked, some criminal mischief on the part of a nanny who was suddenly removed from his life, and his one-eyed history professor from

the *Gymnasium*. As he tells Fliess, it is a lot of work to plow through the detritus of the past and arrive at clear certainties, and he promises: "If the analysis fulfills what I expect of it, I shall work on it systematically and then put it before you. [...] It is by no means easy. Being totally honest with oneself is a good exercise" (Masson 1985: 272). In October he was also facing the first anniversary of his father's death, which had instigated his process of self-analysis in the first place.

Such is the frame through which we must view his subsequent observation on *Oedipus Tyrannus* in this letter, which is worth citing in full:

A single idea of general value dawned on me. I have found, in my own case too, [the phenomenon of] being in love with my mother and jealous of my father, and I now consider it a universal event in early childhood, even if not so early as in children who have been made hysterical. (Similar to the invention of parentage in paranoia – heroes, founders of religion). If this is so, we can understand the gripping power of *King Oedipus*, in spite of all the objections that reason raises against the presupposition of fate; and we can understand why the later "drama of fate" was bound to fail so miserably. Our feelings rise against any arbitrary individual compulsion, such as is presupposed in *Die Ahnfrau* and the like; but the Greek legend seizes upon a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he senses its existence within himself. Everyone in the audience was once a budding Oedipus in fantasy and each recoils in horror from the dream fulfillment here transplanted into reality, with the full quantity of repression which separates his infantile state from his present one. (Masson 1985: 272)

There is much to unpack in this passage, beginning with (a) the assumption that *Oedipus Tyrannus* is experienced by a modern audience still as having a "gripping power" (*packende Macht*); (b) the assumption that this power stems not from a peculiar individual compulsion (*Einzelzwang*) on the part of Oedipus, as if he were an interesting but deviant character like Hannibal Lecter, but from a compulsion (*Zwang*) affecting, and known to, everyone; (c) the assumption that this compulsion is based upon every audience member's real experience of love for the mother and hatred of the father and fantasized experience of consummating that love and hatred through doing what Oedipus has actually done, and in that sense everyone was once an Oedipus in embryo and in fantasy (*im Keime und in der Phantasie*); (d) the assumption that the recollection of this admixture of real and fantasized experience causes the audience to shudder in horror (*schaudert jeder zurück*) when confronted with Oedipus as a real character on the stage (for in saying "transplanted into reality," we must assume Freud meant the theatrical virtual reality that creates this experience for the audience), since Oedipus, too, embodies perfectly our scandalous childhood fantasy (and is thus a "dream fulfillment," *Traumerfüllung*); and, finally, (e) the assumption that this horror is related to *repression*, a quantity of mental energy that keeps the childhood fantasy from our conscious acknowledgement as adults.

Though he would develop a more elaborate literary reading of Sophocles' play later in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), we see that, in this early *aperçu*, Freud is mostly describing a theatrical experience: (1) a gothic shock of recognition at seeing upon the stage a figure who fulfills our hidden childhood experience; and (2) the arousal of a monstrous set of feelings toward our loved ones – feeling that piety, convention, and maturation bury deep within us. The only literary polemic in his observation is against other kinds of "drama of fate" (*Schicksalsdrama*), in particular Franz Grillparzer's lurid play *Die Ahnfrau* (*The Ancestress*), where, Freud claims, our reason simply cannot accept the arbitrary nature of fate as played out in the plot. In Grillparzer's play a brother and a sister, not knowing of their relation to each other, fall in love, and the young lover, under

the influence of an eerie ancestral spirit, kills the man who, unbeknownst to him, is their father. The sister kills herself later on and the young man collapses dead while trying to embrace the ghost. The plot seems terribly contrived, and such a play is doomed to fail in Freud's view.

In point of fact, Grillparzer's play was far from a failure in Vienna. *Die Abnfrau* had a long success on the Viennese stage; between 1824 and 1902 it played 124 times at the prestigious Burgtheater, starring leading actors, and it had numerous performances in the last decades of the nineteenth century (von Alth, Olzyna and Holaubek 1979, vol. 1: 149). It was a spooky favorite to see on All Saints Day, and psychoanalyst Fritz Wittels recalled vividly that it was the first play he ever saw, adding: "Today one would not allow a seven-year-old boy to see such a nightmare, but there were no psychoanalysts in those days to prevent it" (Wittels 1995: 15). So we should note that Freud is making a *critical* judgment on the play, but wishes rather to cast it as an *empirical* observation about cause and effect, and as such he seems to tweak his data from the outset.

Oedipus Tyrannus is utterly different because, Freud contends, in spite of the normal reaction of our reason to the contrived notion of "fated" events, we *do* know something about this compulsion, and because the play thus hooks us, our rational objections yield to our intense engagement. At this stage, however, Freud does not explain why an audience would want to see such a thing. The mechanics of the audience's pleasure in watching tragedy, a controversial topic since Plato and Aristotle's time, are not spelled out exactly in this letter, though we know the dots Freud could have connected at this stage from other areas of his work. His early treatment of hysteria was known as cathartic therapy and, crudely put, it involved reconstructing memories of a patient in order to recover a lost "scene," which the patient could then re-experience and integrate into her consciousness (Armstrong 2006: 84–93). This reintegration was effected in part through the "abreaction" of "strangled affect," or through the catharsis of emotions that remained essentially dammed up by the disintegrating effect of trauma and the gradual onset of neurosis (Breuer and Freud 1955: 8–11). Thus, for the audience, Oedipus is a bit like a recovered memory (the memory, that is to say, *of a fantasy*), and the "gripping power" we experience is the discharge of repressed affect that has lain dormant for so many years under the pressure of our socialization.

This means, then, that Freud already conducted a type of therapy that was informed by a theatrical understanding of emotional catharsis long before he thought to interpret *Oedipus Tyrannus*. When he did turn to the play, he addressed it mostly in theatrical terms, staking a lot on the notion that it remains an effective piece on the modern stage, one that still succeeds, after many centuries, where more recent plays fail. Freud lived right at the time when audiences in Paris and Vienna had begun to experience *Oedipus Tyrannus* directly as a performance text (Armstrong 1998; Macintosh 2009: 87–91). At the Comédie Française, Jean Mounet-Sully (1841–1916) made it a sensation through the sheer force of his acting and, in Vienna, Adolf Wilbrandt (1837–1911) brought it into the repertoire of the Burgtheater with memorable success. *König Oedipus*, performed in Wilbrandt's own German translation, appeared annually throughout the 1890s (von Weilen 1916: 64); and it is worth noting that – *pace* Freud's English translators – he always refers to the play as *König Oedipus* and never by the Latin title *Oedipus Rex*, giving it the sense of a common and vernacularized work. What is more, Freud's approach to Oedipus rhymes with the contemporary theatrical interpretation to some degree. Mounet-Sully described his own performance in the final act, when he notoriously gave way to subhuman groanings, thus: "*Après les épouvantables malheurs qui m'accablent, je*

suis anéanti, écrasé, j'ai perdu le sens et la raison et je m'exprime comme un être inconscient" ("After the dreadful misfortunes which overwhelm me, I am devastated, crushed, I have lost all sense and reason and I speak like an unconscious being," Vernay 1888: 140). This visceral approach struck the audience with particularly strong impressions; a reviewer described Mounet-Sully's Oedipus as "the unconscious tool of a horrible fatality" ("A French Hamlet" 1886: 347).

While there is no direct evidence that Freud saw Mounet-Sully's *Oedipe Roi* or Wilbrandt's *König Oedipus*, he was in both cities during periods when he would have been made aware of the success of Sophocles' play on the modern stage, so that he could certainly take its viability for granted. As we see, both Mounet-Sully and his reviewer conceived of Oedipus as an unconscious agent – a hero unwittingly performing his horrendous deeds. Freud's move was to make Oedipus a figure of the audience's unconscious and to turn the hapless king's moment of self-revelation into an experience of communal self-alienation, as we realize in some manner that *we* are not who we think we are. It might seem a leap to go from Freud's personal analysis to such a universal assumption, and this is a weakness in his argument he will amend as he develops his reading with the help of the Sophoclean text. But before exploring Freud's later reading of Sophocles we need to return to a second feature of Freud's first exploration of these ideas in this early letter of 1897. His initial vision of Oedipal dynamics was not monocular, because the tyrant of Thebes has a powerful affinity with a Danish prince.

3 Hoemlipaust: A Trifocal Vision

Though Freud offers us a largely theatrical reading of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, he proceeds readily in this same letter of October 15, 1897 to offer a literary analysis of *Hamlet* that strengthens his sense that the initial hypothesis of universal Oedipal feelings is truly onto something "of general value." Here his analysis is far more nuanced in terms of authorial (unconscious) agency and textual detail.

Fleetingly the thought passed through my head that the same thing might be at the bottom of *Hamlet* as well. I am not thinking of Shakespeare's conscious intention, but believe, rather, that *a real event stimulated the poet to his representation, in that his unconscious understood the unconscious of his hero*. How does Hamlet the hysteric justify his words, "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all"? How does he explain his irresolution in avenging his father by the murder of his uncle – the same man who sends his courtiers to their death without a scruple and who is positively precipitate in murdering Laertes [*sic*, for Polonius]. How better than through the torment he suffers from the obscure memory that he himself had contemplated the same deed against his father out of passion for his mother, and – "use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping?" His conscience is his unconscious sense of guilt. And is not his sexual alienation in his conversation with Ophelia typically hysterical? And his rejection of the instinct that seeks to beget children? And, finally, his transferral of the deed from his own father to Ophelia's? And does he not in the end, in the same marvelous way as my hysterical patients, bring down punishment on himself by suffering the same fate as his father of being poisoned by the same rival? (Masson 1985: 272–3; my emphasis)

Here the psychological dynamic under review is not that between the character and the receiving audience, but between the author and his own creation. By saying that Shakespeare was excited toward this creation by some real event (*eine reale Begebenheit den*

Dichter zur Darstellung reizte), Freud means that the author's own Oedipal experience unconsciously guided his creation of Hamlet, hence the delicate nuances that have made Hamlet's actions and character problematic to interpreters who assume he operates within normal parameters. Hamlet's cruel treatment of Ophelia, his oscillation between irresolution and murderous impulsiveness, and even his tragic end now coalesce into a coherent picture of clinically recognizable behavior. For Freud, Hamlet clearly acts "in the same marvelous way as my hysterical patients," which means he suffers from Oedipal reminiscences that prevent him from murdering the man whose very deed he once thought to bring into action himself. Whereas Freud felt himself to be the corroborating evidence of the scenario of Oedipus (since self-analysis revealed these unexpected feelings "in [his] own case, too," as we saw above), the hysterical antics of Hamlet find *clinical* confirmations.

Repression is the key element in this early reading of the plays, as is later borne out not only by Freud's increasing desire to get to the bottom of repression mechanisms in his correspondence with Fliess, but also by his later elaboration of this material in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. We may have once been "budding Oedipuses in fantasy," but we remain florid Hamlets as adults. Oedipus shocks us because he realizes a forgotten fantasy of ours; but our uncanny sympathy for Hamlet lies in an unconscious solidarity with his inhibitions, not with his actions. By the time of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, this is further elaborated into a clearly *historical* argument, based on the claim that the regime of repression grows significantly as civilization progresses, such that Sophocles, so close to mythic material that seems itself much closer to the unconscious, could create a figure as boldly transgressive as Oedipus, while Shakespeare, centuries on, would have the Oedipal material buried far deeper under the Dane's mysterious behavior (Freud 1999: 204 n. 23; also Jones 1976: 127–51).

The point is rarely made, however, that Freud's "Oedipal scenario," as it is revealed in this letter, is clearly based upon a reading of *both* plays, and a full understanding of the Oedipus complex would have to rest upon these two essential pillars: (1) the *literal* nature of incestuous desire and patricidal wishes in the case of Oedipus; and (2) the complex ramifications of repressed desire in the case of Hamlet. In a sense, Freud reads the two plays in the light of each other, since his understanding of the audience's reaction to Oedipus is based on our (postulated) Hamlet-like construction: we live in denial and awake to a painful recognition of our childhood wishes. *Oedipus Tyrannus* gives us a clarity we did not seek and do not want, while *Hamlet* affords us a far more neurotic but comforting befuddlement.

Freud's conflation of Oedipus and Hamlet rhymes again with the visual and theatrical culture of his time (Robson 2009). *Hamlet* in Schlegel's translation was put on several times a year in Vienna (von Weilen 1916: 45) and was easier to see than either *König Oedipus* or *Die Ahnfrau*; it had just played the Burgtheater two days before Freud wrote his letter, though, again, we have no evidence he saw it there. Besides its stage popularity, *Hamlet* had been a subject of interest to medical men throughout the nineteenth century – not least to Jean Martin Charcot, Freud's teacher at the Salpêtrière clinic in Paris. Much of the clinical interest was focused on Ophelia, a perfect figure of female hysteria in the eyes of Charcot (Showalter 1985: 85–7; Wechsler 2002: 215–18). Freud's attraction to *Hamlet* is understandable in this context, though, again, he makes his own contribution: his focus is on the hysterical Hamlet, not on Ophelia. The prince's feigned madness proved far less of a challenge to understand than his notorious hesitation to act; Hamlet's erratic *conscious* agency was the riddle Freud thought he had solved by exposing its unconscious dynamics. It seems quite striking that the same actor who was the definitive

Oedipus of the nineteenth century, Jean Mounet-Sully, was also well known for his rather extraordinary rendition of Hamlet, which moved an American reviewer to defend the embattled play as “one of the most profound and extraordinary psychological works. Dr. Charcot has said that it is even a deep physiological work, and that the alienists of the day cannot find the slightest fault with Ophelia” (“A French Hamlet” 1886: 348). Another reviewer noted, in the scene where Hamlet is charged with avenging his father, that Mounet-Sully “gave a strange, low cry of mingled rage and triumph at the confirmation of his own suspicions, which was curiously effective. It is clear that M. Mounet-Sully considers Hamlet to have been nervous and hysterical, but not really insane” (“The Drama” 1894: 278). The affinity between Mounet-Sully’s deep mining of the lower emotional registers of Oedipus and Hamlet and Freud’s interpretation seems very strong; for this very reason the historical untruth that Freud saw Mounet-Sully as Oedipus while he was in Paris has been hard to debunk (see Armstrong 2006: 83, fn. 12). It is one of those imagined historical encounters we would very much like to be true.

The important point here is that, by coupling the two plays in this initial reading, Freud drew *Oedipus Tyrannus* into a discussion that had already drawn the connections between theatricality and neurosis. The key feature is not just that he Oedipalized Hamlet, thus “solving the riddle” that had for so long puzzled literary critics; he also Hamletized Oedipus by making the play an embodiment of psychological truth, thereby jettisoning the metaphysical and theological discussions that tend to encrust the play’s reception even to this day. As he later developed his reading of Sophocles’ work, he rather liked to pose it as a “problem play,” whose ostensible theme cannot possibly account for its stage success – thus turning its effect into a riddle he could solve for us, as he did with Hamlet’s inhibitions (Freud 1963: 330–2).

It might seem demeaning to reduce tragic heroes to infantile complexes, but there is an additional dimension to this ruthless work of analysis that finds itself cast in heroic terms in Freud’s letters. As he related to Fliess on October 27, 1897, he was at the time living mostly for the “inner work” of his self-analysis, since “business is hopelessly bad” (Masson 1985: 274). But self-analysis was proving a very rocky affair, as it subjected him to moods, and even to sexual excitations he was uncertain how to handle. He describes this process in Faustian terms:

I am gripped and pulled through all [reading: German *alle* – or perhaps *alte* “ancient”] times in quick association of thoughts; my moods change like the landscapes seen by a traveler from a train; and as the great poet, using his privilege to ennoble (sublimate), puts it:

*Und manche liebe Schatten steigen auf;
Gleich einer alten, halbverklungenen Sage,
Kommt erste Lieb’ und Freundschaft mit herauf.*

And many beloved shadows appear;
Like an only half-forgotten myth,
There come along with them first love and friendship.
(Goethe, *Faust* I, Dedication ll. 10–12)

And also first fright and discord. Many a sad secret of life is here followed back to its first roots; many a pride and privilege are made aware of their humble origins. All of what I experienced with my patients, as a third [person,] I find again here – days when I drag myself about dejected because I have understood nothing of the dream, of the fantasy, or the mood of the day; and then again days when a flash of lightning [*Blitz*] illuminates the interrelations and lets me understand the past as a preparation for the present. (Masson 1985: 274)

It is very telling that Freud sees self-analysis as a Faustian struggle of the soul for knowledge, in part because we know that Goethe always stood for Freud as a model of ambition and genius (Wittels 1931: 3–46). Years later, when Freud was awarded the Goethe Prize, he cited in his acceptance address the same verses, “words which we could repeat for each of our analyses,” and remarked upon how close the poet came to psychoanalytic insights (Freud 1961: 208–10). It is also worth mentioning here that Adolf Wilbrandt, who had brought *Oedipus Tyrannus* onto the Viennese stage, had shortly before that also succeeded in reviving the stage success of *Faust*. The great Hungarian Jewish actor Adolf Sonnenthal (1834–1909) played Faust *and* Hamlet quite memorably for the audiences of Freud’s generation (Wittels 1931: 16). Sonnenthal had risen from a mere tailor’s apprentice to a patent of nobility through his uncanny art, and he was a figure an assimilated Jew like Freud could easily admire.

To sum up so far: when Freud’s clinical work seemed to collapse, he made the daring move of examining his own soul and began to unlock a host of figures from his past, reaching far back to the earliest part of his experience, which seemed almost mythical (hence his citation of *Sage*, saga or myth). In that eerie landscape he found, then, the combination of Oedipal transgression, Hamletesque internal conflict, and Faustian determination that would later take the shape of psychoanalytic therapy. As inevitable as this development might seem today, it is always important to return historical facts to their conditions of possibility. Clearly his reading of the plays fit into the pattern of sudden illumination he describes above, when interrelations suddenly clicked into place, particularly in reference to how the past determines the present. We can see how invested in these readings he was when he complains to Fliess, as late as November 5: “You said nothing about my interpretation of *King Oedipus* and *Hamlet*. Since I have not told it to anyone else, because I can well imagine in advance the bewildered rejection, I should like to have a short comment on it from you” (Masson 1985: 277). It is clear, then, that Freud felt something risky in his view at this stage and wanted some response from his most intimate interlocutor. This is borne out by the fact that, in the very next paragraph, he mentions he has recently enjoyed the visit of Emanuel Löwy, a close friend of Freud’s youth, who was a professor of archaeology in Rome and a remarkably open-minded scholar (Brein 1998). The fact that Freud did not feel secure enough to share this interpretation of the paradigmatic Greek tragedy with Löwy gives us some indication of his tentative state of mind. On November 14 he reports to Fliess:

My self-analysis remains interrupted. I have realized why I can analyze myself only with the help of knowledge obtained objectively (like an outsider). True self-analysis is impossible; otherwise there would be no [neurotic] illness. Since I am still contending with some kind of puzzle in my patients, this is bound to hold me up in my self-analysis as well. (Masson 1985: 281)

I would put these three plays in the range of “knowledge obtained objectively” (*objektiv gewonnenen Kenntnissen*), since they seemed to guide him back, with some clarity, to the murky aspects of his own experience. It is not hard to imagine, then, that the plays were a kind of technology of the self to Freud, providing analytical grist for his mill as he dredged his memory and groped his way through his clinical improvisations.

Freud’s deployment of the Oedipus myth in his self-analysis certainly fits a general *and ancient* pattern. As Richard Buxton says, “myths function like shoes: you step into them if they fit” (1994: 196), and at a time when incestuous crimes and dreams were very much on his mind, when the death of this father loomed over him, and when his desperate desire to solve the riddle of hysteria was exhausting him, the myth of Oedipus fit Freud

very well, especially since his clinical explorations had taken a self-referential turn. His interest in the unconscious led him to seek what he later termed “the demonic” (*das Dämonische*), Goethe’s concept for the uncanny natural power that is neither human nor divine (Freud 1999: 406). It is thus telling that he found in the myth not surface truth, but inner compulsion (*Zwang*), something that worked upon audiences millennia apart for reasons that those audiences could not fully understand.

4 The Family is a Tragedy, Naturally

We can gauge the strength of Freud’s satisfaction with his interpretation by the fact that the two plays remain at the heart of his argument for the universality of Oedipal feelings, as it emerged for the first time in public in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). On March 24, 1898, we find him outlining the book as he envisioned it, and he mentions that “[c]omments on *King Oedipus*, the talisman fairy tale, and possibly *Hamlet*, will find their place. I first must read up on the Oedipus legend, do not yet know where” (Masson 1985: 304). This shows us two things of significance.

1 He remains for some reason hesitant about including his analysis of *Hamlet*, even though it goes a long way to explain the Prince’s odd character, and in the first editions the comments he makes on Shakespeare are relegated to a footnote. Only in editions after 1914 does that analysis take its rightful place alongside the reading of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as in the initial interpretation.

2 *Pace* Vernant, Freud did know more than the Oedipus myth as crafted by Sophocles, and the Freud Library in London still possesses his copy of L. Constans’ 1881 study *La légende d’Oedipe; étudiée dans l’antiquité, au moyen âge, et dans les temps modernes, en particulier dans le Roman de Thèbes*. The copy has considerable notations throughout, which indicate a thorough reading (details on the book’s marginalia can be found in the Freud library catalog, Davies and Fichnter 2006: Appendix 1, 549–53). This book provides important evidence on how Freud understood a particular scholarly approach to the Oedipus myth, and therefore it is worth discussing briefly.

Constans’ book was an attempt to provide a broad view of the origin and development of the Oedipus myth through antiquity, the Middle Ages and beyond, under the assumption that it is in origin a folk tale that was reshaped in a peculiar manner by the Greeks. The very first words of his preface call it the “spontaneous fruit of the popular imagination” dating from remotest antiquity, which was “profoundly modified by the entirely Greek conception of fate” (*fatalité*) at the hands of the greatest dramatists, then re-imposed on the folk tradition (Constans 1881: 1). The very last words in his conclusion return to this claim: “Thus the woes of Oedipus and his family have not ceased to interest humanity for more than twenty-five centuries; this is indeed the nature of truly spontaneous products of the popular imagination” (p. 390). Constans was of the same school as Max Müller and M. Bréal in favoring a naturalistic interpretation of Oedipus as the hero of a solar myth; he was the personification of light, caught up in a struggle with darkness, as represented by the Sphinx (pp. 3–5). Freud even underlined the word *personification* in his copy. But Constans entertains the objections of the Italian scholar Domenico Comparetti, who pointed out that the episode of the Sphinx is not known in Homer (our earliest source for the Oedipus myth), and that the true primitive material of the myth is the

moral catastrophe represented by Oedipus' patricide and incest. Freud marked the following synopsis of Comparetti's statement of the myth's essential elements: "a fatal coincidence can lead to the commission of the greatest crimes independently of one's will; a man can, without wanting it or knowing it, be guilty and subject to the consequences of his error" (quoted in Constans 1881: 6). Constans countered that such moral considerations, obviously present in Sophocles, are a secondary development, overlaid upon the primitive naturalistic explanation of the struggle between light and darkness.

As it emerged in his first publication on the matter, Freud's interpretation of *Oedipus Tyrannus* reflected this late nineteenth-century scholarly dissection of the Oedipus myth. Where Constans, Bréal, and Müller were wont to locate the essential meaning of the tale in a primitive solar myth, considering it a "naturalistic" explanation, Freud relocated nature into *human* nature, not in cosmology; and this human nature is pre-eminently sexuality, the motor force of evolution. His re-situating of nature in sexuality led him back to the moral crux of the story; unlike the nineteenth-century "naturalizers," he did not read the incest and patricide as standing for anything but the crimes themselves. Freud returns the Oedipus myth to its most salient feature: it concerns the crimes of incest and patricide *literally*, and not in some figurative sense (see Sissa 1994: 34–9). Freud thus reincorporates the moral dilemma Comparetti saw as original, but with an important twist: the "secondary revision," as he later calls it in the language of dream theory, is that the moral conflict has a *theological* purpose: "What the deeply moved spectator is meant to learn from the tragedy is submission to the will of the divinity and insight into his own powerlessness" (Freud 1999: 202). And, in Freud's view, it is important to see that this ostensible lesson is patent nonsense.

Sophocles' play enters *The Interpretation of Dreams* as a capstone to a larger argument about dreams, not self-analysis. In a section of the book on typical dreams, Freud goes to some lengths to explain why we dream of the death of loved ones, which seems to go against his assertion that every dream expresses an unconscious wish. The burden on his theory at this point is that most people would not recognize such dreams as wishes, especially when those who die are parents – the very figures of love, safety, and stability. Freud's theory of Oedipal feelings is gingerly unpacked at this point, first with general observations on the strained nature of parent–child relations and the behavior of young children, then with clinical anecdotes from his neurotic patients. He readily asserts his theory that such feelings have a lot to do with the etiology of psychoneurosis, but he quickly opens the argument to make it one of general significance, since "psychoneurotics are only revealing to us, by magnifying it, what goes on less clearly and less intensely in the inner life of most children" (Freud 1999: 201).

Only at this juncture does he introduce his reading of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, upon which high stakes are now placed: "In support of this insight the ancient world has provided us with a legend [*Sagenstoff*] whose far-reaching and universal power can only be understood if we grant a similar universality to the assumption from child-psychology we have just been discussing" (p. 201). He then moves on to give a detailed synopsis of the Sophoclean play, which he praises for its "gradually intensified and skillfully delayed revelation – comparable to the work of a psychoanalysis" (p. 202). In a symptomatic way, we can see in his description of the play's power a conflation of theatrical effect and clinical work: "As the poet brings Oedipus' guilt to light in the course of his investigation, he compels us to recognize our own inner life, where those impulses, though suppressed, are still present" (p. 203). Freud again asserts that our reaction to the play is based on a recognition of its unique status among such fateful plots.

There must be a voice within us that is ready to acknowledge the compelling force of fate in *Oedipus*, while we are able to reject as arbitrary such disposals as are to be found in *Die Ahnfrau* or other tragedies of fate. And a factor of this kind is indeed contained in the story of King Oedipus. His fate moves us only because it could have been our own as well, *because at our birth the oracle pronounced the same curse upon us as it did on him*. It was *perhaps* ordained that we should all of us turn our first sexual impulses towards our mother, our first hatred and violent wishes against our father. Our dreams convince us of it. King Oedipus, who killed his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta, is only the fulfillment of our childhood wish. (p. 203; my emphasis)

It is clear from this that nature has occupied the place formerly held by divine powers; the lesson Freud would have us learn is that we must submit to the realities of *nature*, not to the divine will. “Like Oedipus we live in ignorance of those wishes, offensive to morality and forced upon us by Nature, and once they have been revealed, there is little doubt we would all rather turn our gaze away from the scenes of our childhood” (p. 203). Again we see the conflation of the theatrical and the clinical, as the stage where Oedipus descants his pathos becomes the *scenes* of our childhood (*Szenen unserer Kindheit*), like those reconstructed in therapy.

For Freud, the cleft from which tragedy springs is not the metaphysical contrast between divine will and human weakness, but the psychological rift between the pretensions of the conscious adult mind and the natural inclinations it sweeps under the carpet as it constitutes itself. Oedipus’ downfall “refers to us too and our pride, who have grown so wise and powerful in our own estimation since our childish years” (p. 203). It is a commonplace in criticizing Freud’s reading to point out that his assumption that the play teaches “submission to the will of the divinity and insight into his own powerlessness” is an antiquated reading of Sophocles (p. 202; for such criticisms, see Dodds 1983: 182; Ahl 2008: 22–30). But, like the views of the “naturalizers” in Constans’ book, this reading is one that Freud is *rejecting*, not supporting. It was a critical commonplace in his day, which led to the very conundrum he was trying to explain: if the “theology” is so repellent to us, why does the play still remain effective? He only holds on to this reading as a convenient straw man (for a later formulation of it as “pious sophistry,” see Freud 1963: 330–2), and he certainly does not think we should believe it.

Freud’s approach to Sophocles is one that drives a wedge between surface and depth; the talk of gods and oracles is part of a jimmied-up surface that papers over a more visceral textual operation underneath: the targeting of our Oedipal emotions. As such, this play, with its careening and improbable plot, lets us peek through the fissures of its own badly executed self-censorship. Jocasta is the voice of denial in the text’s own cover-up; and yet, as Freud’s more literary analysis of Sophocles’ text now points out, she says the very thing that indicates the convergence of dream, myth, and truth – but she asserts it *by denying it*, the kind of contradictory communication on which Freud’s new science of the unconscious zeroes in. Freud cites these lines in the popular translation by J. J. C. Donner, and in his personal copy we find the lines marked in the margin (Davies and Fichtner 2006: 486, item 3312):

*Denn viele Menschen sahen auch in Träumen schon
Sich zugesellt der Mutter; doch wer alles dies
Für nichtig achtet, trägt die Last des Lebens leicht.*

For many men have seen themselves also in their dreams
coupled with their mothers. Who counts this all for naught
carries life’s burdens lightly. (Donner 1868: 954–6 = S. OT 981–3)

This statement comes from one of the oddest parts of the play, when the Corinthian brings news of Polybus' death, the bad/good news that makes Oedipus both inappropriately happy and strangely afraid of his supposed mother Merope. As Freud himself realized later, when watching the Max Reinhardt *König Oedipus* in Vienna, it is very revealing that news of his father's death should make Oedipus feel joyfully released from guilt (Armstrong 1998). This moment in the text is precisely the point to which a Freudian would redirect all well-meaning philologists who echo Vernant's fatuous observation that Oedipus cannot have an Oedipus complex, since he was not raised by Laius and Jocasta in the first place (Vernant 1990: 108; Buxton 1994: 133). As Aristotle knew and fully appreciated about Sophocles' dramatic art, the king and queen of Corinth, like Laius at the crossroads and Jocasta on her wedding bed, are improbabilities best kept *out* of the action of the play (*Po.* 1454^b6–8). They are imaginary back-story, as the play itself suggests when each incident reveals itself to be untrue in the way we first learn it. These fictions of innocence melt away by the end.

Freud was the master of ambivalence and could quickly tell you that Oedipus' two sets of parents are the result of splitting or decomposing an original mother and father – about whom all too powerful and contradictory emotions are felt – into a more palatable set of fictions. So we end up with the dichotomy of a Good Father (Polybus, the kindly man who gladly adopts the wounded foundling) and a Bad Father (Laius, the infanticidal and road-raging autocrat), and a Bad Mother (Jocasta, whose complicity in Oedipus' botched infanticide comes to light, and whom he pursues in the palace with a sword), played off against a Good Mother (Merope, whose bed Oedipus strangely fears, as if he could not keep himself from it). The splitting that generates Oedipus' fateful trajectory (“tragectory”?) between four parents and two cities reveals the important role the imagination holds in our psychic economy, and why this play, and theater generally, probe us so profoundly and improbably. As Antonin Artaud – one of Freud's unclaimed surrealist children – put it, theater “restores all our dormant conflicts and their powers, giving these powers names we acknowledge as signs. Here a bitter clash of symbols takes place before us, hurled one against the other in an inconceivable riot. For theatre can only happen the moment the inconceivable really begins, where poetry[,] taking place on stage, nourishes and superheats created symbols” (Artaud 1993: 18).

Guide for Further Reading

Rudnytsky (1987) is still the best monograph that traces the figure and theme of Oedipus in Freud's personal life as well as Oedipus' place in the intellectual history of the nineteenth century. The one neglected aspect to Rudnytsky's approach is performance history, on which we now have MacIntosh (2009), though Armstrong (1998) deals more specifically with the performance history most relevant to Freud. The idea that Freud had seen Mounet-Sully as Oedipus can now be definitively refuted upon evidence from Marie Bonaparte's journals; see Armstrong (2006): 83, fn. 12. The Oedipus complex is itself a complicated topic as it developed in Freud's thought, and Simon and Blass (1991) can quickly orient the reader to some of the theory's evolving contours. There is generally not enough awareness of how linked Freud's view of Sophocles is to *Hamlet*, and Jones (1976) makes a more thorough argument for a psychoanalytic reading of the play along strictly Freudian lines. Freud's deployment of Sophocles fits into a more general pattern of a certain compulsion for antiquity that marks his thought very

deeply, as is thoroughly explored in Armstrong (2006). Anyone interested in Freud's reading on such topics now has an incredible resource in the detailed catalog of his library – Davies and Fichtner (2006), which includes numerous observations on his marginal comments in books.

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Sophocles with Lacan

Mark Buchan

I Introduction

As the scholarly companion industry meanders along its merry way, it is perhaps not surprising that there has already been an essay, and a good one, written on the importance of Greek tragedy for the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan (Salecl 2003). So, to avoid repetition, and in keeping with the spirit of a volume that is primarily about Sophocles, I will outline Lacan's reading of Sophocles' oeuvre in general and of the *Antigone* in particular, with a view to outlining what it might offer classicists or any others with a broad interest in Greek tragedy. Much room will be given to Lacan's 1960 seminar "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis," where he offers a commentary on *Antigone*; but I will also try to show how his reading of the play is closely linked to broader ethical questions. For Lacan, both tragedy and psychoanalysis focus on intractable problems of human desire, problems that beset the contemporary political world just as much as they did democratic Athens, if in very different ways.

In recent years, after long neglect, some classicists have tried to engage with Lacan's reading of the *Antigone* (though not of Sophocles, or of tragedy in general). But the overall spirit of their engagement has been one of exasperated critique as much as one of appreciation. Lacan, it has been argued, produces readings of the plays that are anachronistic and apolitical and pays no attention to the democratic context of Greek tragedy. Rather than critique, what follows outlines Lacan's most important arguments and knits his commentary on Sophocles into his wider philosophy. I try, as much as possible, to let his views stand and speak for themselves. If the chapter encourages a few to read Lacan's ethics seminar first hand, then it will have done its job. Quotations throughout are from the Dennis Porter's 1986 translation, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*.

The chapter has two sections, one on ethics and psychoanalysis in general, the second on the figures of Creon and *Antigone* and their wider resonances in Greek tragedy. First, I give a brief overview of what Lacan argues psychoanalysis can tell us about ethics. I do not summarize the entire seventh seminar, but I focus instead on the relevant background

for the reading of the *Antigone* that closes it. What interests Lacan is the overlap in function between tragedy and psychoanalysis: not just what these peculiar discourses have to say (their theory), but also what they do. Psychoanalysis and tragedy both aspire to change the human psyche as much as to explain it – via catharsis and the couch. Lacan also offers a critique of the kind of politics that ignores human desire; because both tragedy and psychoanalysis provide an experience that helps reorient the subject with respect to his or her desire, the ethical presumption is that a political world where such a process is not available is far more dangerous for that reason. When Lacan speculates that his psychoanalytic eye will offer up a “less moralizing reading of the play,” he is not ignoring politics or morals (Lacan 1986: 249). He takes a calculated step back, inviting us to consider what psychoanalysis, and its theory of desire, can tell us about politics and the desire to moralize.

Critical reactions to the *Antigone* have delighted in this kind of moralizing, with endless arguments debating whether Creon or Antigone is in the right. Even a deconstructive critic such as Goldhill, who tries to see the play itself as a provocation, a cultural document that offers a window onto the process of political moralizing itself, remains attached to this general outlook (Goldhill 1986). One can focus on the conflict of politics, on the way problems of language complicate ethical engagement, and one can deconstruct arguments; but this tends to strengthen the hold of the moralizing view rather than to offer an alternative. For Lacan, Creon and Antigone simply do not meet on the same playing field. Rather, through the figure of Antigone, we are offered an antidote to the tyranny of the political that is so easy to see in Creon, a freedom to explore our own desires that is also an opportunity to rethink the political sphere; yet this hardly means Antigone’s obstinacy is held up as a model for politics. Lacan’s analysis also offers explanations of why the desire to moralize is so dangerous and alluring.

The second section looks in detail at Lacan’s analysis of Creon and Antigone. They are previewed by the two sections of the seminar that immediately precede the reading of the play, on the function of the good (Section XVII) and on the function of the beautiful (Section XVII). Creon is aligned with the former, Antigone with the latter. Creon’s obsession with the good causes him to ignore his own desire, with fatal consequences. Antigone’s willingness to embrace her desire, even to the point of death, results in her “beauty effect” for us. Here Lacan shifts focus, being concerned less with any psychoanalysis of the character of Antigone and more with how her beauty captures the members of the audience and changes the way they desire.

Creon is representative of the aporias that beset ideals of distributional justice, a case study in how politics is beset by problems that psychoanalysis and tragedy seek to reveal. When Lacan says of Creon that “in [his] rigid mind everything is political, or, in other words, a question of interest,” his critique is also a critique of contemporary forms of politics – in 1960, the capitalist and the state socialist worlds alike – which consider nothing but “interest” (Lacan 1986: 268). Here it matters little whether human subjects are bourgeois egotists or altruists; in both cases the primacy of “interest,” of the distribution of goods, is taken for granted. What both psychoanalysis and the *Antigone* offer instead is the importance of a different kind of good for humans, one that is bound up with coming to terms with one’s desire. For Lacan, the question of the good is so intrinsically bound up with the problem of pleasure, itself filtered through Freud’s writings on the pleasure principle, that any attempt to act as if a good could be separated from the personal and particular question of how each subject pursues his/her pleasure is, from a psychoanalytic perspective, an ethical betrayal. As Lacan concludes, the one thing a subject can be guilty of is “giving up on his/her desire.”

In considering Antigone herself, I cover reasonably well-known territory. Lacan, as his commentators repeat, is convinced that the sublime beauty of Antigone dominates the play and that she is the play's hero, whereas Creon is a secondary figure. But Lacan also explains her beauty, and the experience it provides for an audience. Antigone per se is not beautiful, but rather the place she occupies, awaiting as she does a biological death but already separated from human civilization, produces the effect of beauty, and this links her to other Sophoclean heroes who, for Lacan, also inhabit this uncanny realm "between two deaths." We will spend time on this significance and on what it means for Lacan's understanding of the tragic experience. Most importantly, this analysis does not valorize Antigone over Creon in moral terms. Even advocates of Lacan have fallen into this trap, assuming that her sublime beauty can be exchanged in some way for moral authority. True, Antigone, for Lacan, does not fall victim to the kind of errors that beset Creon; she does not "give up on her desire." But Lacan hardly idealizes her, at least not in any standard way. He follows the chorus' description of her as savage, untamed, unremitting in the commitment that makes her a terrifying figure. She is, precisely, a *heroine* in a way that is recognizable from Sophocles' other plays – and from the treatment she receives from the other tragedians, too, though Lacan does not explore this. We are not meant to champion Antigone, to fall behind any political program of hers; indeed, Lacan suggests that any ultimate political victory for her would herald disaster. Rather we need to reflect on how our experience of her beauty within the tragedy can help us re-configure our own desire, and thus clear a path to virtue.¹

Antigone, with her savage recalcitrance, is thus on a par with other Sophoclean protagonists – Philoctetes, Ajax, Electra, Ajax, and Oedipus, especially the one portrayed at the end of his life, as he cruelly curses his sons. But this does not make them ideals to be followed or exemplars of the kind of humanist vision so often associated with Sophocles. Lacan defines the hero as "someone who is betrayed with impunity"; and from that betrayal, taken together with the hero's steadfast refusal to compromise with those that betrayed him, comes Lacan's vision of humanity's fractured relationship with the world that surrounds it. For tragedy and psychoanalysis alike, there is no vision of harmony to be sought after, no straightforward compromise between the individual and his society. That one can be betrayed with impunity reminds us instead of the permanent rift between the psychic and the social; and the guilt involved in betraying one's desire is the price to be paid for caving in to social norms.

2 The Ethics of Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis' contribution to ethics is centered on its analysis of desire, of how sexuality interferes with and complicates the sphere of ethics: "[T]he genesis of the moral dimension in Freud's theoretical elaboration is located nowhere else than in desire itself" (Lacan 1986: 3). This allows Lacan to contrast his own program with the ethics of Aristotle. Lacan focuses on the way Aristotle excludes the entire realm of "bestial desires" from his ethics and then outlines an ethical program that inculcates virtuous habits in the subject. Psychoanalysis proceeds in the exact opposite direction. It takes as its clinical starting point the perverse desires that beset the human subject and views with suspicion any regimen that seeks to tame them. Creon will later become an example of the danger of subordinating one's desires to ethical ideals that are ultimately always foreign to the

subject. The lesson of tragedy and psychoanalysis, for Lacan, is that subordination of desire to any kind of *askesis* brings a myriad of dangers.

Prescriptive ethics belongs to the version of psychoanalysis that triumphed in the United States after the Second World War under the name of ego-psychology. Based on Freud's second topography of the psyche, this therapeutic practice aimed at strengthening the ego in order to protect it from the attacks of the id and super-ego alike. Because this strengthening of the ego can only be achieved in the name of a specific ideal or set of morals and pays scant regard to the analysand's desire, Lacan contemptuously refers to such psychoanalysts as "guarantors of the bourgeois dream" (Lacan 1986: 303). Here we have Lacan's most basic critique of ideology: there is never any "neutral" ego; it is rather the case that strengthening it always requires paying service to some kind of power and is often linked to the distribution of goods. Indeed, the ego is little more than the accumulated series of identifications with assorted social ideologies. For this reason, power and desire are forever at war, and Lacan's defense of desire is thus also an attack on power. He suggests that all tyrants, whether real or fictional, share this view of power as inimical to desire. When tyrants take control of the state, they may pretend to champion all sorts of freedoms; but they are equally clear that the population must go on as normal, carry on working. On no account must anyone think that this is a time to express one's desire. "The morality of power, of the service of goods, is as follows: 'As far as desires are concerned, come back later. Make them wait'" (Lacan 1986: 315).

One "non-historical" figure Lacan almost certainly already has in mind is Creon. He is of particular interest because the command of power to its minions "do not express your desire," is internalized by him, and becomes his own mantra. But this integrity, his desire for a universal good, means that such a general denial of desire reflects back on him, and ultimately destroys him.

For Lacan, the obsession with goods (distributional justice, mixed with a certain materialist obsession with goods that goes beyond their use value) ignores far more fundamental ethical questions that relate to the subject's desire and enjoyment. Lacan eroticizes politics, but only because the attempt to remove the sphere of goods from human desires is a dangerous and futile one. The conflict is almost too obvious; as Lacan puts it, even a schoolboy realizes that the law is not there to help him jack off most efficiently (1986: 225). The *Antigone* hinges on this same basic antinomy. The point, however, is not to offer different kinds of "personal" ideals in analysis in place of social ideals; indeed, there are no such "personal" ideals at all. Analysis seeks to give the subject some kind of breathing room away from them and from the current form they take, both in the political world and on the couch, in order to pursue more fundamental questions about the subject's desire.

But what kind of theory of desire does Lacan offer, and how does it relate to politics? He begins by turning to Freud and to one of his earliest attempts to work through the child's relationship with the outside world. In his 1895 "Project for a New Scientific Psychology" Freud described the split in our attitude to our first neighbor, our *Nebennensch*. On the one hand, this neighbor is always already tamed, caught up in a symbolic network that makes sense of him/her. But this is not all. There remains a part of this other person that is irreducibly thing-like, alien, and that Lacan will equate to the incestuous forbidden object par excellence, the mother. Lacan calls it the "Thing," with capital letter, in order to capture its strangeness. Forbidden, uncanny, this "Thing," inaccessible to sense, site of all taboo pleasures, will never be directly accessible, but it will nevertheless haunt the subject, providing the fount for all derivative enjoyment. Such

a simple formulation allows Lacan to complicate the Christian ethics of “love thy neighbor,” already critiqued by Freud. It is easy enough to love one’s neighbor when we have domesticated that neighbor. We make of our neighbors little more than doubles of ourselves, caught up in the same symbolic world that structures our own. It is far harder to come to terms with what is strange and properly alien in that neighbor: the “Thing”-like quality. For Lacan, conventional ethics and the politics that goes with it are guilty of the same domestication of the figure of the neighbor. He offers as test cases assorted stories of Christian altruism, which are more notable for what they exclude. He offers tales at the limits of altruism, which in turn produce shudder in us: Angela de Folignio, who supposedly drank the water in which she had recently bathed the feet of lepers, or Marie Allacocque, who ate the excrement of a sick man. But at this point he introduces a twist:

The power of conviction of these no doubt edifying facts would vary quite a lot if the excrement in question were that of a beautiful girl or if it were a question of eating the come of a forward from your rugby team. In other words, the erotic side of things remains veiled in the above examples. (Lacan 1986: 188)

This “edifying” altruism is already a defense against the erotic enjoyment (though a strange, repulsive enjoyment) made visible by Lacan’s counter-examples. What is shocking and unthinkable about this is not just disgust with something in the world outside of us, but rather the way it threatens to disrupt the subject’s worldview by pushing forward toward something hidden, yet crucial to the way the subject sustains his/her desire. For psychoanalysis, this is what counts. The “pleasure principle” remains entirely at the conventional level of what we believe to be good for the world – in a construction of the world as one of conformity, which can even compromise narcissistic altruism. Our acts are governed instead by what Lacan presents as our relationship to something beyond this conventional principle; and the disavowed pleasure and the feelings of repulsion or disgust are signs of the power of this “something.”

The entire modern world and its exchange of goods are also complicit in this kind of disavowal. To illustrate this fact, Lacan offers his reading of the parable of Saint Martin, though once more we should see Creon’s idealism lurking in the background. Saint Martin famously offers up his coat, and Lacan admits that beggars do require clothing. But again, there is something that this act points toward, beyond the exchange of goods:

But perhaps over and above the need to be clothed, he was begging for something else, namely, that Saint Martin either kill him or fuck him. In any encounter there’s a big difference in meaning between the response of philanthropy and that of love. (Lacan 1986: 186)

We ask for x , but is that what we really want? We are strangers to our own desires, and we can see that in others too. Lacan will soon develop a theory of love that depends upon our ability to recognize each other not from what we have, but from what we lack. And does this not make intuitive sense? When, for example, a homeless person asks for money, how much easier it is to give him or her a few coins than, say, to find out their name or to offer up yours. The most rudimentary act of giving is already caught up in a symbolic exchange that keeps something at a distance. Our persistent avoidance of this “Thing” makes for the discontent of civilization.

My wife, say, wants me to give up my card game on Friday nights. I give it up, but the renunciation of my own happiness will linger. And who knows if it will give her any

happiness, or what desire lurked behind the request? We have already laid the foundation for a reading of *Antigone*. For Antigone has a markedly different mode of desiring from anyone else in the play. It is all too easy to know what Antigone wants: to bury her brother, to stand up for the political act of burying him in the city. She never yields. Though Ismene shares the same desire, she is self-hindered by her pragmatism and fear, while Creon, for all his bluster, never comes close to articulating what he wants. Indeed, he voices his disgust at his son's love for Antigone, ignoring the particularity of his desire and reducing her to the status of "goods," namely a field to be plowed. He tries to empty himself out, to reduce himself to a cipher for the ideals of the city, to supervise the exchange between Saint Martin and the beggar that he wants to become universal, while ignoring all that is strange in others and himself.

3 Tragedy with Antigone and Creon

Somewhat conventionally, Lacan is interested in the limits that the genre of tragedy pushes. Less conventionally, he analyses the protagonists in terms of their relation to a fundamental limit that, for Lacan, comes into being for human subjects insofar as they speak. Lacan returns again and again to an enigmatic utterance of the chorus: the difficulty of a life *ektos ate*, "outside of the ruin" of the Labdacid family (S. *Ant.* 614, 625), and he gives it a novel interpretation. Rather than a place "without" destruction, the phrase signifies a logical place beyond the destructive crimes wrought by the house of Oedipus, yet opened up by them. Because we are symbolic creatures, we can imagine a place that is an uncanny other of the symbolic world, from where we can see that world's symbolic annihilation and absence. Antigone is drawn to this "beyond," to the place "between two deaths" – her imminent biological demise and her utter exclusion from the symbolic world. Creon, in contrast, wants to inflict this symbolic annihilation on Polyneices, and in the name of the law. Here is Lacan's summary of their differences and his concluding remarks on the entire play:

The fruit of the incestuous union has split into two brothers, one of whom represents power and the other crime. There is no one to assume the crime and the validity of crime apart from Antigone.

Between the two of them, Antigone chooses to be purely and simply the guardian of the criminal as such. (Lacan 1986: 283)

What is crucial here is that Antigone, in becoming "the guardian of the criminal *as such*," pays no attention to the content of his crimes. She certainly does not identify with them. She is oblivious to them, identifying instead with what Lacan calls the purity of his being, "the radical limit that affirms the unique value of his being without reference to any content, to whatever good and evil Polyneices may have done." No more does she identify with any symbolic traits of the *ate*-family – or, personified as a goddess, Ate, the force of destruction that haunts the family and becomes associated with Polyneices; she does not stand up for the Labdacids in the way a Montague would oppose a Capulet. Creon, of course, assumes the side of "power," but in a way that greatly exceeds the desire of Eteocles. He tries to use the law in order to eradicate this "unique value" of Polyneices, to make him disappear, to elevate the principle of a specific content of being over being as such. This vision of Antigone is hardly a comforting one, and it allows Lacan to

challenge the commonplace view of Sophocles as a “humanist.” Lacan could agree, but only if the concept of “human” consisted of a person split by language into an empty cipher over and above any ideals that one arbitrarily attaches to it, and if the guardian of the “human” were this inhuman, pitiless, and fearless girl, who is willing to defend her brother for no other reason than that “he is who he is.”

Creon

Lacan begins his analysis of the play by admitting that he will focus on Antigone to the exclusion of Creon; an analysis of this tyrant is, to his mind, almost embarrassingly obvious for those who have witnessed a parade of these all too human tyrants in the preceding decades. But extended analysis is also superfluous, inasmuch as Lacan has put Creon’s obsession with civic good under the spotlight in his discussion of the false allures of the sovereign good throughout the seminar. We can flesh out Lacan’s view of Creon by adding this general context to the few memorable remarks he makes about Creon as he reads the play.

Creon upholds the laws of the city, but this prevents him from confronting his own desire. His desire is turned over to these civic ideals that make for a smooth running of the sphere of civic goods, and it is sacrificed to them. But such sacrifice hardly brings him peace. Instead he becomes the victim of the logic of the superego; the more he sacrifices, the more it demands of him. This explains why he refuses to bury Polyneices – a refusal that perverts normal human law in the name of fidelity to it. It is not enough that Polyneices is dead; death, in a sense, is too good for him. Creon wants to inflict a second, symbolic death upon him, one that takes him beyond the limits of the law and its regulations for the living, human community.² But these civic ideals are not his own; they belong to the Other and are, accordingly, fickle and changing. Teiresias, the ultimate symbol of tradition, is there to remind him of this, and he causes Creon’s first doubts. But, even as he seeks atonement, Creon remains caught in his own cycle of guilt and transgression; this explains why he orders the burial of Polyneices *before* the freeing of Antigone – the final error that is, for Lacan, a sign of the disasters sure to follow. Finally, far from being the play’s hero, Creon is fundamentally ordinary. His dilemmas are those of most of us, only writ large. To give up on our desire in the name of serving laws that are not of our own making, while harboring unconscious resentment, is what most of us do. Let us look at these elements of Creon’s story in greater detail.

A function of psychoanalysis is to try to clear away “false goods” that keep the subject from confronting his or her desire. Lacan ends his chapter on “The function of the good” with a reflection on his experience as an analyst: “The sphere of the good erects a strong wall across the path of our desire. It is, in fact, at every moment and always, the first barrier that we have to deal with” (Lacan 1986: 230). If Lacan is speaking of the resistances of his patients, Creon is also already on the couch. The ideal of “doing good” functions as his alibi, the heart of the self-betrayal that sets in motion his mini-tragedy. But Creon’s diagnosis is also theoretically exemplary, relating to the broader function of the good itself.

Lacan begins by turning to Marx’s analysis of the use value of any material. Consider cloth. We make cloth, we clothe ourselves, and, as a utilitarian would hope, we try to clothe the greatest possible number. But, from the beginning, there is not only use value. There is something Lacan calls “*jouissance* use,” or “enjoyment” use: “The good is not at the level of the use of the cloth. The good is at the level where a subject may have it as his disposal” (Lacan 1986: 229). Accordingly, the “domain of the good is the birth of power.”

This is Lacan's "surplus value": not the additional value created by the worker's labor that the capitalist removes, but rather the extra pleasure we gain, not from the object, but from the ability to control access to it – a pleasure that is so often disavowed. For "to exercise control over one's goods is to have the right to deprive others of them" (p. 229).

But there is a final twist: the enjoyment a subject may get from depriving others of the goods s/he protects rebounds back on him/her. For, as analytic experiences shows, "defending one's goods is one and the same thing as forbidding oneself from enjoying them" (p. 230). Transformed by the politics of envy, simple "use value" – that is, the possibility of using cloth without exercising control over its use – now seems almost utopian. Indeed, one could think of analysis as the process that allows a subject to "enjoy his/her goods" without getting caught up in the game of envy and power, of depriving others at the cost of self-deprivation. Creon, too, exercises his own control over the goods of the city – in this case, the rite of burial – by depriving one of the brothers of that rite. Burial, too, has its "*jouis-sance* use," and Creon's obsession with the exercise of his power leads in turn to his alienation from the content of the ritual – the collective human process of memorializing the dead. No wonder Haemon suggests that Creon would be a good ruler of a desert. But if, as Haemon notes, Creon's inability to listen to others comes from his own intransigence and rigidity, there remains something perversely selfless about it. Creon upholds the law as the law; he certainly does not twist it to conform to any of his own desires or prejudices. This identification with the law itself produces his peculiar emptiness and loneliness. Any self of Creon, we might say, is eclipsed by his enjoyment of upholding the law.

The Lacanian name for this enjoyment, which is taken in upholding the form of any law, is "superego," and what Lacan will later call its "malevolent neutrality" is at work on Creon throughout the play. It is strangely un-pathological, in that none of Creon's own desires are bound up in ensuring that the law functions; yet it exerts all the more powerful an effect because of this. What begins with the self-sacrifice of desire – what is itself fueled by an initial act of "giving up on one's desire" – in the name of the law ends up with the law invading the self until there seems no self left beyond the functioning of this parasite within. At the end of such a process one can see why the intervention of Teiresias comes as almost a relief.

Yet this is not quite the end of the process, and Teiresias' intervention does not free Creon as much as it sets in motion the final part of this cycle. For Creon reacts to Teiresias' pronouncements in a significant way, choosing to bury the corpse before he frees Antigone, and this small amount of time lost causes disaster, as if the play wants to highlight his choice.

[I]t is probably not for nothing that he begins with the corpse; he wants, as they say, to come to terms with his conscience. Believe me, that is always the element that leads everyone astray whenever reparations are to be made. (Lacan 1986: 266)

The dictates of his "conscience" are less a sign of change in his attitude to the law as such than a continuation of his dependence on it. As one version of one law fails him, he replaces it with another one, which he is just as likely to fail to live up to, and with similar consequences. Creon looks for permanence in all the wrong places; for human laws are the stuff of Heraclitean flux, rendering futile his implicit demands for unchanging rules to live by, outside of the problem of his own desire. So his "conscience" is hardly his own at all – a further sign of the superegoic parasite within. Even the mode of his atonement bears all the markings of a "rigid mind," where everything is political.

Antigone

To see where a more fitting relationship with permanence might lie, we can turn to Antigone. Lacan makes use of the language of Lévi-Straussian structuralism to suggest that Antigone relates to Creon as synchrony relates to diachrony. Creon's relation to diachrony is relatively easy to see: he is victim to the exact kinds of changes that beset the Aristotelian hero; his *hamartia* ("error") leads to the loss of all that matters to him, as well as to a puncturing of his former worldview. Antigone, by contrast, is attached to "the unique value" of her brother's being, which is only possible for a speaking subject. An effect of language is to create identity, to be able to freeze a thing into something more, or something less, than what it is for a signifier. This is what Lacan reads into the "unwritten laws" that Antigone reveres. At the limit of the chain of signifiers, of their structural interrelation, a beyond opens up of the ineffaceable, although the ability of a thing to be neither more nor less than itself is an effect of language. In Antigone's case, because there are laws that are not written, she can stand up for the uniqueness of her brother instead of reducing him to a symbolic formula:

The point is[,] from the moment when words and language and the signifier enter into play, something may be said, and it is said in the following way: "My brother may be whatever you say he is, a criminal. He wanted to destroy the walls of his city, lead his compatriots away in slavery. He led our enemies on to the territory of our city, but he is nevertheless what he is, and he must be granted his funeral rites... From my point of view, my brother is my brother." (Lacan 1986: 278)

But if the signifier opens up the possibility of this kind of tautology, of an order beyond the chain of signifiers, it also opens up the possibility of our absence from such a chain of signifiers. This symbolic absence is what Lacan calls a "second death," and he relates it to the Freudian death drive:

It is in the signifier and insofar as the subject articulates a signifying chain that he comes up against the fact that he may disappear from the chain of what he is. (p. 295)

This is the space Antigone inhabits, where she defends, indeed embraces, the uniqueness of her family's history at the price of her own symbolic annihilation. She rejects the false goods of compromise that beguile Ismene, the empty political slogans of Creon, and in particular the ordinary human emotions of fear and pity, which would keep her from this path of fidelity. Yet why should this have a salutary effect on the audience of the tragedy, and why exactly is this process akin to the psychoanalytic one?

Rather than "good" Antigone and "bad" Creon, Lacan sees instead a character who pursues her desire and other characters who pursue a "wholly relative value" of prudence, pathological interests, pity or fear.

It is because the tragic epos doesn't leave the spectator in ignorance as to where the pole of desire is and shows that the access to desire necessitates crossing not only all fear but all pity, because the voice of the hero trembles before nothing, and especially not before the good of the other, because all this is experienced in the temporal unfolding of the story, that the subject learns a little more about the deepest level of himself than he knew before. (Lacan 1986: 323)

Antigone's status "between two deaths" has even the power to drag Creon into that space along with her, which leads to a strangely optimistic reading of Creon's demise. If he has lost everything at the play's end, he has at least achieved in return the possibility of a new beginning *ex nihilo*, not beset by false goods, and a freedom from their illusions, even if at an exorbitant price. We, as possible analysts and as possible spectators of tragedy, have it a little easier. Psychoanalysis offers a clearing away of false goods that allows the subject access to the peculiar constellation of the forces that produced him, the equivalent of the "family *ate*" that Antigone takes responsibility for. As for the audience, the pity and fear felt by its members are not simply part of the experience but something to be worked through, to get beyond, so they can begin to experience what it is about themselves that these emotions shield. More directly, their catharsis is also bound up in their experience of Antigone's beauty, to which we now finally turn.

Why is she beautiful? Not because she is about to die. Rather, because she accepts that her own uniqueness comes at the price of its disappearance from the social world. What the spectator sees is thus both her own uniqueness and her contingency, the beauty of her form shadowed by her own possible non-being. This, for Lacan, is the function of the beautiful: to reveal to us, as we look, the site of our relationship with our *own* death as we witness heroes "between two deaths."

Lacan offers two more examples – prosaic ones – of the beauty's effect. He tells us how, in a British boarding house, his wife recognized the presence of a former professor of Lacan's from a pair of shoes that lay outside the door of that person's room. The shoes themselves belong uniquely to this professor, and this is true regardless of any symbolic qualities they might have (say, "worn out," or endowed with whatever other quality property might suggest "professorial," and thus indicate a – any – professor). But, in representing his uniqueness, the shoes gesture toward his absolute absence.³ Lacan also considers the beauty of still-life paintings. If they produce a beauty effect that a real bowl of fruit does not, it is because they elevate the possibly ordinary biological decay of real fruit to another level. This represented apple displays its aesthetic uniqueness, and then it leans on the possibility of biological degradation that nature produces to point toward a different kind of death it can endure: its symbolic non-being.

Lacan challenges us, if these examples do not work for us, to come up with our own; and another sublime Sophoclean hero comes to mind and may allow us to knit together what has been said on Antigone. For, if Lacan characterizes her as "splendor," surely the most conventionally sublime of Sophoclean heroes is Ajax, as he confronts his own death. But his sublime beauty does not arise simply from his impending suicide. There are, after all, plenty of ugly and farcical suicides. Rather it arises from the way the suicide is framed by the deception speech, which becomes his goodbye to the human world. He "deceives" his nearest and dearest into thinking that he will "give up on his desire," learn moderation, and live in a world where friends and enemies change like the seasons. But for the audience – who will, even if only with hindsight, understand this deception – the speech becomes a more profound attack on this world of change – an attack pursued in the name of something different. As Antigone steps up for the brother who "is what he is," Ajax departs in effect saying "I am what I am." And, from the perspective of the audience, isn't the second half of the play designed to show the "wholly relative value" of the political bickering that follows his exit, the prattling on about prudence and moderation, insiders and outsiders, who is a Greek, who a barbarian? Their insistence on their identifications with specific forms of social existence is in contrast with the intransigence of Ajax, who stands for something altogether different.

I suggested at the start that Lacan does not ignore politics, merely takes a step back to see what psychoanalysis might offer the realm of politics. A way of approaching this would be to historicize the seminar itself, offered as it was at the height of a nuclear arms race between first and second worlds and a couple of years before our narrow avoidance of the equitable “exchange of goods” known as the Cuban missile crisis. The terror of contemporary Cold War politics, for Lacan, was not just that nuclear war became clothed in the language of reasoned and reasonable exchange, but that such political discourse was strangely anonymous, as if the world was heading quietly toward destruction, regardless of any desire of the participants. If Cold War politics lacked passion, it was more dangerous for this reason – not less.

At a time when I am speaking to you about the paradox of desire – in the sense that different goods obscure it – you can hear outside the awful language of power. There’s no point in asking whether they are sincere or hypocritical, whether they want peace or whether they calculate the risks. The dominating impression at such a moment is that of something that may pass for a prescribed good; information addresses and captures impotent crowds to whom it is poured forth like a liquor that leaves them dazed as they move toward the slaughter house. (Lacan 1986: 231)

The would-be architects of such destruction, suggests Lacan, will be “bureaucrats,” empty ciphers, without even the mistaken ideals of Creon to hang their excuses on. To be able to demand of such bureaucrats that they begin to confront how their desire relates to their acts is thus hardly an apolitical matter.

The seminar on ethics could thus be entitled the “false goods” seminar, its target being the ways in which such goods have come to dominate the contemporary political landscape and the psychic discontent that their dominance produces. For this reason we might end by presenting the overlap that Lacan sees between the psychoanalytic individual and Sophocles’ poetic picture of the human being in his most famous choral ode, the “Ode to Man” at *Antigone* 532ff. Lacan offers an extraordinarily counter-intuitive reading. Rather than the obvious contrast between a human being’s resourcefulness and her/his inability to overcome death, Lacan turns the logic around; *because* s/he cannot defeat death, s/he invents lots of gimmicks designed to help her/him avoid what s/he cannot control. The tone, Lacan suggests, is that of the proverb from the Vaud region: “Nothing is impossible for man; what he can’t do, he ignores.” The human being has supposedly “contrived escapes from impossible diseases” (*noson d’amechanon phugas*, *Ant.* 363–4). But Lacan again complicates this phrase by lingering over the meaning of the adjective *amechanon*: “irresistible” diseases, or diseases “without remedy” – and etymology would even invite us to say: diseases that cannot be “contrived” or “plotted” against (*mechanan*). Diseases that no contrivance or technique can ameliorate are not a product of nature. Instead, humans flee *into* artificial diseases in order to avoid existential unease: they are hooked on inventing, and failing to solve, artificial problems. Surely this rings true for much of Sophocles, or at least for the secondary figures (Creon, Chrysothemis, Odysseus, Neoptolemus) in these plays.

The world of the heroes is something quite different. Sophoclean tragedy, for Lacan, begins not so much “in the middle of things” as at the end of things, or rather after a very particular thing. We always begin with a “hero who is betrayed with impunity,” one who refuses to cave in to that betrayal and sticks to his love (or his hatred) right to the end. Philoctetes’ hatred for the Atreidae, Antigone’s love of her brother, Ajax’s rejection of the world where heroic values are obsolete, Oedipus’ savage attacks on his sons at the

end of his life, all fit into this pattern. This is why “their race is run”; there is nothing left of any significance that can happen to them. The “action” and the plot lie elsewhere, in the fate of the secondary characters. But what matters is not their extremism as much as the spotlight cast on the petty vanities and compromises of those around them, both their fellow tragic characters (with their errors, false rises, and inevitable falls) and the audience itself. The practice of psychoanalysis sets itself up as modern version of the cathartic ritual of tragedy, while its theory can perhaps also offer a critique of a passionless political world where desire has been laid to rest.

Guide to Further Reading

It is difficult to come to grips with Lacan’s commentary on tragedy without an overall sense of his teaching and of the general theory of the subject. Though Lacan’s work is notoriously cryptic, there are now many reliable introductions and commentaries that can help orient the reader. The work of Slavoj Žižek (1989, 2008, 2009) uses popular culture to clarify many of Lacan’s more difficult concepts. The introductions of Bruce Fink (1996, 1999) are also reliable.

Increasingly, classicists have been willing to engage with Lacan. Paul Allen Miller’s (2007) work has tried to elucidate Lacan’s work for a classicist audience in a spirit of straightforward solidarity, though he concentrates on explicating the “pure desire” of Antigone. More usual has been a measured historicist critique. Nicole Loraux (1991) has argued that Lacan’s obsession with Antigone ignores the other characters as well as the necessary political and historical context of the Athenian stage. Leonard (2005) has elaborated on this position. Griffith (2005) has taken a mediating position, recognizing the worth of a turn to the problem of “subjectivity” and desire, though failing to come to grips with the Lacanian theory behind these terms.

On the overlap in worldviews between Lacan and the tragedians, Zupankic (2000, 2003) is essential, and Žižek’s essay giving an overview of tragic plots and their relationship to subjectivity (“From Antigone to Joan of Arc,” Chapter 2 in Porter and Buchan 2004) also useful. But all this should be ancillary to reading Lacan’s work itself. The first two seminars (Lacan 1988 and 1991) are sprinkled with references to Sophocles, they are among the most accessible of Lacan’s work, and they offer a useful way in to the ideas that dominate the seminar on ethics (1986).

Notes

- 1 As Žižek argues, Antigone’s act is not something that we should duplicate, but rather we should work through its significance as it changes the contours of the political. She offers up an opening to get beyond the rigidity of Creon’s political thinking. See Žižek 2008, Chapter 6.
- 2 Creon is linked to Hamlet, at least in Lacan’s analysis of his hesitation to kill Claudius offered in his previous seminar. If Creon hesitates, it is because biological death was not enough for him; he wants a *second death* for himself.
- 3 In passing, he also suggests that this accounts for the beauty experienced as we look at the “old clodhoppers” painted by Van Gogh. It is not the fact that they are peasant shoes or a sign of poverty, but rather the fact that they give the appearance of being a specific *someone’s* shoes.

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PART VII

Influence and Imitation

Oedipus on Oedipus: Sophocles, Seneca, Politics, and Therapy

Alex Dressler

If anyone were inclined to put forward the paradoxical proposition that the normal man is not only far more immoral than he believes but also far more moral than he knows, psycho-analysis [...] would have no objection against the second half.

Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, in Freud 1953–74, vol. 19, p. 52

Should it really matter so little for the ethical demands on politics that politics operates with very special means, namely, power backed up by violence?

Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, p. 119

1 Introduction: Poetry, Philosophy, Politics, Psychoanalysis

The Roman philosopher, poet, and politician Lucius Annaeus Seneca wrote a verse tragedy entitled *Oedipus*. His version of the character, however, has proven hardly memorable compared with the protagonist of Sophocles' play *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Add to this the negative view of Seneca's "adaptations" in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the paucity of modern scholarship devoted to the connection between the two plays, and one might wonder about the merits of Seneca's tragedy altogether. On the other hand, Seneca's *Oedipus* is the only thing we have about the Roman reception of Sophocles' original, and Seneca's tragedies provided the paradigm of the genre for tragedians of the Western Renaissance far more than Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* did, however central the latter had been to Aristotle's seminal discussion in antiquity (Braden 1985). Seneca's plays have, moreover, enjoyed a "Renaissance" of their own since W. M. Calder declared it in 1976.

Of all the claims to importance that Senecan tragedy, and Seneca's *Oedipus* in particular, can make, perhaps the most interesting ones accompany the observation that Seneca was not only a tragedian. He was, infamously, an important advisor at the court

of Nero, one of Rome's most infamous emperors, and he was also a Stoic philosopher who wrote volumes of prose treatises "calling" philosophy to the soul (*Epistles* 108.23) in accord with the ancient philosophical conception of happiness, or "flourishing," known today by the Greek word *eudaimonia* (Inwood 2005: 249–70). That such a person wrote an *Oedipus* – practicing politics, preaching philosophy – stimulates curiosity, if only for its great suggestiveness. What secrets about his behind-the-scenes political existence must his tragedies hold? How does one reconcile the famous emotional intensity of these plays with Seneca's Stoicism, which preached calm and moderation? Such questions connect Seneca's plays to broader concerns about Roman thought and the practice of politics and ethics.

Assuming that interest in Seneca's tragedies is justified, then rather ambitious and complex questions confront the student of Seneca's *Oedipus* in light of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Does Seneca's version bear any relationship to Sophocles' play at all, at least as an adaptation – for it is certainly not a translation – of the Greek original? If there is a connection, is it one of conscious contrast with Sophocles' *Oedipus* – a contrast based on Seneca's familiarity with the original – or is it a more general and cultural connection, arising from both plays being preoccupied with the "family romance" (Freud 1953–74, vol. 9: 235–41) and with the different conditions of that phenomenon in different periods? Although there is little doubt that Seneca *knew* of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Holford-Strevens 1999), the differences between the works are stark enough and our knowledge of literary and theatrical intermediaries sufficiently sketchy to challenge any attempt to study Seneca on Sophocles in terms of reception alone. While the general form of the two works is basically the same, the differences are those that one encounters in Roman "translations" of Greek originals from Plautus to Vergil. We meet Oedipus worrying about the plague at the beginning of both plays; a dialogue between Oedipus, Jocasta, and Creon ensues; the prophet Teiresias plays a part, as well as some Theban extras. At the end of Seneca's version the king blinds himself, although his reasons for doing so are not as immediately obvious as they are in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In Seneca's play, on the other hand, the characters have Roman worries; they speak and act with reference not only to Greek, but also to Roman institutions – conspicuously extispicy or the oracular analysis of (anomalous) entrails. Similarly, the message that drives both plays is that the plague will afflict the city for as long as it continues to harbor the murderer of the past king, Laius; but in Seneca's version this message arrives not second hand from Delphi, but second hand through the ghoulish spectacle of the king's raving ghost. Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Seneca's *Oedipus* therefore start and stop in roughly the same places, but they get there very differently, which is more than half of the art of ancient drama.

In light of such differences, not to mention the range of different sources that intervened between Sophocles and Seneca (Tarrant 1974), this chapter will not posit a direct connection of the kind that Roman practices of literary adaptation make dubious. I will instead take a more oblique approach to the Roman reception of Sophocles in Seneca, considering four fields that the two authors share in their respective *Oedipus* plays (in the present chapter this collective reference excludes Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*): politics, poetics, philosophy – and that form of theory and practice now known as psychoanalysis. While the first three fields are probably uncontroversial, the last, psychoanalysis, may require a little explanation. Like Sophocles' tragedies, those of Seneca have not lacked their share of psychoanalytic

appreciation (Segal 1986; Schiesaro 2003: 2–3), but the psychoanalytic turn of these approaches has been consistently *hermeneutic*; in other words, psychoanalysis has been used as a method of understanding the play’s underlying meaning. Nevertheless, Seneca’s commitment to a form of philosophy that aimed at overcoming the moral obstacles to human flourishing – a form seminally dubbed “therapy” by one scholar (Nussbaum 1996: 20–1, 352–3) – invites an interpretation that puts the hermeneutic process *at the service of the therapeutic one*. It invites us to read Seneca’s play as a dramatization of therapeutic processes in which, as in the “talking cure” of psychoanalysis (Freud 1953–74, *Five Lectures*, vol. 9: 13), characters use language both to disguise and to disclose – that is, to investigate hermeneutically – the things that cause them pain, doing so in ways that may represent (and perhaps determine) therapeutic practices in the real life of the author and his society. In the following pages I argue for such an interpretation of Seneca’s *Oedipus*, suggesting that Seneca’s characters perform this therapeutic process. I further argue that – directly or, perhaps by necessity, indirectly – Seneca’s *Oedipus* itself does this with Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, “repressing” it in its “textual unconscious” (Oliensis 2009: 5–7, cf. 60–1) in the direction of a curative resignification.

2 Politics and Talking Cures

In this section I will begin by considering the role of politics in Seneca on Sophocles, as it gives rise to what we may term psychoanalysis, or therapy, through poetics. There are, however, two ways of considering politics in relation to any text. On the one hand, one can consider the way in which the characters in the text do politics with one another, asking – as Cicero said one must do in juridical inquiry – *cui bono?* or “who benefits?” (Cicero, *For Roscius Amerinus* 84). On the other hand, as Thomas Habinek recommends in his influential study of the *Politics of Latin Literature* (1998: 8–9), one can ask *of* the text itself *cui bono* – that is, who benefits, not among the characters depicted in the text, but among the historical characters in the author’s circle, in their social and political context. In light of how little we know about Sophocles (see Scodel in this volume), it is hard to ask *cui bono* of his text in context, but in the better documented history of imperial Rome one can take the world of politics outside of Seneca’s play and ask “who benefits?” of his text in context. Asking this question of Seneca’s Stoic philosophy, social historian Matthew Roller writes (2001: 99): “Seneca’s Stoicism does not merely attempt to adapt aristocratic ethics to new social realities; it also seeks actively to shape those realities to the advantage of the aristocracy.” In only slightly less sophisticated terms, Seneca’s contemporaries implicitly asked *cui bono* of his poetry, and they answered it the same way, too (Tac. *Ann.* 14.52): “They accused him of aspiring to the glory of eloquence only for himself and of writing poetry [*carmina*] more frequently after Nero began to like it [*Neroni amor eorum venisset*].” In this section I will argue that, on the model of Sophocles’ original, but in very Roman terms, Seneca represents his characters practicing this “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Ricoeur 1970: 32–6), not only on one another, but also on themselves. Moreover, in turning it from others to themselves, Seneca’s characters, and indeed Seneca, aim at something more than just hermeneutics. Moving from the political to the personal, they aim at a kind of therapy or “talking cure,” like psychoanalysis, but also, like psychoanalysis, one that preserves but also exceeds the processes enacted in and by Sophocles’ original.

Consider the famous dialogue between Oedipus and Creon – famous from Sophocles, and familiar by the time we come to Seneca (Mader 1993). Here Seneca’s Oedipus cross-examines Creon on the subject of “who benefits” from the death of Laius (*Oed.* 687–91; all translations from Seneca are my own):

CREON Free of the toil of kings, I reap the rewards
 of kings, and my house teems with assemblies of citizens
 while no day rises in its turn without
 proximity to power [*sceptra*] showering our hearth
 with gifts and resources [*munera*].

Then, the banter turns bitter (*Oed.* 699–706):

CREON And if I’m innocent?
OEDIPUS Kings tend to fear
 uncertain things as if they’re given.
CREON He who is scared
 at false fears merits true ones.
OEDIPUS Once a suspect
 and let off, he really hates [*odit*]. Let the suspect perish.
CREON That’s how hatred really starts.
OEDIPUS The person afraid of hatred
 does not know how to rule. Fear safeguards kingdoms [*regna*].
CREON Cruel people who wield power [*sceptra*] with harsh command [*imperio*]
 fear the people fearing them. Terror returns
 to the one who authored it [*auctorem*].

Invoking the exchange of resources (*munera*) and the relations of authority (*auctor*) as structured by power (*imperium, regna, sceptrum*) and by violence (*odia, duro imperio, metus, terror*), Seneca’s characters are, in today’s terms, debating politics. And they are doing so in a way that is unequivocally Roman; as Seneca himself notes in another text, the formulation “Let them hate, as long as they fear” is common to the republican tragedian Accius, the republican despot Sulla, and the imperial “monster” Caligula (Seneca *On Mercy* 1.12.13 with Braund 2009: 302).

This is not to say that the Sophoclean original does not mention material goods (*ktēma*, *OT* 549), fear (*phobosin*, l. 585), or power (*krate*, l. 586). In Sophocles, however, the psychological emphasis is not so much on fear, violence, or real and symbolic resources, as much as on persuasion, justice, and possibly even affection. Creon cites the point of view of “anyone who understands sane reasoning” (*sophronein epistatai*, *OT* 589), and says: “Think logically [*logos*]/. Consider this first [...] Examine the refutation of this” (*elenchon*; *OT* 583). Oedipus says: “You’re fearsomely quick with words [*legein su deinos*] [...] Did you or did you not persuade me [*epeithes*]?” (*OT* 545, 555). Then:

Don’t damn me on your own with unclear thinking [*gnome* [...] *adelo*].
It is not just [*dikaion*] so falsely to regard bad men
as most reliable and the reliable bad.
(To cast aside a noble friend is like, I say,
casting aside the parallel self one loves the most...)
Only time gives proof [*deiknusin*] that any man is just. (*OT* 608–14;
all the translations from Sophocles are from Ahl 2008, sometimes modified)

Seneca's *Oedipus*, on the other hand, emphasizes power, terror, and, instead of the Other-relation of persuasion, "irrational" psychological effects, not only on others ("once a suspect and let off, he really hates"), but also those of subjects on themselves: "Fear," which others feel, "safeguards kingdoms" from those very others, as a result of the fear that they feel. Finally, maximizing the reflexivity of emotion, we learn that kings "fear the people fearing them" and that "terror returns to the one who authored it."

Seneca's *Oedipus* is thus faithful to that moment in the Greek original that most exhibits the hermeneutics of suspicion, with characters interrogating one another for their real motives, but it also adds a crucial dimension – not only of fear and violence, which will prove to be ubiquitous in Seneca's Roman politics (see pp. 514–16), but also of psychosocial reflexivity (Bartsch 2006: 249–82). Here Creon is not persuading Oedipus with reason as much as he is intervening in the reflexive effects of individual and collective psychology. Indeed, this political dimension that appears in the middle of both versions, the Greek and the Roman, in fact *follows* Oedipus' application of the hermeneutics of suspicion to himself at the beginning of Seneca's play (*Oed.* 6–15):

Who takes pleasure in power? Deceptive good,
how many evils you mask with your sweet face!
As lofty mountains bear the brunt of the wind,
and the waves of even quiet seas blast the crags
that hold apart vast oceans – just like that
towering power stands in Fortune's path.
How successfully I escaped the authority
of Polybus, my father! In exile, I was free
of anxiety when, wandering with no worries,
I just fell into kingship (gods, be my witnesses!);
And now I fear the unspeakable [*infanda*]...

Here, at the beginning of Seneca's play, the hermeneutics of suspicion that characterizes politics later on in both versions first appears in reflexive application to oneself. Beginning in denial of what he will later impute to Creon and of what is in fact the truth, Seneca's Oedipus persists in this denial almost to the end, using terms that will prefigure those of psychoanalysis more explicitly than anything Sophocles wrote (*Sen. Oed.* 764–8):

My mind [*animus*] turns over its anxieties [*curas*] and repeats its fears.
High and low, the gods affirm that Laius died
because of my crime, but my mind denies this, known [*notus*]
better to itself [*sibi*] than to the gods and innocent.
Memory returns through a faint hint [*vestigia*].

"Anxieties" in the "mind," even "soul" (Latin *anima* for Greek *psyche*), are "tracked down" (*per vestigia*, "by tracks, traces") through "memory," which may or may not lead to self-knowledge (*sibi* [...] *notus*). Elsewhere, in his philosophy, Seneca speaks of shaking himself out (*se excutire*) and examining himself (*se scrutere*) as in a kind of census, of catching himself (*se deprehendere*), and of being judge and jury of himself (see e.g. *On Anger* 3.36, with Ker 2009: 113–15). These private practices that Seneca considers in juridical terms are precisely the terms of psychoanalytic therapy: literally, the examination of the soul with a view to taking responsibility for, or to owning, one's own actions (Lear 1990: 4–5, 37–8; see 170–1 on Oedipus; on "owning," see pp. 517–19). Thus, while the political question of either *Oedipus* – "Who wins and who loses?" – is at the center

when each protagonist interrogates Creon, in Seneca's treatment this hermeneutics of suspicion is turned inward, becoming the question of psychoanalysis in the search for hidden truths, as "Who benefits?" becomes "Who is guilty?" The Latin highlights the importance of language in this process when Oedipus says, "And now I fear the unspeakable [*infanda*]." Later on the king continues to incite that which already called "unspeakable," demanding that Creon reveal his suspicions with the words (l. 215): "Speak [*fare*], even if it is unclear." The Latin in the first instance is *infanda*, a verbal adjective in the neuter plural that means literally "things that are not to be spoken" (*infanda*, from *for/fari*, "to speak") even while, in the second instance, Oedipus incites speaking with the imperative of the same verb: *fare!* ("speak!"). The Latin *infandum* connotes more than just (not) speaking, however. Prefixed by a different particle of negation, another derivative of *fari* denotes that which is not to be uttered because it is wrong, unjust, or unholy; this is the word *nefas*, important in the Latin religious and moral vocabulary. Along with the unmarked positive form of this word (*fas*, meaning "licit" or "right"), these words, *fas* and *nefas*, are invoked by characters throughout Seneca's play (*Oed.* 18, 215, 328, 1014–15, 1023; cf. 915). So it is that, following on the mention of his "fears that one must not speak" (*infanda*), Seneca's Oedipus immediately asks (*Oed.* 18): "Is any unspeakable crime [*nefas*] greater than slaughtering one's father?"

The connotations of these words for "speaking" are not limited to morality in Seneca's play, or in Roman literature more generally. In Seneca's Latin, the word for "fate" is in fact *fatum*; but *fatum* had come to mean "fate" (as we understand it) because it was originally felt to be the word of a god. Vergil established the terms of such dynamic self-reference as moral, political, and literary in one of Seneca's favorite poems: at the beginning of the *Aeneid*, when he is about to guarantee the future foundation and greatness of Rome, Jupiter declares (*Aen.* 1.261): "I will speak [*fabor*] the mysteries of fate [*fatorum*]" (see O'Hara 1990: 40–4, 137–51). By the end of Seneca's *Oedipus*, after the *nefas* doings of the character's past come to light, the blind king addresses Apollo with the Latin vocative *fatidice*, "Speaker of fate!" evincing the original verbal meaning of the word for destiny, *fatum*, by glossing it with the help of *dicere*, "to speak" (*Oed.* 1042–6):

You speaker of fate, you god who protects the truth –
it's you I challenge: I owed fate my father alone,
but now I've killed a parent twice, which is more
than I feared: my mother is dead from my crime.
O lying Apollo, I outdid shameless fate!

Culminating here after their constant alteration throughout the play, words for speaking and for the unspeakable serve as tropes for past deed and present avowal, constituting nothing less than a dialectic of repression, which ends with "the return of the repressed" (Schiesaro 2003: 39, 42–3; Segal 1986: 18–28). In this dialectic, right (*fas*) and wrong (*nefas*) alternate and come to light as destiny (*fatum*). Addressing Apollo, the god of prophecy, as *fatidice*, Seneca's Oedipus finally uses language to make clear that "destiny" (*fata*) functions in connection with language (*dicere*): the return of the repressed, in the form of confession (*-fess-<fas<fa-*), becomes a "talking cure" of the city's plague.

The importance of reflexivity to this talking cure – that is, of the characters' consciousness and of our own consciousness, in language, of what has happened and is happening – is clearer in light of the Latin word for "tragedy." Where the Greek tradition emphasized action and gave us the word "drama" (which, according to Aristotle,

was connected to *pragma*, which means “doing” and becomes “practice”), in the Roman tradition “drama” was referred to as a *fabula* or “telling,” whence “fable” (Dupont 1995: 60). The final confession of Seneca’s Oedipus and the recognition of his identity (*nefas*) and destiny (*fatum*) therefore just *is* the play (*fabula*), just as the pronouncement of fate by Vergil’s Jupiter just *is* Vergil’s *Aeneid*. The process of Seneca’s work (*drama*) is therefore complete when the play becomes conscious of itself as such (*fabula*) and when, analogously, we do so too. Seneca’s *Oedipus* thus stages “the return of the repressed” *as* a staging, mediated by poetic language and coming to consciousness as “fabled”/“fated” through intimations of its (repressed) poetic antecedents (Vergil, Sophocles, etc.). Against the eudaimonistic background of Seneca’s philosophy and in view of his own engagement in Roman politics, recalling Cicero’s *cui bono* and Sulla’s “let them hate,” the textual self-consciousness of Seneca’s play thereby opens its readers to their personal engagement with the missing, the repressed, or the disavowed – that is, to poetic debt in language *and* to personal and political guilt in the play and in Roman reality.

3 Oedipus at Rome: A History of Violence

Critical reception of Seneca’s tragedies in relation to their Greek counterpart is marked by a paradox. On the one hand, developing a political interpretation, scholars such as David Konstan have written that “the plot of Oedipus the King is constructed in such a way that it demands the biological view of the family as a condition for the intelligibility of the action,” where versions such as Seneca’s effect “a shift of emphasis from parricide to regicide, from an offense against the family to an offense against the state” (Konstan 1994: 5, 22). On the other hand, psychoanalytic critics such as Charles Segal (1986: 4–8) believe that, compared with the “public, outward-facing form” of Greek tragedy, Seneca’s plays “face inward,” are “psychodrama” (p. 4). In this and the next section I will argue that the reason for Konstan’s and Segal’s divergent interpretations is an ambiguity about the personal and the political, which is built into Seneca’s play vis-à-vis its Sophoclean original. In the first place, Seneca’s *Oedipus* develops a uniquely Roman conception of politics as violence, “repressing” the personal (familial) elements of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* in the re-telling of the Oedipus myth. In the second place (next section), the way in which Seneca’s *Oedipus* parallels but diverges from Sophocles’ play can be construed as repressing that play, even as it changes it. Thus, by the end of Seneca’s play, when Seneca’s characters and readers become conscious of Oedipus’ family identity as son and lover, it is as if Sophocles’ “repressed” original has returned, bringing with it the themes of love and family that, compared with Seneca’s violent, “political” version, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* now represents.

Of course, in Sophocles, “the return of the repressed” takes the form of tracking down that which the characters do not want to know, even as it seems to *want* to be known. This first appears in suggestive ambiguities, as when Oedipus extracts the first clue to the killer’s identity (*OT* 120): “One thing [*ben*],” he says, “could discover [*heuroi*] many things to learn [*mathein*].” Using the same word that will describe Oedipus’ violence against his eyes (*Oed.* 961), Seneca’s Teiresias tells the king (l. 297): “So let the words of fate [*fata*] now be dug up [*eruantur*].” It is typical of Seneca’s post-classical Latin sensibility that Teiresias comes to have in mind “dig up” literally. After the prophet takes

Creon to a lurid grove to bring out the dead, the dead show themselves only too ready to come (*Oed.* 586–8):

Fierce [*saeva*] leaped out [*prosiluit*] the company
and stood at arms, the entire dragon crowd,
the hoards of brothers sewn from Cadmus' tooth.

This gruesome cohort, armed to the tooth and “fierce,” “leaped out” (*saeva prosiluit*). In doing so, the speaker describes them with what will become *the* marker of the return of the repressed in the play: after the incest comes to light, Jocasta too will, “fierce, leap out” (1004: *saeva prosiluit*).

The scene culminates, not with the zombie soldiers, but with the ghost of Laius, who speaks for himself, in a striking departure from Sophocles (629–35, 647–8, 658):

The greatest crime at Thebes
is mother's love [*amor maternus*]. O country, it isn't the gods'
anger that destroys you: it's crime. It's not the oppressive gust
of south wind bringing sickness, and it's not the earth
grown noxious with too little rain and with parched breath,
but the bloodsoaked king who rules [*sceptra*] as a prize [*pretia*] for fierce [*saeva*]
murder and claimed his father's wedding bed – unspeakable [*nefandos*]...
So cast the king as an exile out [*pulsum*] of this land
and banish him [*exulem*] anywhere...
Steal the land from him. I, his father, will steal the sky.

Here the repressed in the form of the history of violence bursts on the scene, returns (Freud 1953–74, *Five Lectures*, vol. 11: 26–7, cf. *Introductory Lectures*, vol. 16: 295–6), armed, fierce, and fated, prompting our psychoanalytic critic to suggest that Laius is “virtually a foreshadowing of the Freudian superego” (Segal 1983: 323). Be that as it may, notice the ambiguity introduced by Laius' words: “The greatest crime at Thebes is mother's love” (*amor maternus*). This line, which would be flagrantly obscene in Greek (*eros metros* means only erotic passion of or for one's mother) is, in Latin, more ambiguous, like the English “love”: mothers are supposed to have *amor*, after all, and so whatever Laius' status as a “harsh, demanding, guilt raising father figure” (Segal 1983: 323) and whatever “his” consciousness of himself as such, the raving father implicitly sidelines the familial aspect of Oedipus' crime. This is consistent with Konstan's conclusion that Seneca's play shifts the emphasis away from the familial obscenity of incest to the political act of murdering the king. At the same time as the repressed of Oedipus' guilt returns, Laius' prophecy culminates: “Banish him anywhere.” With this injunction, Laius calls the addressees to action in *political* terms: depose the man who took the city illegitimately, not “my son Oedipus” but simply the “bloodsoaked king” (*cruentus rex* – with Henry and Walker 1983: 133–4). All of this is said by Laius' ghost, accompanied by his undead men-at-arms, with the result that politics becomes a sphere of violence, over and against familial relations of love and community belonging.

Throughout both plays, the political seems to be defined as distinct from the personal, yet the Greek play admits of their harmonizing, while the Roman play dramatizes their irreconcilability. With good or bad faith, Sophocles' Oedipus outlines the system of this “public” good as it relates to the Greek *polis* in various comments throughout the course of the play (*OT* 60–4):

You all are sick with plague: yet, plague-sick as you are,
 not one of you is sickened as I [*ego*] am. Your pain,
 collective as it is, afflicts you one at a time
 as individuals [*monon kath' auton*], and no one else, whereas
 my soul laments for city, self, and each of you.

Here Sophocles' Oedipus implies a doctrine of public good through the idea of the king as an individual for whom the personal truly is political. Thus, since anyone who killed a past king with impunity might kill Oedipus, the latter declares: "I shall myself [*autos*] dispel this poisoned cloud, not for/some distant friends [*philoï*], but for myself [*autos hautou*]" (ll. 137–8). Outlining a system in which the welfare of the collective city pertains to himself, the king and regicide also suggests that his own welfare, qua king, pertains to the citizens and has nothing to do with personal attachments per se. Whatever the truth of his claims in light of the facts, he continues to the logical conclusion, according to which the welfare of the previous king (his father), like that of the citizens themselves, is simply identical with his own (ll. 139–41):

Whoever the man
 who killed him was, he might, as agent of revenge,
 employ his hand in that same way on me. And so,
 in doing right by him, I also help myself [*emauton ophelon*].

Such is the tidy arrangement of political, public, and personal good – the good of the *polis*, of the king as king and as individual – of which Greek Oedipus has made himself a part.

Romans adopted this Greek conception of politics, clarifying it in translation even as they changed it in the course of their historical experience. Where the Greeks refer to that "public good" that is the *polis* as *koinonia*, "association" or "sharing" (so Aristotle at the beginning of the *Politics*), the Romans express the same idea more clearly through *res publica*, literally the "public thing," where "thing" (*res*) denotes some material good (cf. "real estate"). Signposting his agreement with the Greeks, an earlier Roman philosopher-statesman, Cicero, defined the political in his work *De republica* thus (1.12):

But I see that those whom the Greeks called the Seven Sages were practically all involved in the public good [*in re publica*]. For indeed there is nothing in which human virtue comes closer to the power of the gods than either in founding [*condere*] new cities or in preserving them once they are founded [*conditas*].

Cicero here establishes the field of operation of cultural agents such as the Greek Seven Sages – ironically, a field that no Greek could name as such: "the public good" or "property," in other words the *res publica*. Equally significant is the term twinned to define the action of these agents of "founding": *condere*, *condita* (Connolly 2009: 188–90). Writing after Cicero and in the changed political conditions of Augustan Rome, in the opening of the *Aeneid*, Vergil preserves some aspects of Cicero's Hellenizing definition of politics and changes others, making it clear that politics is not a universal shareholding or engagement with the public good at *polis* scale, but that it is *Rome* whose "foundation" constitutes the political (*Aen.* 1.33): "Such a massive thing [*tantae molis*] was it to found [*condere*] the Roman people [*gentem*]!"

Foundation and public good do not exhaust the idea of politics once the political becomes particularly associated with Rome, however. As Cicero's death in the course of

Augustus' "re-foundation" of Rome makes clear, politics consists not only in founding cities, and not only in founding Rome, but also in the *violence* that accompanies foundation and engagement in Roman political life throughout Roman history (Connolly 2009; Oliensis 2009: 81–4). Rome, after all, was founded numerous times, each time through bloodshed: Aeneas "driving" the sword into Turnus' chest (see *condit* at *Aen.* 12.950, and Putnam 1995: 204); the slaying of Remus by his own brother Romulus (Livy 1.7); Tarquin expelled by Brutus after raping Lucretia (Livy 1.58–60); Augustus waging wars, "civil and foreign" (*Res gestae Divi Augusti* 3), in order to "restore the *res publica*" (1). Returning to Teiresias' prophecy in Seneca – returning, then, to the return of the repressed – one realizes that Thebes, founded and preserved in violence, is better suited to Roman self-understanding than to that of the Athenians, to whom it so often served as Other.

Thus, while Roman political theory may not develop the terminology that we associate with Plato and Aristotle, it comes closer to the modern understanding of the political as epitomized by the seminal sociologist Max Weber (above) and as implied by Seneca himself (*On Benefits* 4.37): "No one can play the part of a good man and a good leader [*dux*] at the same time." This conception of politics as material relations accompanied by violence, and therefore wholly irreconcilable with the good that is the subject of ethics, is more Roman imperial – and modern – than classical Greek. Moreover, if Sophocles' *Oedipus* is ultimately about the positive dimension of politics with only intimations of real violence, Seneca's *Oedipus* is obsessed with the latter. Consistent with its appropriation and subversion of the "family romance" to politics, the play develops its violent understanding of the political through the personal or familial. Here Jocasta tries to talk Oedipus down with the wisdom of Roman Stoicism (*Oed.* 82–6):

Why, my husband, do you like to complain
in this poor way? To me to rule is this:
to take the bad, and when things get uncertain
and when the mass of empire [*imperi moles*] is on the brink,
to be brave and dig your heels in.

Unlike the Jocasta of Sophocles, this mother–wife takes a role that is familiar to readers who know the imperial family, the strong mother or wife: Livia to Tiberius or Livia to Augustus or, more relevant to Seneca, Agrippina to Nero (in whatever capacity – see Tac. *Ann.* 14.2).

In traditional Roman terms, Jocasta is right, something that can also be said for Laius. Jocasta and Laius thus fulfill the role of Roman parents, inciting Oedipus in political terms. Jocasta does this with her "mirror-of-princes" approach to Oedipal instruction (cf. Seneca to Nero, *On Mercy* 1.1.1), and Laius does this by his own example – literally, his Roman *exemplum*, *mos maiorum*, or our-fathers-ourselves instruction (however hallucinogenic). The first Roman father to act this way in the Roman literary tradition was Anchises to Aeneas, prophesying from beyond in the famous underworld scene of *Aeneid* 6. Jocasta's advice also recalls the *Aeneid* – in reverse: her "power's burden [*moles imperi*] slips and slides" undoes Vergil's "Such a burden [*tantae molis*] was it to found the Roman people!" (*Aen.* 1.33, above). The next time *moles* occurs in the play is in Jocasta's next scene (*Oed.* 829–32):

Know that what is sought with a lot of effort [*mole*] is a lot of trouble:
Public welfare [*publica* [...] *salus*] is at issue there, the king's [*regis*] is here,
and either is equal; best stick to the middle:
to do no harm, let fate [*fata*] unfold itself.

This somewhat neutral word (*moles*) takes on meaning through its repetition within the play as well as through its repetition, from Vergil onward, within Latin literature. Here the mother speaks in ways now associated with empire (*moles imperi ~ tantae molis*) about the balance of personal and political interest (*publica vs. regis salus*). While this balancing act may be familiar from Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, on the way from Greece to Rome the House of Oedipus has begun to introduce new "facts of life," in addition to love and marriage – namely "power backed up by violence" (Weber 1946: 119). A newly defined sphere of politics has now begun to emerge at the expense of the "family romance" of psychoanalysis, reversing the revelation of Sophocles' tragedy, which rose with Oedipus' cry, "O city city" (S. *OT* 629: *o polis polis*), but climaxed with the personal lament "O marriage marriage" (l. 1403: *o gamoi gamoi*).

4 Seneca at Thebes: A Politics of Love

At this point in interpretation, a curious and complicating reversal has occurred: while Seneca's play inaugurates psychoanalysis by turning the political hermeneutics of suspicion away from others and toward the self, it essentially neglects the "family romance" that gave psychoanalysis – and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* – their meaning. In this section I will argue that the terms of the discussion in both plays, combined with their hermeneutics of suspicion, allow for a movement beyond surfaces and toward the "unconscious" system that the plays repress, namely that of the ethical functioning of the individual as an effect of personal and political love. While this system of affective politics is implied in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, it is fully developed by the time we get to Seneca through the (post-Sophoclean) Hellenistic philosophy to which the Roman claimed allegiance.

Jocasta's comparison between personal and collective interests, considered at the end of the previous section, reflects a distinction central to ancient tragedy and ethics alike: concern for self versus concern for other. In a famous aside, Herodotus mentions the fifth-century tragedian Phrynichus, whose play, *The Sack of Miletus*, incurred a fine and was banned by the Athenians for reminding them too much of "their own misfortunes" (*oikeia kaka*, Hdt. 6.21.1–2). The term that Herodotus uses to denote "one's own," namely *oikeios*, is derived from the word for home, *oikos*, and is used ubiquitously in Greek, along with *philos* ("dear"), for that to which one is specially attached ("my own" soul, love) and for any possession in general ("my" clothes, "my" hand). As such, the Greek domain of ownness frequently conflicts with that of the *polis*, where *polis* would function, for our purposes and through the Roman lens of Seneca on Sophocles, like "republic" (*res publica*, "public property" as opposed to one's own property; cf. Cicero, *De republica* 1.39). Building on the conception of ownness implicit in words such as *oikeios* and *philos*, the early Stoics of the third century BCE developed a philosophical concept for which they coined the term *oikeiosis* (roughly, "ownness"). By the time we get to Seneca, the political–philosophical content of Greek tragedy had been formalized into a system with which Seneca is, so to speak, at home. Thus, while Seneca's *Oedipus* conflicts with *Oedipus Tyrannus* in defining the political by violence, it harmonizes with Sophocles' play at a deeper level, through the elaboration of Sophocles' basic conceptions of politics.

The basic idea of the philosophical concept of ownness, as Seneca tells us, is that all creatures, including people, are attached to that which is their own by nature, starting with one's own body (*Ep.* 121.15): "For each period of one's life, one has one's own

bodily makeup [*sua constitutio*] [...] All are attached [*conciantur*] to the bodily makeup in which they exist.” Romans translate the term *oikeiosis* either by indicating possession generally (hence *sua*, “one’s own”), or by the word that denotes being made amenable to something (*conciantur*, “attached”), or by the idea of dearness or affection (*Ep.* 121.24): “Nature first gave animals this tool for survival, attachment to [*conciatio*] and affection for [*caritas*] oneself.” The concept of *oikeiosis* or *caritas* is significant for the political Roman because it suggests that, concurrently with attachment to the parts of oneself and to other creatures who are also “one’s own” (family, friends), one naturally develops attachment to more remote others, to acts of justice, and to the state at large (Reydams-Schils 2005: 83–98). An aspect of ownness that is obviously relevant to the Oedipus myth becomes very clear when Cicero explains it through the process of having children (*De finibus* 3.62–8; see Long and Sedley 1987, vol. 1: 348–9 (= 57 F), with omissions; translation modified – and cf. Reydams-Schils 2005: 53–82):

[The Stoics] think it is important to understand that nature makes it so that children are loved [*amentur*] by their parents. That is the starting point from which we derive the general sociability of the human race [...] But it could not be consistent for nature both to desire the production of offspring and not to take care [*curaret*] that offspring should be loved [*diligi*]. Even among animals, nature’s power can be observed; when we see the effort they spend on giving birth [*in fetu*] and on rearing, we seem to be listening to the voice of nature herself. As it is evident therefore that we naturally shrink from pain, so it is clear that we are driven by nature herself to love [*amemus*] the ones whom we have begotten [...] Hence it follows that mutual attraction between people is also something natural. Consequently, the mere fact that someone is a person makes it incumbent on another person not to regard him as alien [*alienum*]... We are therefore by nature suited to form unions, societies [*conciia*], states [*civitates*] [...] From this it is a natural consequence that we prefer the common advantage to our own [...] This explains the fact that someone who dies for the Republic [*res publica*] is praiseworthy, because our country should be dearer [*carior*] to us than ourselves.

Against the possibility of social alienation (*alienum*), community exists as one of the “facts of life,” no less a product of nature’s care (*curaret*) than engendering and loving one’s own children (*amentur*, *diligi*, *amemus*) or being attached, in affection (*carior*), to the state.

The references to anatomy, offspring, and love, which characterize the concept of ownness, form a complex that will be very important in Seneca’s *Oedipus* but that also appears in his “political” writing. Compared with the adumbrations of ownness in Sophocles’ play – in the form of parental relations, and in the confluence of the personal and the political discussed in the previous section – Seneca’s philosophy develops such images systematically:

This unanimity among peoples and cities about offering protection and love [*amandi*] to their kings and about hurling themselves and their own [*se suaque*] wherever the safety of their ruler [*imperantis salus*] requires is not without reason [...] I present an analogy: the body is entirely at the service of the mind. And although the body is so much larger and more impressive while the mind remains hidden and insubstantial with its precise hiding-place unknown, all the same, the hands and feet and eyes do its business and this skin we see is its protection [...] So it is their own safety [*suam incolumitatem*] that people love [*amant*] when for one individual they lead forth legions ten at a time into action [...] He quite simply is the link that holds the state [*res publica*] together. (*On Mercy* 1.3.4–4.1, trans. Braund, modified)

The safety (*salus*) of their ruler, love (*amandi*, *amant*), self, and ownness (*se suaque*, *suam*) – all are terms in the sphere of Cicero’s ownness, and they appear here in specific

connection with the *personal* body, regarded as the source and medium of love and as the normative model of the *political* community.

In the previous sections I argued that Seneca's *Oedipus* is political where Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* is personal, and now I have turned to Seneca's philosophy in order to show that it offers a conception of the political that takes the personal, in the form of the body and its relations of love and attachment, as its model, thereby integrating the personal and the political. Yet, if Seneca's play differs from Sophocles' play in being more gruesome, more violent, and less familial, it does not differ from it in being concerned with the body, which is the source and image of both the personal and the political in Seneca's philosophy. Since the body is the site of the violence that characterizes politics in Seneca and of the love that characterizes family in Sophocles, in what follows I will argue that the horrible treatment of bodies in Seneca's play represents simultaneously the pathological state of subordinating the personal to the political and the possibility of their reconciliation. In view of the literary self-consciousness discussed above (pp. 512–13), when Seneca's Oedipus finally blinds himself and becomes his own fate (*fata*), he also becomes his own story (*fabula*), drawing attention to the storied character of *Oedipus* the play and, accordingly, to Sophocles' original. The coalescence of the two plays at the point of Oedipus' blinding therefore marks the coalescence of the personal (*OT*) and the political (*Oed.*), through the body (*OT* and *Oed.*), drawing attention to the operation of language and to the hermeneutics of suspicion, which teaches us to interpret in terms of personal and political complicity. This it does, not only with a view to politics (*cui bono?*), but also with a view to personal flourishing (*eudaimonia*) and "therapy."

The first scene to consider is the shocking image of bodily impropriety that most distinguishes Seneca's play from Sophocles'. In a process that demands interpretation by definition, the prophet Teiresias turns to the Roman practice of interpreting entrails (*Oed.* 372–6; cf. Mastronarde 1970: 298):

Nature is turned inside out; no law remains in the womb.
We will investigate [*scrutemur*] the origin of the stiffness of the organs.
What unspeakable thing [*nefas*] is this? The fetus of the maiden cow
rests out of its own place [*alieno in loco*] in a strange way
as it fills its parent; it stirs its limbs [*membra*] with a groan,
and the weak organs tremble with shaking stiffness...

Considering the importance of the body as the model of ownness and alterity (*sua-aliena*) in Seneca's accounts of Stoic *oikeiosis*, the omen becomes an allegory of botched ownness, as Seneca's play uses meaningful body in the form of the ominous sacrifice to represent personal and political "alienation" (*alieno in loco*).

A more important image of bodily impropriety comes with the famous end of both plays, when Oedipus turns his hands against himself. While, in Sophocles' original, Oedipus' self-blinding is famous for its thematic relevance and symbolic consonance, scholars have noted that it is comparatively under-justified in Seneca's version (Motto and Clark 1988: 148–9; Tochterle 1994: 607; Mader 1995: 303–6). In a typically reflexive move, Seneca's Oedipus even signposts the novelty of his self-mutilation (l. 947): "Poor wretch, use your creative talent [*ingenium*]!" Then he says (ll. 952–7):

See a sudden shower
soaks my face and wets my cheeks with weeping –
and is it enough to weep? Are my eyes still

producing a thin fluid? Out of their seats,
 let them be exiled and follow their tears. Forthwith
 dig up these husband eyes!

With self-conscious cleverness, Seneca's Oedipus takes on the role of actor *and* interpreter, producing a punishment in puns that suggests the real reason for his blinding in this new version. Bringing Laius' original political injunction to fulfillment (*Oed.* 647 above) and bringing home the political, Seneca's king cries: Let me "exile" [*pulsi*] my eyes from my face.

In violating his own body in the political terms of exile rather than by integrating the personal and the political on the model of the body, Seneca's Oedipus is politicizing his body, inflicting the violence that characterized the political as he "exiles" his eyes from the "members" of their "community." At the same time, by using his "creative talent" (in Latin, the word for poetic "genius," *ingenium*), Seneca's Oedipus becomes the storied character of Oedipus the myth (*fabula*), and perhaps also of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (also *fabula*). It is hard to know whether Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* is truly being invoked in the metapoetic blinding of Seneca's Oedipus, not least because Sophocles' *Oedipus* is a "repressed" part of Seneca's *Oedipus*' "textual unconscious." Thus repressed, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* has become, on analogy with the equally repressed Stoic philosophy and its story of human flourishing, a play about love in the form of family relations. When Seneca's Oedipus blinds himself and becomes Sophocles' Oedipus, we witness the return of the repressed not only as a return of the personal to the political, but also as the possibility of integrating the personal and the political in the Senecan–Stoic–Sophoclean figure of the interpretable human form. The ultimate integration is only a possibility, not a reality (this is tragedy, after all). The form that it takes nevertheless presents an image of pathology combined with a prescription: therapy in the form of the hermeneutics of suspicion, exercised in view of a self-conscious poetics and with the commitment that we are creatures of public politics and personal love. Seneca-on-Sophocles is indeed a drama of the return of the repressed, but, through the hermeneutics of suspicion that it teaches us, we learn that something else has been repressed along with personal and political complicity: a complex of therapy, cure, and ethics requiring consciousness and expression.

Guide to Further Reading

Students of Seneca's plays will treasure Fitch's recent Loeb editions (2002, 2004), with clear translations, texts, and judicious introductory and bibliographical material (2002: 1–33, 2004: 3–16), where Ahl's powerful translation of both Oedipus plays (2008) comes with a long and stimulating introduction aimed at the general reader. While I frequently mentioned above the works I find most helpful (Tarrant 1978; Mader 1993, 1995; Boyle 1997; Schiesaro 2003; Bartsch 2006), readers seeking discussion combined with thorough references to secondary literature should consult Schiesaro (2003) and Littlewood (2004), with Fitch's *Oxford Readings* (2008) for a "best of" selection of recent work. Important works dealing with the philosophical dimensions of Seneca's plays are Nussbaum (1996) and Bartsch (2006), in accessible and interdisciplinary chapters devoted to Seneca's *Medea*, while Fitch and McElduff (2002) deal with what might be called philosophical themes in a literary way, and Inwood (2005) and Reydams-Schils

(2005) offer a general orientation in Seneca's philosophy. Scholars have taken many positions on the relationship between Seneca's philosophy and his tragedy, which Hine (2004) illustrates and classifies. For Seneca's biography – personal, political, and intellectual – Miriam Griffin's treatments remain standard (1974, 1976).

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Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*

Jed Deppman

Jean Anouilh sketched a modern version of Sophocles' *Antigone* in 1942, in German-occupied Paris, then finished and staged it in February 1944. Because he kept the original title, the mixed French and German audience had no reason not to expect it to be faithful to Sophocles. Oedipus' daughter would be a young and headstrong princess who drew upon divine, unwritten laws to challenge the king's manhood and earthly authority. Creon would be a resolute leader, with clear ideas on how to govern the *polis* and transgressive teenagers. The two self-confident nobles would entertainingly clash and Antigone's motivations and actions, while controversial and tragic, would ultimately be justified by Teiresias' judgment and by Creon's self-reversal.

It did not work out that way. Anouilh radically revises Antigone and Creon, removes Teiresias entirely from the play, expands the role of the guards as a blue-collar counterpoint to the nobility, and introduces modern anachronisms such as Antigone breakfasting on coffee and *tartines* and her brothers driving sports cars. He adds a lengthy prologue, eliminates the structure of acts and choral songs, and lets the play unfold as an unbroken series of scenes, with occasional commentaries from the chorus. This "chorus," in turn, is no longer a group of Theban elders with a leader but a single man, a metaphysic-aesthetic commentator ambiguously related to the author. Offering theoretical perspectives on the plot and the nature of theatrical experience, he speaks as a master critic, a disdainful but technically proficient authority on dramaturgical matters. Putting aside Antigone's occasional sarcasm, he is the only source of deep irony in the play and, in a mixture of gentle and brutal tones that is hard to interpret, he mocks the audience. Shaping our experience but also intensifying our uncertainties, he helps make Anouilh's play very disorienting.

Yet not everyone has been stumped. Some critics, especially those with didactic intentions, have been content to draw out parallels with the tense historical circumstances in which the play was produced. It is "very tempting," notes Christopher Smith, to see this modern version as "a dramatization of France's most pressing political problem of the 1940s, with the pragmatic collaborationist policies of the Vichy regime,

exemplified in Créon, held up for comparison with the idealistic intransigence of de Gaulle's Free French forces and the Resistance, embodied in Antigone" (1985: 24). In fact, interpretations of the play as political allegory have surrounded it from its earliest reviews up to its current Wikipedia entry. Along with Thebes as Paris, Antigone as the Résistance, and Créon as Hitler, Pétain, or Pierre Laval, the guards have been equated with collaborationist French military and the Gestapo. At times the text invites this political treatment. Créon, about to divulge his most devastating arguments to Antigone, insists that he does not want her to die "*dans une histoire de politique*" ("because of some political issue") (l. 76). He immediately repeats the phrase, as if to ensure that viewers will catch it.

So one trick is to decide exactly how allegorical, political, and historical to get – not only with the characters and the plot but with several metaphorical networks that seem to exist prior to and outside of Anouilh's contemporary history. There is an animalistic rhetoric, for example, that – perhaps in contrast to the prominent bird imagery in Sophocles – likens Antigone to a scavenging creature who "scratches" about in the dirt: the guards describe her as "scratching like a little hyena," "a little beast that scratches" (ll. 57, 63). Such devices allude to Sophocles and follow logics independent of French history. They also acquire political meaning, as when Antigone introduces Douce, her female dog, into the conversation with the Nurse and pleads for lenient treatment. Unwittingly, the Nurse refers to Douce in cruel terms and asks questions that resonate with Antigone's situation, and perhaps with that of the Résistance as well: if a dog "dirties everything" and "pisses on" her carpets, is she supposed to "let her ruin everything?" The audience understands this as a code-switch of sorts, for Antigone knows that in the eyes of the law she is already a dog. (Anouilh has her bury her brother before the start of the action.) The scene climaxes with a provocative hint at the extremism of Antigone and whatever she represents. If, she says, "for some reason" she can no longer speak with Douce, if the dog becomes sad and lonely, then it might be better just to put it out of its misery (l. 36). Pursued in this way, the play can, and has, become important more for its status as a timely, decipherable political allegory and window on history than for its dramatic or intellectual power.

Here I argue the contrary, that it is hard to determine the basic meanings of the play and that interpretive difficulties are central to its lasting power. Writing in the 1950s, American drama critic Eric Bentley described Anouilh's general reputation as that of an author "first introduced to New York as a playwright of the Resistance with a play allegedly written to defend a partisan Antigone against a collaborationist Creon" (1956: 66). But Mary Ann Witt notes that Anouilh's play suited the preconceived ideas of modern tragedy held by most of the reviewers in the French collaborationist press, and Katie Fleming adds that the way Antigone rejects the portrait of happiness offered by Créon and retreats into youthful, idealistic fantasies reflects a fascist rhetoric that Anouilh made little attempt to avoid. In fact, she argues, because fascist intellectuals tended to equate bourgeois life with democracy, the anti-bourgeois attacks make Anouilh's politics "complicit with the rhetoric of fascism." The idea of "happiness," in particular, "signified the political (and cultural) status quo, the acceptance of bourgeois corruption and immorality, a condition to be utterly rejected in favour of the 'new order'" (Fleming 2006: 179). Witt even suggests that Antigone's famous line to Créon – "*vous me dégoûtez tous avec votre bonheur!*" ("all of you disgust me with your happiness") – echoes Mussolini's fascist slogan, "*Noi siamo contro la vita comoda*" ("We are against the easy life") (Witt 1993: 54; Anouilh 2001: 94¹).

For Anouilh's contemporaries, the meaning(lessness) of Antigone's death was another problem: why does she dictate a letter to Hémon in which she repeatedly admits that she does not know "what she's dying for?" Fleming cites the pro-Résistance critics Lassalle and Gaillard, for whom such "pointlessness" was proof of Antigone's "evil character" and willingness to commit "treason" (2006: 178). For them the upshot was that Anouilh reproduced "two sinister doctrines": Antigone was "the model fascist – youthful, vigorous, and rebelliously uncompromising" and Créon "*le dictateur roi*, the authoritarian ruler who gets on with the difficult job of stabilizing the country [...]" (pp. 181–2). From this perspective Antigone's own politics were clear: she was "not merely a pessimist" but a "dangerous anti-humanist" (p. 179).

So which is it? Is the play "resistant" since Antigone refuses to compromise, heroically saying "no" in the most difficult circumstances and choosing death over surrender? Is it "collaborationist" because Créon is sympathetic and tries his best to save Antigone's life? Could it be both, in some sort of Olympian balance or God's-eye representation of irresolvable conflict? Witt points out that Roland Laudenbach, who worked with Anouilh on *La Petite Molière*, understood Anouilh's *Antigone* to represent "virtue and heroism" and Créon to represent "the legitimate authority of the state," both figures contrasting starkly with "the stupid mediocrity of the guards" (1993: 51). Crucially, in this optic, "both Antigone and Créon are *right*, thus illustrating Nietzsche's contention that tragedy stems from the Aryan perception of contradiction at the heart of the world" (p. 51).

On the whole, it is hard to affix a political orientation to the play. For Bentley, it may not be "flatly erroneous" to consider *Antigone* a pro-Résistance piece, yet this representation is "half true and wholly misleading," because the politics are too ambiguous (Bentley 1956: 66). George Steiner notes that Hegel, Schlegel, and Holderlin, despite their many differences, all interpreted Sophocles' *Antigone* as a pivot in the development of human consciousness because it "turns on the enforced politics of the private spirit, on the necessary violence which political–social change visits on the unspeaking inwardness of being" (Steiner 1984: 11). If so, then we see, by contrast with Sophocles, just how decisively Anouilh weakens the power of the political–social sphere and displaces the source of violence away from institutions and authorities. Since Anouilh's Créon is willing, even eager, to forget all about Antigone's transgression – he even proposes to help cover it up – her impulse toward (self-)destruction must originate in her private consciousness.

This movement inward, into the mysteries of Antigone's thinking and being, is central to Anouilh's version. Unless one is ready to explain away inner experience as a function of politics or history, it complicates historicist analysis and calls for a more psychological or philosophical approach. One cannot solve the problem by quoting the author's opinions; for, compared to Sartre and other contemporaries, Anouilh was much more single-mindedly committed to drama than to philosophy or politics. In short, the debate over the extent and significance of the historical "references" in the play can continue, with all the permutations that are defensible.

From another perspective, the trouble we have in organizing Anouilh's quasi-allegorical impulses tells us something about the degree of interpretive freedom the audience has. Rather than merely representing an author's encrypted, performative view of current events, or a strong thesis about the original Greek text, Anouilh's play may be closer to an "open" work in the sense defined by Umberto Eco. Such texts and performances depend on the receiver, for they are so structured that one can neither remain objective and impersonal nor choose among meanings that are explicitly proposed: audiences must either flounder about or contribute their full share to the meaning. In what follows I

examine character construction, an area where Anouilh opens up Sophocles and demands radically different responses from his viewers. I then turn to the philosophical consequences of these stylistic and dramaturgical elements and argue that Nietzsche's writings on nihilism help explain the conjunction of politics, aesthetics, and intellectual history in Anouilh's *Antigone*.

The openness of Anouilh's version is evident in the main characters who, allegorically resonant or not, were not simply generated on the spot, for political purposes. With Sophocles as a constant intertextual foil, they function as more than local conceptual tokens, and each has traits disparate and contradictory enough to defy actors and critics alike. Fleming (2006: 177) finds a tyrannical, Sophoclean Créon in the two clearest allusions to the Greek text: the metaphor of the ship of state and Creon's reflexive suspicion that a conspiracy is behind the burial of Polyneices. I would add that Anouilh, like Sophocles, has Créon blame the messenger and attribute pecuniary motives to people. But this ambitious and ruthless figure is hard to reconcile with his doppelgänger, the tired, wrinkled, gentle, humanistic, book-loving *roi malgré lui* introduced in Anouilh's prologue and threaded through the action of the play. Alter-Créon is no megalomaniac: he is a responsible, avuncular fellow who stumbled into the job and could not refuse it. Earnest, apprentice to a difficult craft, still learning the "difficult game of leading others," he lacks the Sophoclean Creon's paranoid obsession with gender (p. 11). Not only is he not afraid of losing to a woman; he speaks respectfully to Antigone and bends over backwards to save her life. She is the one who says she is from a "kingdom" he can "no longer enter" with his "wrinkles, wisdom, and belly" (p. 94). The erstwhile patriarch comes off as forbearing and gracious when she rudely shifts from using *vous* to the *tu* form with him and takes to calling him names such as the king "of beasts" and "cook" (pp. 83, 96).

Conflicting identities are even more apparent in Anouilh's *Antigone*. Sophocles, of course, has her open the play – a figure so composed, passionate, and articulate that the audience must take her seriously. She has learned of Creon's edict, but, instead of talking about how it affects her personally, she introduces the grand perspective of the house of Oedipus and of the griefs visited upon it. By contrast, Anouilh starts us off with a dark and brooding Antigone squatting on the floor, clinging to her knees in a nervous mess. It may not even be her: we cannot be sure whether the prologue represents the characters within the action or the real-life actors before the play begins. As Anouilh's play goes on, we discover a princess who leads a privileged life but opposes, not the state superseding family and religion, as in Sophocles, but the seemingly less controversial values of "happiness," "understanding," and "compromise." This Antigone also has idealized fantasies of motherhood and wifeliness that mix uneasily with her intense nostalgia for childhood, and her sexuality and level of maturity are hard to pinpoint. Her age is given as 20 in the text, but she could plausibly be played as 12 or 16, as male, female, transsexual, or something else, according to other gender-bending options. Her paralyzed attitude toward her own femininity and sexuality seems to drive much of her skittish behavior with Hémon, perhaps with the Nurse as well, and there also is the (Sophoclean) suggestion that sexual attraction was involved in her decision to bury her brother: when the Nurse guesses that she is returning home from a tryst with her lover, she plays along. Even Antigone's diction is inconsistent. When she realizes that she really will be walled up in an underground hole and left to die, she drops her usual plain speech and bursts out, suddenly channeling Sophocles, in a heightened lyrical language of which neither she nor anybody else in the play seems otherwise

capable: “*O tombeau! O lit nuptial! O ma demeure souterraine!*” (p. 111; cf. S. *Ant.* 978–9: “O tomb, my bridal-bed – my house, my prison/cut in the hollow rock...”).

All of this suggests that, while Anouilh splinters the Sophoclean model, he does not subvert it; for what he provides are not “anti-” Antigones, Créons, or choruses, but new characters, or hidden possibilities in each. In the case of *Antigone*, the multiplicative method produces a philosophical mystery at the heart of the play: how can such an amorphous character co-exist with a simple and clear nihilistic message? Anouilh makes many voices and impulses visible in *Antigone*, but all of them are absolutist and idealist: “I want to be sure of everything today and it must all be just as beautiful as when I was little – or else die” (p. 95). Why, with a vehemence unjustified by the arguments beneath it, does *Antigone* say “no” to life, even though she has, in the offing, a marriage, a royal household, and a well-developed fantasy of bearing a son?

Does she withhold her true reasoning, or is what she says in the play the full extent of it? This is such a difficult question that critics brush it aside: “*Antigone*’s decision to attend to Polyneices’ body,” says Fleming, “is predicated simply on her fatalistic refusal to accept the ways of the world [...] she provides no motivation other than irrationalism” (2006: 172). But to say this and stop there is to ignore both the origins and the significance of her “irrationalism” and the history of enthusiastic responses to her character. It forces one to conclude that *Antigone* is “stripped of any significance other than as the child-like character that simply refuses” (p. 177). Yet *Antigone*’s thinking is such a studied feature of the text that it cannot be waved away, and for a large part of the audience her reticence represents not the end but the beginning of the hermeneutic process. Sophocles’ *Antigone* is doctrinal in her duty, relying on articulable principles in order to reject the emotional appeals emanating from Ismene, Haemon, and Creon. Anouilh’s is a more emotional, histrionic, and divided being, but maybe she too has unspoken reasons for resisting those same appeals.

We might ask: where exactly did Anouilh’s *Antigone* come from? The play makes clear that this problem is meant to be both explicit and difficult for us. After the prologue, the Nurse asks the question in the first words of the play – “*D’où viens-tu?*” – as she catches *Antigone* sneaking back home. In French this has both the immediate, intuitive meaning of “Where are you coming from?” and the more philosophical one of “Where do you come from?” or “What are your origins?.” Looking back, one can even hear: “Where on earth did you come from, what could possibly explain you?” At first, the stronger forms of this question are only hinted at, but they gain traction as Anouilh emphasizes *Antigone*’s “strangeness” in his stage directions. By 1944 *étrange* had already become an existentialist keyword, thanks to the publication in 1942 of Camus’s *L’Étranger*, and *Antigone* joins Meursault in being a socially unconventional, wrong-thinking, doomed being. She acts “*étrangement*,” (“strangely”) becomes “*étrangement apaisée*” (“strangely peaceful”) during her final meeting with Hémon, and repeatedly shows an “*étrange petit sourire*” (“strange little smile”) (pp. 16, 45). For much of the play she also alternates between states of otherworldly calm and shouting hysteria, and Anouilh reinforces the estranging effect by discarding the Sophoclean practice of comparing *Antigone* to figures such as Niobe, Danae, Cleopatra, Lycurgus. However complicated it is to tease these parallels out in Sophocles, they do embed his *Antigone* in narrative and historical traditions. Anouilh isolates and singularizes her.

Will the chorus give us a considered opinion, an answer to the Nurse’s opening question? Not really. Not only are the choral odes and the Theban elders gone, but the chorus, in his concluding remarks – precisely where Sophocles wraps things up with a

comment on how events beat sense into proud individuals and on how good it is to have wisdom and reverence for the Gods – does not retrospectively judge Antigone’s behavior by saluting or condemning her personality traits (duty, tenacity, transgressiveness, fortitude) or any of the arguments she has canvassed on her own behalf. To all evidence, the action of the play has taught the chorus, and by extension us, nothing about Antigone’s motivations. The chorus pronounces only that she has been “calmed,” and that “we will never know from what fever” (p. 123). No longer the active illness, wound, or disruptive force that she was in life, Antigone, despite being introduced as the problem for the play to solve, remains alive as an enigma.

This is partly because, as Pol Vandromme and others have noted, Antigone also comes partly from previous Anouilh characters (Vandromme 1965: 104 ff). Earlier plays feature the two main *Antigone* roles: a young female with a puristic attitude, and an older male authority representing compromise and bourgeois happiness. Antigone particularly resembles Thérèse, the heroine of *La Sauvage*, who, long before, uttered precisely the same line “vous me dégoûtez tous avec votre bonheur!” David Grossvogel notes the masculinity shared by many of Anouilh’s young heroines. “Modelled, perhaps, on a combination of Frantz and Monime in *L’Hermine*, Thérèse, Isabelle, Amanda and Eurydice are all ‘thin’ and ‘hard’, without softness and sensuality [...] Their heroic purity seems somehow to derive from their transsexuality” (Grossvogel, quoted in Witt 1993: 55). Antigone is conflicted, like a closet case, and before visiting Hémon she steals Ismène’s lipstick, powder, perfume, and dress. Despite this makeover or attempt at identity theft, she tells him that, if they had had a son, he would have had a mother more “sure” (“certain,” “real”) than other “vraies mères” (“real mothers”) with their “vraies poitrines” (“real breasts”) (pp. 39–40). In short, Antigone is not only a Sophoclean hand-me-down or a trope for the Résistance, but also a recurring Gestalt, an automatic Anouilh update, with a few new preferences.

And she seems to owe something to a real-life rebellious and law-breaking young woman who was, like her, eponymous with a literary production: Nadja, who exemplified surrealist tenets and life for André Breton. Breton’s lengthy attacks on reason and his defense of insanity in *Nadja* and in *The Manifestoes of Surrealism* prepared the terrain for the rhetoric that Anouilh associates with Antigone. We “cannot find words enough to stigmatize the baseness of Western thought,” Breton (1972: 128) had said; “we are not afraid to take up arms against logic.” Antigone echoes: “There are times when one must not reflect too much [...] I don’t want to be right” (pp. 24, 25). Like Sophocles, Anouilh uses an early conversation between Antigone and Ismène to point out how “unreasonable” Antigone can seem when compared with her conventional sister. He fills Ismène’s speech with terms related to careful thought, such as *réfléchir*, *pondérée*, *comprendre*, *avoir raison* (“reflect,” “balanced,” “understand,” “be right”), and he has her say that, with Antigone, it is all a matter of “whatever passes through her mind at the moment and too bad if it’s a mistake” (p. 24).

Antigone is especially impatient with the coalition of sentiment and thinking that hides in the word *comprendre* (“understand”): “I do not want to understand a little bit... Understand... You have all had nothing but that word in your mouths, ever since I was very little. I had to understand... Understand. Always understand. But I do not want to understand. I will understand when I get old” (pp. 25–6). It all culminates when she rejects Créon’s empathy and logic in order to choose “no” and death instead: “I do not want to understand... I am here for something besides understanding. I am here to tell you no and die” (p. 82).

With Anouilh's *Antigone*, as with much of surrealism, it is not always clear where the reason-based critique of reason ends and irrationality or insanity begins. Just as there is a studied play on *comprendre* and *étrange* in the text, so there is one on *fou/folle* ("crazy"). Ismène says straight out: "*tu es folle*" ("you're crazy"), and Antigone lets us know that she is used to it: "You have always said that I was crazy [*folle*], in everything, and always was" (p. 30). After Antigone blithely proposes to kill Douce, the shocked Nurse bursts out: "Why you're crazy [*folle*] this morning!" (p. 36). Créon's first response when he learns that Polynice has been buried is to ask: "Who was crazy [*fou*] enough to defy my law?" (p. 51). Describing Antigone's second visit to the corpse, he bursts out: "Yes, she is a crazy [*folle*] person!" (p. 57). When Antigone rethinks and rejects Créon's proposed equation of happiness with life, he returns to his dismissive stance: "You are crazy [*folle*]!" (p. 92). Not long after, Créon receives the same treatment both from the chorus – "You are crazy [*fou*], Créon. What have you done?" – and from his son: "You're crazy [*fou*], father" (p. 100). The chorus tells him that Hémon has run off "like a crazy man [*fou*]," and Créon tells his young page, who is eager to grow up, "you are crazy [*fou*], little one" (pp. 105, 122). In live theater this accumulating vocabulary can create suspicion. Because the words and ideas of *folie* have been circulating in an echo chamber, some in the audience may dismiss it all as overheated colloquialism, while others may entertain the idea that one, both, or more of the characters, or the play itself, really are crazy.

Still others may conclude that Antigone is just showing what Breton (1972: 129) called the "unflagging fidelity to the commitments of Surrealism" – that is, "disinterestedness, a contempt for risk, a refusal to compromise, of which very few men prove, in the long run, to be capable." Above and beyond the attacks on reason and conventional understanding, Breton had written in his *Second Manifesto* that "everything remains to be done, every means must be worth trying, in order to lay waste to the ideas of *family, country, religion*" (p. 128). Without making a speech about it, Anouilh's *Antigone* just as thoroughly rejects these foundations of human meaning. As Fleming (2006: 171) points out, she dispenses with "the critical Sophoclean concerns and motivations of *philia, nomos, oikos, and polis*." The ancient model was an economical way for Anouilh to demonstrate precisely what motivations he wished to obliterate from *Antigone*, and perhaps from everyone.

Unsurprisingly, his play and his heroine have sometimes been seen as undignified come-downs from impressive archetypes. "In trying to make his heroine realistic and create sympathy for her," complain critics like Carolyn Asp, "Anouilh debases the Greek model" (1970: 44). Nor would the Asps of this world be mollified by the reference to Breton. The play does not explicitly promote the surrealist way of life and *Antigone* cannot be taken as one of its heroines per se: she has nothing to say about the power of the unconscious or of the individual imagination, no urge to form a clique with like-minded thinkers, no theory of symbols, no belief in the liberating powers of poetry and of the urban experience. The critique Anouilh accomplishes through her character aligns broadly with Breton's, but it seems to lack the latter's constructive counterpart. *Antigone* nihilistically sacrifices sources of meaning cherished by the West since before Sophocles; and he does this not in order to promote something else, but in order to put death in their place.

Or maybe we are trying too hard to understand *Antigone* as a "character" in the first place. Perhaps she functions in the open work more like a provocative set of ideas or situations, along the lines described by Jean-Paul Sartre. His argument, Andrew Hunwick

notes, was that French theater between the wars was centered on characters, but afterward emphasized difficult situations. No longer making the mistake of believing in an essential human nature, wartime dramatists started identifying the conditions surrounding available choices as more central to the dramatic art than individual personality traits. Accordingly, Anouilh's *Antigone* may not be a character, but – and we are almost back to allegory – a “naked will” or a “free and pure choice” (Sartre 1973: 56–7; Hunwick 1996: 305). The openness of the play might be a function of its existentialism.

Hunwick also draws attention to another ambiguity running through the play, where the audience is invited to compare the character being played with the actual actor or actress. This procedure is reminiscent of the playful-serious game in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (a playwright and play very dear to Anouilh), where “half-formed” characters meditate on how to “complete” themselves. Early in Anouilh's prologue, for example, the chorus introduces Antigone and says “She's thinking” (p. 9). But we are unsure about both pronoun and verb. “She” may be the actress and/or the character Antigone and/or some kind of experimentally mixed subjectivity or situation. The chorus explains her “thinking”: “she” is not said to be scrutinizing possible courses of action, worrying about burying her brother, negotiating relationships with her family or fiancé, or weighing the ethical implications of her situation. No, she is thinking about identity issues, how she will “be herself” in a little while, how she will defy the king and all the people who never took her seriously. These notions of teen rebellion plausibly reflect either the real-life actress motivating herself for the part or the fictional Antigone talking herself into breaking the law – or both.

The character/actor *chiaroscuro* extends deeply into the action. Antigone repeatedly uses language that may refer to her role as a doomed princess, to her status as an actress, or to both. “Each person has a role,” she says to Ismène. “He must make us die, and we, we must go to bury our brother. That is how it has been distributed” (p. 24). Is this the actress reminding the players of their assignments or the princess of Thebes regretting her position in the house of Laius?

Créon also employs the rhetoric of “role distribution.” When he says “I have the bad role, everyone knows, and you have the good one,” he is, indistinguishably, the uncle/king character arguing with his niece/subject and a live actor comparing assignments (p. 75). At a key moment he explains to Antigone that he understands “his role” but “wants to be sure” that she understands hers (p. 84). He then proceeds to tell dirty secrets that undermine the Sophoclean motivations for her to bury her brother: both Polynice and Étéocle intended to commit the same crimes against Thebes, and both were unethical, greedy, self-centered playboys. Polynice once lost a huge sum of money in gambling and OEdipe would not pay it, so Polynice punched him in the face and gave him a bloody nose. The father sat crying, while the worthless son lit a cigarette and laughed and sneered. Finally, Polynice joined the Argive army and tried several times to have OEdipe assassinated. This flood of dispiriting information explains why Créon neither knows nor cares which of the brothers' bodies he has buried. Presumably it is also intended to give Antigone new perspectives on how to act, in both the theatrical and the ethical sense of the term.

At the most decisive times, then, both Antigone and Creon willingly see themselves as players strutting and fretting their hour, and, as the play unfolds, when either of them says something like Antigone's famous line – “I am here for something besides understanding. I am here to say no to you and to die” – we learn to hear at least two things. There are the playwright's instructions standing behind references to roles and to why “I am here”; but there are also existential overtones à la Heidegger's *Geworfenheit*

("thrownness"). The characters/actors have been thrown into their worlds, bodies, languages, and situations. Because the agency behind these assignments is left unstated in the play, the audience has *carte blanche* to trace the characters' ideas and behaviors to fate, to the curse over the house of Oedipus, to the free choices people or actors make, to the Sophoclean text, to the dramatist Anouilh, and more. The basic question "how should I act?" is put visually to the audience in the contrast between Antigone and the guard who watches over her before she is taken away. She represents a heightened consciousness, struggling with mortality and with her ethical responsibilities, while he, as Plainemaison (2003: 285) suggests, symbolizes the false, superficial, complacent existence that the authentic heroine must reject. Their contrasting outcomes and the ambiguities about the agency beneath them are crucial to the open work and encourage us to ask about our own behaviors. The characters, the live actors, and their myriad situations are test cases: are we attracted to, capable of, Antigone's intransigence, Créon's pragmatism, the guard's indifference, the individual choices and behaviors of all the real-life actors?

This is why the predominant note of nihilism is such a problem. Putting aside the author's own reputation as a pessimistic person and playwright, the three main voices in *Antigone* are Antigone, Créon, and the chorus, and each espouses a different, yet recognizably nihilistic line of thinking. Antigone's pronouncements are general enough to reflect not only the fascism identified by some critics, but also Nietzsche's philosophy, perhaps channeled through surrealism and existentialism; and these various options are not mutually exclusive. "It is a cliché of the history of ideas," notes Roger Shattuck (1968: 40), "to trace from Nietzsche down to surrealism and existentialism the unseating of God in literature and the deification of man." Perhaps; but in Anouilh, as in Nietzsche – for whom "man" has for centuries "been rolling from the center toward *X*" and is "no longer the collaborator, let alone the center, of becoming" (pp. 12, 8) – there is very little deification of man.

This chapter is not the place to pursue every Nietzschean motif in Anouilh's play, but it may help to mention a few. There is, first, Antigone's critique of decadent or bourgeois culture and the related depiction of human life as role-playing within inherited conditions, scripts, values, and beliefs. Hovering over the play, too, is a lingering sense of being caught in a time of historical transition – the end of war and the beginning of a tentative peace – and of being unable to analyze it or to get a wide perspective on it. "The day after a failed revolution," notes Créon, "there is plenty to do" (p. 76). There is also the anti- or post-Christian framework. The ancient Greek setting was a convenient mechanism for Anouilh to elaborate on post-Christian tensions, and he used it to portray a society like the one envisioned by Nietzsche: one much more secularized than his contemporary French culture actually was.

Anouilh also builds structural contrasts between the attitudes of the "herd," embodied by the guards, and those of the nobles in the palace. Ismène and Antigone construe the people not as a democratic force but as an uneducated, dirty, dangerous mass, and Créon himself refers repeatedly to the "brutes that I govern" (pp. 77, 81). The many scenes with small-minded guards reflect Nietzsche's argument that the "whole of existence" is vulgarized whenever the "'herd,' 'mass,' 'society'" expand "their needs into cosmic and metaphysical values [...] in so far as the mass is dominant it bullies the exceptions, so they lose their faith in themselves and become nihilists" (Nietzsche 1968: 19). Anouilh ends the play with the chorus emphasizing just how removed the tragic events are from the concerns of the herd: "Only the guards remain. For them, all of this, it just does not matter, it's not their problem. They continue to play cards...." (p. 123).

For these and other reasons one can see the play as a twentieth-century example of the tensions Nietzsche identified in the nineteenth century and described as inevitable in the “transitional” period of the advent of European nihilism – “that typical transformation of which G. Flaubert offers the clearest example among the French and Richard Wagner among the Germans, in which the romantic faith in love and the future is transformed into the desire for the nothing, 1830 into 1850” (Nietzsche 1968: 66). If I turn next to Nietzsche’s writings to describe the nihilisms Anouilh introduces, however, it is not in order to show that he accomplished a specifically Nietzschean program – the text is too open. Nor will I pursue the question of whether the war created the need for, or the specific contours of, the philosophical tendencies the play includes. Rather, my view is that much of its enduring interest derives from the vivid ways in which various nihilisms are created, contrasted, and thrust forth into the audience.

The nihilist “does not believe that one needs to be logical,” writes Nietzsche, laying anti-foundationalist foundations for the surrealists and beyond them. Certain people always go beyond intellectual posturing and into action (Nietzsche 1968: 18). In fact, it is the very condition of such “strong spirits and wills” that they cannot “stop with the No of ‘judgment’: their nature demands the No of the deed.” For these nihilists, the “reduction to nothing by judgment is seconded by the reduction to nothing by hand.” Nietzsche calls this a “European form of Buddhism [...] *doing* No after all existence has lost its ‘meaning’” (p. 37). Antigone “does No” and reduces herself to nothing both by thought and “by hand.” What was the No “of ‘judgment’” she followed?

Let us look again at her thought process. Like her Sophoclean precursor, she uses the language of duty to explain why she tried to bury her brother. “*Je le devais*” (“I had to”), she tells Créon before tepidly proposing an argument that she herself soon rejects – that her brother’s spirit will wander forever without finding peace (p. 65). And her next explanation, just as flatly pronounced, is just as empty a formula: “It is necessary for me to go bury my brother whom these men have uncovered” (p. 71). Sophocles backs up Antigone’s intransigence with religious faith and sisterly duty, but nothing in Anouilh explains why “it is necessary.” Since Antigone does not herself believe in the “derisory passport” the priests offer to the dead, it is not clear why she floats the idea to justify her action. “*C’est absurde!*” explodes Créon, invoking the existentialist keyword, and Antigone provokingly concurs: “*Oui, c’est absurde*” (p. 73). He grows further exasperated when she threatens to repeat the “absurd gesture” of burying him a third time, for she has already been caught twice and obviously has no chance of success. She says that she “must do what she can,” even if it amounts to nothing. Again, why? Will she do it for others who do believe, wonder Créon and the audience, or for her brother? No, she says: “For nobody. For me” (p. 73). This ambiguous phrasing can be interpreted in several ways: solipsistically, “for nobody except me, for no reason anybody else could understand”; existentially, “this absurd gesture may be a useless, senseless thing to do, but in the act of doing it I produce a meaning, a purpose”; nihilistically, “for nobody, which means for me, because I will myself to become nothing.”

Existentialist, surrealist, fascist, nihilist, emblem of the Résistance, Greek princess, gender blender, angsty teen, pressured actress... myriad Antigones come in and out of focus in Anouilh’s open text. Perhaps it is also possible to construct a philosophical one, who would better justify her tenacity? As we have begun to see, precise clues to her motivations are few and unpersuasive. The attack on bourgeois happiness seems especially underpowered to justify what amounts to suicide, and one can suspect that Anouilh was willing to let Antigone reject her society without fully understanding it.

Yet, while it may not be spelled out in detail, some of Antigone's reasoning really does sound like Nietzsche's. Comments like "*vous me dégoûtez tous avec votre bonheur*" echo his critique of bourgeois life generally and of the idea, more specifically, that "happiness" is a desirable product of virtue, reason, and dialectic. "In fact," he puts it bluntly in *The Gay Science*, "man does *not* want 'happiness'" (Nietzsche 1974: 238). The way Antigone excoriates the soft, corrupt life and eschews the religiosity that characterized her Sophoclean precursor falls right in step with Nietzsche's arguments that nihilists "seek states in which bourgeois morality *no longer has any say* and priestly morality even less [...]" (Nietzsche 1968: 73). Just as striking is her interest in power. At first, the long opening scene with coffee and *tartines* looks like it is meant to establish a nurturing domesticity, a quiet harmony into which the noises of the day will erupt; but instead of basking in the Nurse's affection and empathy, Antigone marvels almost hypnotically: "Nurse more powerful than fevers, Nurse more powerful than nightmares, more powerful than shadows... more powerful than death" (p. 32). Her final remark: "*Tu es si puissante, nounou*" ("You are so powerful, Nurse") confirms that she cherishes power in a way that the king does not, with Anouilh marking the contrast by repeating the word *puissant* when Créon abjures it (pp. 33, 78). The same goes for Antigone's relationship with Hémon. She loves him "*dur et jeune*," "*exigeant et fidèle*" ("tough and young," "demanding and faithful") – like herself (p. 93). She does not want him to understand, pity, forgive, or empathize with her, but to give her power: "And hold me. More powerfully than you have ever held me before. Let all of your strength be imprinted on me" (p. 38). Should he ever compromise and become a good little bourgeois, a "*Monsieur Hémon*," then she will no longer love him.

Nietzsche (1968: 37) argues that, for centuries, systems of morality, paradigmatically Christianity, kept the underprivileged from lapsing into nihilistic thoughts and behaviors by "assigning" to each soul "an infinite value, a metaphysical value," as well as by placing each one in a cosmic order that compensates for low status in the "worldly order of rank and power." Thus were resignation and docility inculcated; but, whenever the underprivileged lose faith in the system, their "comfort" disappears and they perish. Crucially, however, when this occurs they are not simply crushed by the powerful: their "perishing takes the form of self-destruction." Instead of making peace with, or submitting to, those they cannot defeat, the underprivileged obey "the will of a still deeper instinct, the instinct of self-destruction, the will for nothingness." Thus, they take a paradoxical action: in their weakness they seek power by turning the already powerful into "mortal enemies" and by "*compelling*" them "to become their hangmen."

Does this logic explain Anouilh's *Antigone*? Nietzsche talks about "the underprivileged" in both political and physiological terms, and Anouilh emphasizes Antigone's estranged psychology, contrasting her with the well-adjusted, pretty, sociable Ismène: "*La blonde, la belle, l'heureuse Ismène*" ("The blonde, the beautiful, the happy Ismène"). Antigone is said by several characters, including herself, to be disadvantaged – a dark, ugly, foul character ignored by her family. As an "open" character she also represents many things, including "the underprivileged" or "the unconscious," on scales public and private, and, depending on which perspectives we have in mind, it may be important that she does not merely want to die – she wants to be *killed by Créon*. He resists many times – "*Je veux te sauver, Antigone*" ("I want to save you, Antigone") – but her replies are as crisp as Nietzsche: "You are the king, you can do anything, but you cannot do that [...]. You can only make me die" (p. 74).

Breeding her own hangman in Créon, Anouilh's *Antigone* makes a Nietzschean play for power, and the success, failure, and significance of her act can be interpreted in many

ways. It is tempting to see Créon and Antigone as opposing agents in a cultural crucible of warring values and to read into them Nietzsche's distinction between "active" and "passive" nihilisms. The former is "strong and adventurous" when the "power of the spirit" is increased, while the latter is "weak and decadent" when one's power undergoes "decline and recession" (Nietzsche 1968: 17). Créon seizes the day, issues edicts and orders, makes hard decisions, and kills, while Antigone reacts, says "no," and dies.

If we pursue the equation, we uncover a structure where Créon and Antigone develop an active-passive dialectic to which the chorus, all throughout, but especially at the end of the play, adds supplementary perspectives. The active form of nihilism, as Gianni Vattimo points out, can be understood in at least two ways. First, it might be a measure of hermeneutic awareness, of one's ability to thrive in the absence of an objective reality and to accept that human beings are the sole source of value systems: to "live without the assurance of a stable and determinate horizon" (Vattimo 2006: 136). Créon evidently has this Nietzschean insight into the dirty, all-too-human origin of social values and does not mind moving forward or, as Nietzsche might put it, continuing to dream even though he knows he is dreaming. He disparages the need for absolutes he sees in both Antigone and Œdipe, and he embraces pragmatism to the point of being ready to lie to his subjects to make them behave the way he wishes. And if a messenger comes from the hills with questions about his birth and lineage, he will not pursue the matter, for who cares about the truth? His goal is to install a little order:

my name is only Créon, thank God. I have my two feet on the ground, my two hands deep in my pockets and, since I'm king, I've resolved, with less ambition than your father, to use my time quite simply to render the order of this world a little bit less absurd, if that's possible. (pp. 68-9)

Alas, not only are Antigone's actions introducing more individual absurdities into the world, but her own existence is threatening to prove its essential absurdity. Créon tries to turn everything into a practical problem; but, by forcing him to kill her, Antigone introduces into his philosophy and politics a problem with no practical solution.

Active nihilism can also be defined as "pure extra-hermeneutic power," a form of life "driven by its own power and vitality to continually create new interpretations that clash incessantly and attain only precarious situations of equilibrium, without ever being able to relate to an 'objective' criterion of validity" (Vattimo 2006: 136-7). Since Créon authoritatively installs his chosen values, enjoys great political power, and is pragmatic and perspectivist enough to remain undiverted by fantasies of being objectively right, he seems positioned as an active nihilist in both the philosophical and the extra-hermeneutic sense. Passive nihilism, by contrast, is "the weary nihilism that no longer attacks" (Nietzsche 1968: 18). It arrives with the dissolution of the "synthesis of values and goals" on which every "strong" culture rests, and its most famous manifestation is Buddhism. One can argue that Antigone is one of Nietzsche's so-called "European Buddhists," since the goals and values of society have "become incommensurate" for her. Arguably, too, while Créon trudges forward amid the chaos, not believing in capitalized Truth or Justice or Goodness but not fatigued from trying to believe in them either, her spirit seems "worn out, exhausted" from the labors of disbelief.

This dialectic between active and passive is significant but does not completely account for the two main characters. According to Nietzsche (1968: 18), since passive nihilists do not instill new values, they ultimately cannot help but allow old ones to flourish "in

various disguises, religious or moral, or political, or aesthetic," and thereby they unwittingly promulgate "whatever refreshes, heals, calms, numbs." It is easy to agree that Antigone "passively" refuses to create new values that might contradict those championed by Créon, but at the same time she is not anesthetized by any platitudinous, pre-existing system. Unless we reduce her to a knee-jerk fascist or we take her idealized views of childhood and motherhood as organizing philosophical attitudes, she is not a reactionary opposing Créon with disguised versions of comfortably numbing positions.

Nor is Créon a perfectly "active" nihilist. At key moments he assumes a metaphysical, foundationalist idea of life that betrays both Nietzsche's perspectivism and his own pragmatism. It is precisely when he offers Antigone a metaphysical speech on "what life really is," conveyed through a series of "*la vie, c'est*" ("life, it's...") remarks, that she – sensing his hypocrisy? – rejects him and chooses death instead (pp. 91–2). Créon might have reached a nihilistic insight into the transience of all values and systems, but he cannot avoid anti-Nietzschean hypostasizing language and so becomes an unwilling hangman.

It does not help much to stabilize the interpretation of the play; but perhaps we can say that both characters exist in the first, energetic, uncertain phases of their nihilism. Maybe Antigone's passive nihilism is preliminary, in the sense that the existing values of her culture have *just* dissolved into nothing but have not yet resolved into anything stable enough to be recognizable and therefore comforting, conservative, and interpretable either for Créon or for literary critics. This would help explain her multivocality, her mixture of strength, immaturity, and energy, as well as the historical timeliness and allegorical pull of the play. Créon, too, is new to the job, taking and defending his first decisions.

Conditioned by the Sophoclean text, the weight of tradition, and the generic consistency of tragedy, we tend to look for some interpretive guidance to resolve the represented conflict. Once Teiresias has been removed from the play along with all the phenomena of spirit, we are left, however, without the key catalysts of a Hegel-style synthesis. Indeed, once they are gone, it becomes tempting to argue that, because Hegel had to work so hard to produce a synthesizing interpretation, he really only showed how Sophocles had exacerbated rather than resolved the *aporiae* at the convergence between the individual and the public sphere. Without Teiresias the power shifts away from religion and, arguably, from tendencies of democratic individualism to ones of nihilistic relativism.

The chorus, a meta-observer and a critic/aesthete, steps into the holes left gaping both by the absence of Teiresias and by the unresolvedness of the characters Créon and Antigone. By the end of the play the question turns into whether or not this critic/aesthete represents a solution to the dialectic the other two had initiated. Does his commentary help the audience understand the two sides, and therefore advance in nihilism, perhaps? Does he represent a full-blooded Nietzschean artist, or does he reflect the opinions of one? In the final scene, while the guards drink wine and play cards, while the audience is thinking through the actors' and the characters' performances, he gives a devastating aesthetic–philosophical summation in which he dismisses the value of holding any beliefs at all: "Those who believed one thing, and those who believed the opposite – even those who believed nothing and found themselves caught by history without understanding. Equally dead, all of them, good and stiff, perfectly useless, rotting away" (p. 123). That is a dark, unsatisfying, and depressing conclusion, a warning sign that reads *do not look here for answers*. Philosophically, it amounts to radical relativism and confirms the openness of the play, especially since no wider perspective is offered.

In short, we are made painfully aware that it is not only the chorus that is squeezed out or beyond the Antigone–Créon dialectic and cannot produce a synthesis out of their tensions. It is also the text itself (as a more capacious inscription and collection of voices), the figure of the author (a hidden agency attractive to biographical critics), and literary and historical contexts such as the few canvassed in this chapter. Ultimately, if those nihilistic lines from the chorus reach us and mean anything, then we are forced to return seriously to ourselves, to the most basic questions of why we believe anything or identify with anybody.

Thus, as unsatisfying or as inconclusive as this may be, I suggest that the play is best interpreted as the meeting ground of unhappy, seething, preliminary nihilisms. The lines of thinking articulated by the three main figures – all of whom, not accidentally, are constantly frustrated – never produce the “accomplished nihilist” in any advanced Nietzschean formulation, at least not in the text itself. Nietzsche argues that artists can become the most perfect nihilists, but only if they fully internalize God’s death and all its consequences, find a way to live beyond good and evil, and willfully and creatively revalue all values. Anouilh removes God, but nobody represented in his *Antigone* explicitly revalues values or otherwise uses the *creative* possibilities that Nietzsche associates with late-stage nihilism. Antigone opts out of her society’s values, Créon opts in without rethinking or revaluing them, and the chorus shakes its head in supercilious pessimism. From this point of view they all seem transitional, early waystations along the line of Anouilh’s (or France’s, Europe’s, Western culture’s) nihilistic trajectory.

Also by contrast with Nietzsche, none of the characters recognizes that nihilism, in stripping the world of traditional false interpretations, might produce more positive and welcome visions than those that exist. The world “might be far more valuable than we used to believe,” argues Nietzsche (1968: 22), and therefore we must not only “see through the naïveté of our ideals” as good nihilists but also recognize that, “while we thought that we accorded it the highest interpretation, we may not even have given our human existence a moderately fair value.” Nietzsche also proposes what nobody in the play does: that, despite (and perhaps because of) the suffering that life involves, one can and one should affirm it: “suffering might predominate, and in spite of that a powerful will might exist, a Yes to life, a need for this predominance” (p. 23).

Letting everybody speak, neither privileging nor subsuming any of the three nihilistic voices, the play stands as a display of moderation and openness. This naturally puts the burden on the audience to see its way forward, through the glass darkly, beyond the positions put forth by Antigone, Créon, and the chorus. Anouilh’s text can therefore be construed as making available, if only negatively, a Nietzschean nihilistic ideal identified by Vattimo, one where the “‘moderation’ characteristic of the strongest in the epoch of perfected nihilism” is neither the “blond beast” nor the “philosopher aware of the historicity” of every worldview (2006: 139). Rather it is the artist, but only in a “tragic” or “Dionysian” mode, only as able to “grasp, accept, even augment the problematic and terrible aspects of life in a sort of experimental hubris...” Unlike the forceful but preliminary nihilisms represented in the play, this nihilistic *moderation* emerges from “an acceptance of extreme risk” which “transcends the interests that drive the struggle for life.” Some in the audience may credit Anouilh with precisely this; for he took risks of many kinds when he experimented with a version of *Antigone* so open, so allegorical, and so nihilistic that it would both invite and deny the most vigorous political and philosophical interpretation.

Acknowledgment

I wish to thank the editor Kirk Ormand for his insightful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

Note

- I All references to Anouilh's *Antigone* in this chapter are to page numbers in the Table Ronde edition, which is cited in References; English translations are mine.

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Enter Antigone, Let the *Agones* Begin

Sophocles' *Antigone* in
Nineteenth-Century Greece

Gonda Van Steen

The dramatic poet must, like another Heracles, breach the gates of Hades and, from there, he must bring back to the light of day the heroes of [ancient] Greek history.

Georgios Mistriotes in *Palingenesia*, March 29, 1889

1 Introduction: Of Pomp and Circumstance, or the 1896 First Modern Olympics

In 1896, on the very public occasion of the first modern Olympics (commonly referred to in modern Greek as the *Agones*) to be held in Athens, an “academic” production of Sophocles’ *Antigone* asserted the ancient Greek language as a pillar of the modern Greek national identity. A true display of stage conservatism, this 1896 *Antigone* production failed, however, to draw the constructive involvement of the many foreign visitors as well as of the Greek critics and audiences. The production’s deliberate refusal of any translation became a symbolic act that marked the director’s move from agency to collusion in contemporary reactionary politics. Who was Georgios Mistriotes, the university professor who subjected Sophocles’ ancient tragedy to these peculiar circumstances and pressures? How was the production of 1896 received, before as well as after its March 27 opening date? To which historical and theatrical context did it respond? How precisely did the denial of a translation yield to the pressures of conformism and resist opposition? Where did that leave the character of Antigone?

These questions must be answered through a study of the performance history of the play, which will enrich our understanding of the reception of Sophoclean tragedy. While

the reception of classical drama in the English-speaking world has received much recent attention, the contributions that focus on modern Greek performance histories have been far fewer.¹ Nonetheless, the latter may point out precisely that unknown angle or oblique touchstone to reception studies that puts Western performance histories in perspective, for delving into the Greeks' complex tradition of reappropriating "their own" ancient legacy. To say that the nineteenth-century Greeks started to produce ancient drama under various and intense pressures is an understatement: there was the push to classicize, in order for the newborn nation to establish its legitimacy; there was the trend to romanticize, so the Greek royal court and aristocracy could show how well attuned they were to Western and northern European fashions; there was the lingering issue of the Greek language and translation to be decided; and there were theater venues to be built or refurbished, actors and amateurs to be trained, audiences to be educated. In 1896, moreover, all eyes internationally would be on Athens and the first modern Olympics.

No wonder, then, that the first modern Greek productions of ancient tragedy came about under intense local media scrutiny and much public attention. The media focus of the time proves to be of especially great help for the modern student of the performance histories of the first plays, because some Greek newspaper critiques can be retrieved, while the impressions of the diverse audiences cannot. Most significantly, however, the answers culled from such a historical and questioning study provide some counterweight to our contemporary approach of Sophocles' *Antigone*: foregrounding the heroine's sympathetic character, recent productions have presented the play as a vehicle of outspoken opposition through translation and adaptation. A historicizing look into the Greek *Antigone* of 1896, however, will reveal that the decision *not* to translate the original and to produce it in a conservative style, with considerable support for the character of Creon, could, on the contrary, offer up a platform of "patriotic" and introverted Greek nationalism.

I argue that, against the backdrop of the prior Greek reception history of ancient drama and of the 1896 Olympics, Mistriotes' appropriation of the *Antigone* and its "academic" production in ancient Greek bespoke the nature and purpose of late nineteenth-century Greek state conservatism. The question of how reactionary Greek "patriotism," in its various hues, played out in the 1896 staging of the tragedy commands special interest. I do not aim, however, to provide an exhaustive account of the play's early modern Greek translations, re-interpretations, and stage receptions. Instead, I will highlight the way in which important threads of a representative revival production were interwoven with a historical Greek defense of non-translation and with notions of "classicizing" conformism that were enacted not only on the stage of urban Athens, but on the world stage of the first modern Olympics. All translations from modern Greek are my own.

This brief chapter enters into broad subjects, but it can only aim to achieve a concerted foray, with attention to detail, into topics such as Greek revival tragedy and stage and state conservatism. It cannot attempt a complete coverage of many aspects and dimensions of tragedy and cultural politics, even when these dimensions marked modern Greek theater as a theater of political and cultural memory in its earliest formative, destabilizing, or solidifying operations. Yet each dramatic performance that touched the Greek nerves of nationalism and patriotism also stood, metaphorically, for what was happening with Greek identity formation in a broader temporal context. This is precisely the focus that this analysis brings to Mistriotes' production of Sophocles' *Antigone*, which took place on March 27, 1896 at the Municipal Theater of Athens (Sideres 1976: 125).

Mistriotes was disappointed in his expectation that his production would be granted an ancient outdoor setting such as the Theater of Dionysus, the Herodes Atticus Theater, or even the Panathenaic Stadium – now also called the “old” Olympic Stadium or *Kallimarmaro* (p. 123). He insisted, however, on breaking with the romantic Mendelssohn score and managed to promote the Byzantine-style music of Ioannes Sakellarides (who doubled as the stage company’s secretary and as chorus leader to the chorus of the Theban elders), on which he kept insisting (pp. 122, 125) even when other, foreign musical scores were proving to be a huge draw for any Greek production of a classical play or adaptation. The opening night of Mistriotes’ *Antigone* fell two days after the formal inauguration of the Olympic Games. The Games lasted from March 25 through to April 3, 1896 (Papasprou-Karademetriou 2004: 58), and the opening day deliberately coincided with the Greek national holiday commemorating the 1821 nationalist uprising against the Ottoman Turks.

2 Finding One’s Own Language, Preparing for Foreign Scrutiny: A Few Markers of the Nineteenth-Century Reception of Classical Tragedy in Modern Greece

In the decades after 1821, a liberated Greece erected physical theater buildings, but it did not honor the early nineteenth-century patriotic struggle of the first Greek performances (nor did it dwell on the classical Greek tradition of questioning the Athenian state system through bold comedy and tragedy): theater practitioners and patriotic plays of the post-liberation era could not always be sure to find the hard-won freedom of speech.² Rather, neo-classical adaptations and melodramas enjoyed official Greek approval and occasional financial sponsorship, often to the detriment of “authentic” revivals of ancient plays and native modern Greek stagings, whose patriotism was then deemed exaggerated or offensive by the foreign (Bavarian) royal house and by the Greek aristocracy (Van Steen 2000: 44–50).³ The nominal or grand modern Greek premiere of Aeschylus’ *Persians*, for instance, took place in 1889 and was heavily charged with the expectations of the court. The play’s pro-German adaptation conformed to the contemporary aesthetics of romantic melodrama: pursuit of grand orchestral music, a “happy” ending, psychological sensitivity, and the exaggeration of emotions. The germanophile translator of the *Persians*, Alexandros Rizos Rankaves (1809–92), projected ambivalent anti-tyrannical as well as pro-dynastic components onto the Persian – or on the German – monarchs.⁴ Rankaves had quickly become perhaps the best known Greek philologist/translator of ancient drama who, by 1860, had added a translation of Sophocles’ *Antigone* to his repertoire (Rankaves 1860, 1885). His influential 1860 renditions reflect his advocacy for translation into the formal Katharevousa or classicizing Greek language.⁵ Following Rankaves, the occasional “authentic” Greek stagings of the mid- through to late nineteenth century were typically conducted either in the formal Katharevousa or – more sporadically – in the original ancient Greek. Productions of classical tragedy in Demotic appeared in the early twentieth century, and only after the occurrence of several incidents that made the “language question” (*glossiko zetema*) notorious – such as the *Euangelika* and the *Oresteia*, or the public outcry over demoticizing translations of the Gospels and of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, respectively (Constantinidis 1987: 15–32; Carabott 1993; Van Steen 2008: 360–72; Mackridge 2009; Mauroleon 2009).

The nineteenth-century Greek elite was not shy to conceive of ancient tragedy (including Aeschylus' *Persians*, the quintessential drama of loss and mourning) as a proper state ritual on the festive occasions of royal weddings and official anniversaries. The practice of performing theater or music on celebratory occasions may remind the reader of the stately practices cultivated by the Habsburgers in Vienna or of other customs at Western European courts. This background explains why also some of the first *Antigone* productions of mid- through to late nineteenth-century Greece were generated by and firmly imbedded in official, or even nationalist state ceremony. Many Greeks saw the 1896 Olympics as another opportune moment to boost Greek nationalism through grand performances of ancient drama, when the eyes of the world were fixed on the Greek capital and its cultural as well as athletic activities.

The prospect of the 1896 Olympics heightened the pressure on any modern Greek revivals of ancient Greek culture as well as on productions of classical drama to meet the high standards set by the state's – and by the Olympic Committee's – investment in the cultural capital of Greece (to use Pierre Bourdieu's categories; Bourdieu's theory can be conveniently accessed in English through the 1993 volume edited by Johnson). Both the state and the general public were preoccupied with outdoor cultural activities such as concerts, fireworks, a re-enactment of the Panathenaic Procession, a musical performance of the Delphic *Hymn to Apollo* (preserved in the inscription with musical notations, a rare find currently held in the archaeological museum of Delphi), the founding of a national theater company that would stage Greek as well as foreign plays and so on (Papasprou-Karademetriou 2004: *passim*). The cultural program of the Olympics prominently featured also Greek folk dances or other folkloric or topical ethnographic spectacles, which were drawn mainly from Greek regions that were still under Ottoman occupation (p. 11). In May 1895 an official call for theater productions to be staged during the Olympics was issued in the widely read Athenian newspaper *To Asty* (*The City*). In spite of this concerted effort and other early calls for (the equivalent of) a Greek national theater, as the months went by and the March 25, 1896 opening date of the Olympics drew nearer, the initiative to perform plays was left in private hands (pp. 58, 60–1, 75–6 n. 58). The scheduled theatrical and other outdoor activities attended or enacted by large audiences were to highlight the “sacred,” “inherited,” or “genuinely Greek” nature – and thus the ideological or nationalist potential – of mass gatherings in monumental open-air sites. Before increasing numbers of foreign and Greek visitors who descended on central Athens, modern Greek revival productions of classical tragedy had to labor to build patriotic reverence, domestically as well as internationally, for a young nation with huge internal and external, political, social, economic, and financial problems. Critics carped that some of these productions, as well as some of the ritual ceremonies associated with the Olympic Games, would amount to costumed pageantry and propagandistic manipulation of the masses. In the process, however, modern Greek identity and the public's concomitant stage identities were being politically and ideologically defined and negotiated under the pressures of the volatile global political landscape of the late nineteenth century and its turn to the twentieth.

3 Anticipation

Already several decades prior to the 1896 Olympics, the Neohellenic intelligentsia had come to regard Greek tragedy as one of the highest achievements of classical culture. Adopting the ethos of the French Enlightenment and the special role with which it had

credited ancient and neo-classical drama, Neohellenic scholarly discussions focused on the use of the extraordinary corpus of surviving tragedies to support the nation-building project of modern Greece (Van Steen 2000: chapters 1 and 2). Sophocles held pride of place as the most highly regarded classical tragedian, and especially the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the *Antigone*, and the *Ajax* were long-time favorites (Daskarolis 2000; Garland 2004: 119; Macintosh 2008: 251–4). The ancient critics had already perceived Sophocles' diction to be clearer and purer than that of Euripides or Aeschylus, which made his plays and their admired ethos and qualitative rhetoric ideal moral–pedagogical tools for modern times (mainly through Erasmus' espousal of Sophocles' works, a key theme in Daskarolis 2000). The Enlightenment movement took an active interest in Sophocles' tyrants and “martyrs,” much as recent decades have rediscovered some of his tragedies, and the *Antigone* in particular, for questioning colonial and imperialist projects (select chapters from McDonald and Walton 2002, and also McDonald 2003, may serve as examples). Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh claim that in Britain, by the 1830s, Sophocles enjoyed the status of the “best” ancient dramatist and the exemplar of “classical perfection,” who was thought “to occupy the ideal middle ground ‘between’ Aeschylean primal ruggedness and Euripidean wordy decadence” (Hall and Macintosh 2005: 318). With these qualifications and with the added appeal of the ethos of “patriotism,” Sophocles' eminently classical theater was expected to build for Greece a rich reserve of international goodwill at the time of the first modern Olympics, when the international spotlight fell upon Athens, be it only for the duration of some ten days.

And Aeschylus and Euripides? Euripides, the *enfant terrible* of classical times, was farthest removed from ever becoming the favorite of Greek political and cultural officialdom. He was also perceived as too inglorious and ambiguous – or too critical perhaps – to serve in the long term the ideal of Greek nation-building. As long as the nation was in search of, and vested in, its most sustained mouthpiece of “patriotism” from among the ancient dramatists, Euripides stood little chance of being chosen – in an oddly serious “rerun” of the comic competition in the underworld that Aristophanes (another *poeta non gratus* for the Neohellenists; Van Steen 2000: chapters 1 and 2) depicted in his *Frogs*. New military and political challenges of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries indeed made patriotic readings of ancient drama, complete with layers of patriotized emotions and accretions of nationalist chauvinism, reverberate in Greek school readings, translations, and stage interpretations of the plays. Most of Euripides' plays, such as his *Medea*, were deemed unsuitable for arousing nationalist pride and patriotism. Despite the occasional justified case (such as Medea's speech to Jason, lines 465–519), Euripides' tragedies were either too ambivalent or too innocuous to be produced. Also, his *Medea* had become a subject of choice for neo-classical adaptations in French and Italian, which the touring foreign companies and domestic commercial performers, who lived off pirating imported productions, presented to the Athenians (relatively) frequently (Van Steen 2000: 48, 50). These neo-classical adaptations and Greek imitations caused the number of translations of the *Medea* into modern Greek to rise, but they did not lead to an immediate or more profound rediscovery of the original Euripidean corpus.

In the nineteenth-century Greek conception, Aeschylus, in contrast, presented the advantage of calling for a patriotism of a concrete political or military nature and, through the *Persians*, for more tangible connections with current events such as the ongoing Greek movement for liberation from Ottoman Turkish occupation (Van Steen 2010: chapters 2 and 3, 2011: 77–8). In addition to Aeschylus' *Persians* in 1889, other ancient plays, too, underwent processes of adaptation that corresponded to eighteenth- through

to nineteenth-century neo-classical and romantic aesthetics. Western aesthetics and Western fashions largely determined the mode in which the tragedies premiered in post-revolutionary Greece, mainly from the 1850s onward, before audiences consisting of upper classes with cosmopolitan interests and aspirations. Ambitious calls for a “national” theater that would draw on the ancients in their undiluted form or would pay homage to the heroes of the 1821 Revolution followed; they were answered by the more conservative intelligentsia, among them professors at the University of Athens. Some of the resulting antiquarian productions of classical drama, however, imparted a staged nationalism and cultural chauvinism that were voiced mostly by amateur theater groups, which could not otherwise compete with foreign, mainly Italian, professional companies or with Western European plays and adaptations of ancient themes (Chatzepantazes 2002, vol. 1.1: 49–50, 138, 139, 155, 181–2, 274, and vol. 1.2: 633).

The public praise of Sophocles that Mistriotes formulated in December 1895 may be applied directly to our interpretation of the earliest modern Greek performance history of the *Antigone*. The public occasion was provided by Mistriotes' founding of his student theater company, the Society for the Staging of Ancient Greek Drama (*He hyper tes didaskalias ton archaion hellenikon dramaton hetaireia*; for its name and formal manifesto, see Sideres 1976: 113–16):

If we teach Sophocles' works in the theater, we will improve not only the art of the younger dramatists, but also the sensibilities of the theater-goers. When the Greek people become educated through instruction in such dramas, the good poets will rightly be honored, but the depraved ones will not dare to appear on the podium, nor will the frogs of the murky waters climb up into the sacred waters of the Castalian spring to go croaking there, out of tune and uninspired [*amousois*]. (Mistriotes, quoted in Sideres 1976: 115)

Mistriotes' imagery, perhaps still derived from Aristophanes' *Frogs*, thinly disguises his anxiety about younger and more popular dramatists and stage managers. Asking himself who those contemporary, “inferior” frogs/playwrights might have been, the theater historian Giannes Sideres pointed to some of the modern Greek dramatists who had espoused the Demotic language, with which they were successfully reaching out to broader theater-going and reading audiences (Sideres 1976: 115). If the powerful Creon of Mistriotes' 1896 production of the *Antigone* silenced the younger generation before him, as per the tragic plot's development, then Mistriotes, self-proclaimed guardian of the pure Castalian waters and of the poetic inspiration bestowed by the ancient Muses, might have wanted to shut down the annoying but persistent sounds of a new theater age whose linguistic medium would be Demotic Greek.

4 The “Heirs” to Classical Drama in Danger of Becoming the Orphans of Theater History

The Greek intelligentsia of the 1850s and 1860s regarded Sophocles' *Antigone* as one of the key plays in the movement of grafting classical tragedy onto modern Hellas, even though the tragedy's mid-century reception strengthened the rather uncritical but widespread contemporary Greek fascination with foreign, imported productions. The play's mid- through to late nineteenth-century reception history, however, which pivots on three significant performances, also points up fault-lines in the complex dependencies

between Greek revival tragedy and translation practice – or non-translation politics. It further unmasks the pressures to establish a modern Greek theater and repertoire of manifest political as well as cultural capital. The immediate relevance of these movements and their importance as building blocks of Greek identity are confirmed by the mid-nineteenth-century Athenian efforts to revive Sophocles' *Antigone*, though belatedly. Belatedly, because the Greeks of the 1850s felt that they were rapidly becoming the orphans of Western theater history, due to the success of a “foreign” *Antigone*.

It was the compelling combination of a German adaptation and a romantic musical score that steered the *Antigone*'s modern Western European reception. The choral music composed by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy launched the *Antigone* of director Ludwig Tieck as *the* “classical” production ever since its grand opening performance in Potsdam (near Berlin) in 1841. The translation was by Johann Jakob Christian Donner, who received help from and drew on the scholarly authority of the respected Hellenist (Philipp) August Böckh. The production enjoyed the patronage of Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia – who dreamed of a “renaissance of Greek tragedy in the heart of the Kingdom of Prussia” and whose actions expressed growing nationalist, pro-dynastic, and didactic fervor (Hall and Macintosh 2005: 319–20; cf. Flashar 1991: 60–81, 85, 90–1, 110, 2001: 36–44, 2009: 58–74; Macintosh 1997: 286–9; Fischer-Lichte 1999: 253–5, 2010: 329–38).

The “Mendelssohn *Antigone*,” as the German romantic production of 1841 became known (Hall and Macintosh 2005: 320), caused many *Antigone* performances to spring up throughout Europe. Mendelssohn's music made it so that this 1841 *Antigone* was also the very first Greek tragedy to be produced on an American commercial stage: the US production took place as early as 1845 in New York City (Hartigan 1995: 11–12). Britain saw a Mendelssohn *Antigone* at Covent Garden in the same year (Hall and Macintosh 2005: 316–36). Simon Goldhill, who warns that “Mendelssohn's music [...] would sound extraordinary now to a modern theater audience,” calls the production, with its ancient-style costumes and sets, iconic of “Victorian staged Hellenism” (2007: 69; see also 2002: 112). The Mendelssohn *Antigone* gave impetus also to literary and philosophical discussions of Sophocles' original play from the mid-nineteenth century on (Steiner 1984: 8–9). George Steiner provides an insightful and eloquent introduction to the many theatrical, operatic, cinematic, and psychological reworkings of Sophocles' *Antigone*, several of which predate the Athenian initiative to stage the Mendelssohn version. When the first Greek staging finally took place, it was not only a belated one, but also an incomplete treatment of the tragedy.

The tremendously influential model elicited a sense of frustration in the Greek theatrical world, because the “legitimate heirs” had failed to revive Sophocles' *Antigone* before the German adaptation stole the show, and also because they had not adopted the successful modern version as quickly as other countries had done. By wasting such valuable opportunities, the Greeks, some thought, had failed to prove the authenticity of their own descent from the ancients. The search for historical continuity and classical ancestry inspired many of the first modern Greek revival productions of ancient tragedy. Few saw the bold liberties that neo-classical and romantic adaptations took, however, as encroaching upon the broad claims to Greek continuity. In 1850 Rankaves sounded the alarm bell on the belatedness of Greek theatrical life, in an article in the journal *Pandora* entitled “The *Antigone* at New Theaters” (April 15, 1850). Rankaves here reinforced the idea, common throughout the Enlightenment, that the Muses of drama had long since left Greece, their original homeland and unredeemed ancient *topos*, to go and inspire, among

others, Prussian theater practitioners and enthusiasts – some of whom, oblivious to time and place, “tried to find Pericles or Socrates among the [modern] spectators” (Remediakē 2004: 157; Van Steen 2000: 55). The Athenians were eventually caught in the maelstrom of the German production’s success. Their performances were well-intentioned attempts to smooth over the “intractable” aesthetics and conventions of Greek tragic theater with the aural and visual delights of romantic drama, to which the mid-nineteenth-century Greek theater-goers from the upper classes had grown accustomed.

5 1858: An Elite Girls’ School *Antigone*

Probably in 1858, Athenian schoolgirls first delivered choral passages of Sophocles’ *Antigone* to the accompaniment of Mendelssohn’s music, the preferred musical composition, which the foreign as well as the Greek elite insisted on hearing and which had fashioned – and made fashionable – the 1841 German production (Sideres 1976: 31–2, 1990: 212). The girls’ trained singing of the play’s choral passages relied on the Katharevousa translation of the *Antigone* by Rankaves. This meant that their performance most likely consisted of Mendelssohn’s orchestral introduction and of his musical settings of the sung choral odes and of those parts of the dialogue that were meant to be sung. The girls’ performance was thus essentially an autonomous exercise, given that they were not rehearsing for any scheduled production of the tragedy, which, in any case, casts old men from Thebes in the role of the chorus. Rankaves later explained that the requests and active shows of interest of high-placed Westerners in Athens had led to this school performance, which imported foreign aesthetics in order to interpret one of the most renowned Greek classics (Rankaves 1895: 164–5; Remediakē 2004: 158).

Rankaves believed that he could present classical drama in the way in which the ancients would have seen and experienced it, and in particular he confidently invested time and effort in establishing the continuities of the formal aspects of the Greek language, prosody, and text (Sideres 1976: 25; Glytzoures 2001, vol. 1: 54 n. 92). But Rankaves also believed that European fashions and ideals could be grafted onto the ancients and their literary forms. Through this conviction, he and many of his contemporaries in the Greek intelligentsia represented the movement of a romanticizing classicism (Chasape-Christodoulou 2002, vol. 1: 327; Chatzepantazes 2002, vol. 1.1: 243, 244). Thus, Rankaves attuned his translation of Sophocles’ *Antigone* to Mendelssohn’s grand orchestral musical score. The 1858 partial and amateur performance of Sophocles’ *Antigone* may have been an indirect example of sponsored nineteenth-century Greek student theater. However, the obvious “foreign” allegiance of this and subsequent performances of ancient drama caused Mistriotes to seek the long-awaited return of the “native” Sophocles to his ancestral soil.

6 1867: The Mendelssohn *Antigone* of Greek Pomp and Circumstance

The romantic Greek staging of Sophocles’ *Antigone* of 1867 was again modeled closely on the 1841 German version (Rankaves 1895: 164–5; Sideres 1976: 42–5, 1990: 213–14; Van Steen 2000: 54). This Athenian initiative now proudly showed off Mendelssohn’s

celebrated music in a full production with a complete, 15-member chorus of students singing the choral passages in Rankaves' translation in Katharevousa Greek (Glytzoures 2001, vol. 1: 45; Chasape-Christodoulou 2002, vol. 1: 340–1; De Herdt 2003, vol. 1: 98, 191). The staging amounted to a cosmopolitan and aristocratic tribute to the Greek king and the elite – which may partly explain why it earned mixed reviews (Sideres 1976: 44–5; Chatzepantazes 2002, vol. 1.1: 138–40, 273–4 n. 41, and vol. 1.2: 633–4; Remediakē 2004: 160–1, 2007a). With this first full-blown *Antigone* production of 1867, the semi-professional Greek actors and the student amateurs, who were symbolically made representative of the obliging Greek masses, celebrated another ritual of state: the royal wedding of King George I and the Russian Princess Olga. They brought the pride of Potsdam to small-town Athens in honor of the royals; a creative exploration of the dynamics of the play and of its performance was not their primary concern. The ceremonial tragedy was prominently staged at the Herodes Atticus Theater, which was newly excavated and fitted out, though not yet restored (Sideres 1976: 43). A professor of archaeology from the University of Athens, Athanasios Rousopoulos, was in charge of the stage direction. This academic basis – a common feature of mid-nineteenth- through to early twentieth-century revival productions – demonstrates once more how willing some Greek intellectuals were to participate in the disciplined training in foreign aesthetics and, in particular, in Western choral or orchestral music, especially when ceremonial or courtly performances were at stake. The 1868 repeat performance of this first, full Greek premiere of Sophocles' *Antigone* was followed by an amateur production of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, a classic of German romanticism and of French neo-classicism alike (Flashar 1991: 82, 85; Van Steen 2000: 54).⁶ Very little is known, however, about this and a few other productions, mainly student ones (Sideres 1976: 49).

Sideres characterized the rage for the Mendelssohn *Antigone* as the phenomenon of *Antigonismos*, with a pun on the modern Greek word for “antagonism” or “rivalry” (*antagonismos*) (Sideres 1976: 82, with reference to a newspaper report in the *Ephemeris* of October 22, 1888). In the competitive struggle to bring the first revival of Sophocles' *Antigone* to Greek soil, be it in its “authentic” form or in adaptation, the German version held pride of place. For several decades to come, the *Antigone* mania marked the tragedy and its author as vehicles of foreign romanticism imported through the Siren call of music. The same infatuation impacted other classical plays as well, including Aeschylus' *Persians* and Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. Two years before Rankaves offered his Germanized translation of the *Persians*, amateurs and students of the Drama School at the National Drama Association (the Ethnikos Dramatikos Syllogos, under the directorship of Professor Antonios Antoniadēs) staged a performance of the *Philoctetes* in ancient Greek but divided it into three acts. This production, too, accommodated a symphonic musical score, even if it was one by minor German composers. In 1888 the same group put on a Mendelssohn *Antigone* in ancient Greek (Sideres 1976: 76–7, 89, 94–5, 1990: 216; Chasape-Christodoulou 2002, vol. 1: 513). Indeed, the thread that ties together the various romantic productions of ancient plays in the last decades of the nineteenth century was the recurring fascination not as much with Sophocles, as with imported German music, which was expected to guarantee success. Along with Aeschylus' *Persians*, Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and *Antigone* became loci for the contemporary Greek diplomacy of international alliance-building (of which royal weddings were a significant component). Protectionist reactions did not stay out. Some critics and scholars argued that any choral music or other modern accretions should be subordinated to the original text and not vice versa. In other words, in Greece revival tragedy should be owned by the Greeks.

7 The “Repatriation” of Classical Drama to Greece, or the Descent into the Underworld to Retrieve ... Sophocles

The late nineteenth-century Greek romantic tradition in revival tragedy came to a rude awakening when it encountered the vocal protests of Mistriotes, the classics professor from the University of Athens and the controversial standard-bearer of a line of conservative philologists turned amateur stage directors. Mistriotes loudly questioned the key position of romanticizing revivals in the Greek repertory and in the court-serving theater, albeit he did it with his keen, personal interest in affirming the unity and purity of Greek lineage, which manifested itself in his insistence on classical Greek for his own performances. His Society for the Staging of Ancient Greek Drama was active from December 1895 until 1906, during which time it specialized in classical-language revivals of Sophoclean tragedy. It marked a decade of protectionist cultural activity that purported to be “patriotic” in the name of the inherited Hellenic civilization. Mistriotes was one of the last to defend tenaciously the linguistic ideal that rejected modern Greek translations of the ancient Greek texts. Non-translation of the plays, however, meant limited dissemination and narrowed the potential for viable stage production. Nonetheless, for Mistriotes, Greek dramaturgy, nationalism, and didacticism had to join forces in a “patriotic,” historicizing theater that functioned as a school for the nation – an ideal with roots in the Western Enlightenment and with a long-lived but charged history in modern Greece.⁷

The Greek theater scholar Thodoros Chatzepantazes positions Mistriotes – and therefore, indirectly, also Sophocles – at the source of the exalted public promulgation of the patriotic, religious, moral, and family values that found their formal rhetorical expression in the reactionary triptych of “fatherland, religion, and family” (*Patris, Threskeia, Oikogeneia*) (Chatzepantazes 2006: 185; see also 178 n. 14). This mantra, publicized on the page as well as on stage, became one of the quintessential Greek (ultra-)right-wing conservative slogans that saw their last, notoriously forceful revival under the Greek military dictatorship of 1967–74; since then they have been discredited. Statements made by Mistriotes, such as the one published in *Palingenesia* (*Rebirth*) of March 28, 1889, leave no doubt as to this “public intellectual’s” definition of Greek nationalism and “patriotic” theater. Mistriotes envisaged fashioning the “genuine” Greek national mind and heart along the lines of the guiding beacons of antiquity, Orthodoxy, and the ethos of the family tradition: “[t]he development of the intellect in the sense of the Greeks of the classical era, the shaping of the heart following the commandments of the Gospels, and the preservation of the innocent life of our fathers and grandfathers.” For Mistriotes, this triptych also encapsulated and paid homage to “the three great periods of Greek history”: “antiquity, the [Byzantine] Middle Ages, and more recent times.” In continuation to this speech, published in *Palingenesia* on March 29, 1889, Mistriotes summed up, motto-style: “Hellenic ideas in the mind, Biblical sentiments in the heart, and the wise lifestyle in the family.” He then favorably compared the theater’s didactic function to that of the schoolmaster, because theater does not instruct children, but men of a certain age and occupation; it does not teach in abstract terms, but through characters that have “blood and heart”; and it does not confine itself to specific social classes, but instructs the people at large. Mistriotes, who was no fan of the “far from glorious”

Aristophanes, nonetheless used imagery from the latter's *Frogs* to expound the modern playwright's task. He declared that it was the "mission" of the dramatic poet, "like another Heracles, to breach the gates of Hades and, from there, to bring back to the light of day the heroes of [ancient] Greek history" (second part of Mистриotes' speech, *Palingenesia*, March 29, 1889; Chatzepantazes 2006: 175).

Mистриotes, then, self-styled patron and protector of Greek tragedy (after the more serious side of Aristophanes' Dionysus, the patron deity of drama), brought back from the dark not Aeschylus or Euripides, but Sophocles. Then he burdened him with the load of his fiercely nationalist ideology. Mистриotes' efforts to revive especially Sophoclean tragedy in the original ancient Greek language may well amount to a Herculean labor – or to the task of a belated Sisyphus. In the early 1890s, or well before the hype surrounding the first modern Olympics, Mистриotes announced "authentic" productions of Sophocles, whom he more and more frequently hailed as *ethnikos*, or as a "national" playwright (Sideres 1976: 105 and n. 1, 115–16, 203; Chasape-Christodoulou 2002, vol. 1: 521–2; Papaspyrou-Karademetriou 2004: 55–6). With a great sense of urgency, Mистриotes reclaimed Sophocles, *the* public persona of the classical dramatists, for the cause of Greek nationalism and patriotism – in his own definitions. Sophocles' reception was in need of proper redirection, so the professor asserted, because the overwhelming success of the Mendelssohn *Antigone* had badly romanticized it. Before Mистриotes staged his own *Antigone* in 1896, the play's recent Greek history had, according to him, taken the lead in revival tragedy's ostentatious show of Western "progress" and modern urban amorality. Therefore, too, Sophocles' *Antigone* simply had to be first on the agenda that Mистриotes had set for his Society since its inception, three and a half months prior to the Olympic Games (Sideres 1976: 116, with reference to the manifesto that Mистриotes issued on the foundation of his Society): the Olympics would provide the ideal public occasion to set the record of the classical *Antigone* straight.

8 *Antigone* Agony: The Public Execution and Reception of Mистриotes' *Antigone*

Data on the actual performances of Mистриotes' 1896 *Antigone* (its premiere and in several repeat performances) are rather scarce, but they can be culled from the work of Sideres, even though they reflect his personal bias (Sideres 1976: 101, 113–28, 1990: 217–18; Papaspyrou-Karademetriou 2004: 34–50). The 1896 production was, at best, praised as a noble effort on behalf of the students and amateurs who supported Mистриotes. For most critics, however, it was a terrible flop (Papaspyrou-Karademetriou 2004: 50, 53–5, 65–71). The production's biggest hurdle was the language barrier that Mистриotes was thought to have thrown up unnecessarily. The ancient Greek was lost not only on Mистриotes' fellow Greeks, but also on the many foreign attendees to the Olympic Games, some of whom were familiar with the original text of Sophocles' *Antigone*, but not with the modern Greek pronunciation of ancient Greek. Foreign classicists had been trained in the very different Erasmian pronunciation of ancient Greek; some foresaw the problem and brought their text along to the theater (Sideres 1976: 121, 125). In 1905, on the occasion of an archaeological conference that brought many foreign classicists to Athens, Mистриotes revived his *Antigone* and mounted the performance at the Panathenaic



Figure 36.1 The contributors to the 1905 production of Sophocles' *Antigone*, staged by G. Mistriotes at the Panathenaic Stadium in Athens. Source: "*Antigone*," 16–17 (= Special Issue of the Greek newspaper *Kathimerini*, July 14, 2002).

Stadium (Sideres 1976: 213–15). Gregorios Xenopoulos, a prolific Demotic novelist and author of social dramas, voiced particularly damaging criticisms. He unmasked the Hellenic–nationalist language ideology that had underpinned the inaugural *Antigone* production and subsequent efforts of Mistriotes' Society:

We think that if it were discovered that we do not comprehend our ancestors' tongue, they [i.e. the Western European visitors] will tell us that we do not descend from Pericles, and that the Parthenon is not our inheritance. And this fear drives us to claim, and even to believe it ourselves, that we do understand and have a feel for the *Antigone* in the original language [...] [W]e thought we would amaze our foreign guests and take them in by demonstrating that we presumably are in a position to follow the *Antigone* as a drama and not as a pantomime [i.e. without comprehending the verbal language], as is the harsh and bitter truth. (Xenopoulos, quoted in Sideres 1976: 218)

Mistriotes' stubborn insistence suggests that, for him, the 1896 *Antigone* had to be remembered, if not as a good production, then at least as a paradigmatic one. But in the latter aim, too, the director failed. The political satirist Georgios Soures, who irreparably



Figure 36.2 Georgios Soures, satirical drawing of a rehearsal scene of the 1896 *Antigone* production directed by Mistriotes. Source: *Ho Romeos*, March 16, 1896.

ridiculed the academic *Antigone* before as well as after its first appearance on stage, caustically remarked:

Δοκιμαὶ τῆς Ἀντιγονῆς,
ποῦ τῆς βλέπεις καὶ παγόνεις.

Rehearsals of the *Antigone*,
which give you the chills when you watch them.
(Soures in *Ho Romeos*, March 16, 1896; spelling as in original)

Soures perceptively captured the clash between the older, commanding or authoritarian Greek generation (led by Mistriotes, classics professor turned stage director) and the self-confidently indifferent younger generation (embodied by the young man who walks away, aloof, cigarette in hand). This vignette, along with the critics' observations, may deliver an answer to the question of the role that the figures of Antigone, Ismene, and Haemon fulfilled. Sideres described the amateur acting of Mistriotes' students in the following terms, reluctantly positive, which credited the student actors with some degree of autonomy on stage:

The naïve amateurs and their inexperienced instructors, with the courage of ignorance, were never anxious to appear on stage [...] They were serving the ideal of archaism, and that

ideal, with all its hollowness, somehow gave them wings. They would feel an enjoyment, an extraordinary “*hedone*,” to be speaking the ancient words, and that pleasure they inevitably transmitted to their spectators. (Sideres 1976: 131)

The critics also noted that the 1896 production was still dominated by the overbearing character of Creon, whom Soures saw as a thinly disguised Mistriotes (though played by the actor Vryzakes; Papaspyrou-Karademetriou 2004: 68). This Creon/Mistriotes was a loud but ultimately irrelevant and unsympathetic hero, who was pompous in his unyielding defense of the “fatherland.” “You’d think the actor is such a stern and irreconcilable tyrant off stage as well,” surmised one reviewer (quoted in Papaspyrou-Karademetriou 2004: 68). For the director, the opportunity to speak through Creon’s character for the city of Thebes as for the Greek homeland was not to be missed. He eagerly upped the ante of Creon’s “patriotic” rationale at the expense of the dynamics of sympathy that tend to emerge from the original play. Rhetoric and reactionary pronouncements may have been Mistriotes’ and also Creon’s forte, but they did not win over the broader audiences. Likely too, they elicited mixed feelings among the student actors, who enjoyed the stage experience but not necessarily the push to broadcast reactionary thinking. Against the backdrop of the conservative rhetoric, the imposing “ancient-style” palace of Creon, and the “faithful” costumes (Sideres 1976: 126), the younger characters’ stage roles were not the more outspoken ones; yet these minimally trained students still embodied the younger and rebellious but suppressed generations, whose real-life members embraced many of the new, modernist trends in Greek society – and in theater. In other words, even if the production identified with the authoritative Creon through language, casting, and setting, this 1896 *Antigone* still elicited discussion of the more fashionable trends. If these novel ideas were silenced through the tragic plot’s development, that is, in the death of Antigone, they would nevertheless become the wave of the future of Greek theater.

9 Conclusion

Mistriotes used his reactionary production of Sophocles’ *Antigone* of 1896 as a vehicle for the nation’s “cultural” advancement and to legitimate its claims to continuity in the face of the first modern Olympic Games. That classical drama was expected to build for Greece a vital reserve of international goodwill is perhaps harder to comprehend today. Modern sensibilities measure and esteem ideological “authenticity” in the representation of ancient plays as a component of their success. *Antigone* and “inauthenticity” seem today incompatible. Already at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century a treatment of the play that conversed with explicit ideas of non-translation, anti-romanticism, normative nationalism, and revival tragedy raised many questions, some of which led to the conclusion that Mistriotes’ production, along with its stubborn insistence on the ancient Greek language and its disconnectedness from urban trends and movements, inevitably called for its own failure.

This chapter has further explored some instances of pressures rarely placed on Sophocles’ *Antigone*: not to be dissident, but to conform, and to deliver “patriotic,” comfortable solutions for particular festive or celebratory state occasions, urban audiences, and elite social and political classes. These cases exhibited a new kind of partisanship, no longer that of the Greek revolutionary age, but that of scoring political points

with the power-holders and of succumbing to nationalist motives and to classicists' caprices. They supply benevolent to patronizing or authoritarian performance histories with which to question the late twentieth-century tenet that reliance on tragic models from antiquity was necessarily a radical or a dissident move. This tenet has inflected the reception histories of Sophocles' *Antigone* and of Aeschylus' *Persians* in particular. Reading anew their counterweight – the 1896 *Antigone* and its public context – has allowed us to explore the ever evolving dynamics of Greek theater consolidation and patriotic politics, and of “national” language and literature, espoused by academics turned stage directors and “public intellectuals.”

Guide to Further Reading

Garland (2004) provides a very readable historical overview of the corpus of Greek tragedy and of the processes of its textual transmission and philological tradition, translation, and staging and reception histories. This well-illustrated study features very useful appendices and bibliographical references as well.

Hardwick and Stray (eds.) (2008) cover a wide range of practical and theoretical approaches to reception studies and the classics. The following works shed further light on this burgeoning field: Hall (2004a) discusses the history and meaning of reception studies of classical dramatic texts and explains why Greek tragedy has held such a tremendous appeal for the late twentieth-century theater world. The author also analyzes the main intellectual and theatrical developments and identifies the successive waves of feminism, the quest for sexual liberation, and the anti-Vietnam war and civil rights movements as some of the catalysts that have led recent generations to recover classical drama and, specifically, to (re)discover other tragedies apart from the long-time neo-classical favorite *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Hall (2004b) theorizes diverse receptive strands and provides an up-to-date discussion on the status of reception studies and theater. Hall and Macintosh (2005) contextualize Greek tragedy and its revival during more than 250 years of British stage life.

Mackridge (2009) offers one of the most useful English-language studies and in-depth analyses of the Greek language question within the context of the ideological debate about modern Greek identity. The book focuses on the long-running controversy over which variety of Greek should be used as the official national written language. It situates the language controversy against the background of various other languages that were spoken in the southern Balkans and addresses ways in which the Greeks have distinguished themselves from other nations by referring to their language.

Revermann (2008) is a rich narrative analysis that explains ancient drama's draw in the twentieth century as the “appeal of dystopia,” in other words, through classical theater's appeal to “difference” as well as “proximity,” “bigness” as well as “survival.” Steiner (1984) is an impressive study of the reception of Sophocles' *Antigone* and of the various philosophical, literary, artistic, and broadly cultural inquiries to which *Antigone* productions have given rise since the nineteenth century.

Van Steen (2000) is a study of the reception history of Aristophanes' comedy in Greece in the late eighteenth through to the twentieth centuries. Three recent dissertations may help the reader to fill out the details of the reception of Sophocles' *Antigone* in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Greece: Mauroleon (2003), Remediate (2007b), and also Ritsatou (2004).

Acknowledgment

I thank the editor, Kirk Ormand, for his many helpful comments and suggestions and also for his unflagging patience and professionalism, to bring this volume to completion in a timely manner.

Notes

- 1 The “Olympic” production of Sophocles’ *Antigone* took place in a complex set of political and social cross-currents that affected Greece’s image and language, its ethnic pride versus the will to accommodate foreign visitors, and especially the relentless grip that antiquity held on the burgeoning capital of Athens. All of this complexity, centered on the public stage, goes unnoticed, for instance, in the assessment of the modern English-speaking researcher who, admittedly, scrutinized 1896 Athens first and foremost for its preparedness for hosting the Games. While some scholars relegate the modern Greek *Antigone* production to a footnote in history or do not mention it at all, David C. Young observes: “With the good weather, the crowds, bands, and lights returned to the Athens streets and tavernas that night; many people attended an excellent performance of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, performed in the original ancient Greek. It was another good day for the Olympics [...]” (1996: 154). On the cultural and intellectual climate in Athens at the time of the first modern Olympics, see Polites (2004).
- 2 On the first indoor playhouse of Athens, the Boukouras theater, and on nineteenth-century cases of banned patriotic plays, see Van Steen (2000: 47, 55). The Municipal Theater of Athens (*Demotikon Theatron*) opened in 1888 on Syngrou Avenue and housed Mistriotes’ production of Sophocles’ *Antigone* eight years later (Van Steen 2000: 48, 112). On political censorship in the Greek theater of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Delveroude (1988: 299–300 and n. 27). See also Chatzепantazes (2006: 64–7). Moral censorship was yet a different story. See Van Steen (2000: chapter 3, *passim*).
- 3 Many facets of the long-lived Greek historical and heroic–patriotic drama have recently been covered by Chatzепantazes (2006). For a more theoretical perspective on ancient drama and reception studies, see Hall (2004a and 2004b) and recently also Revermann (2008).
- 4 Rankaves was a scholar and diplomat of prestigious Greek Phanariot stock, but also a writer, editor, and critic who spent many years of his life residing abroad, where he exhibited great curiosity about the international theater scene (Sideres 1976: 31). Rankaves’ modern appropriation of the *Persians* made for a ceremonial and symbolic theater: his production acted as a form of diplomatic state ritual on the occasion of the royal wedding of Konstantinos, the crown prince of Greece, to Sophia of Prussia, the sister of Kaiser Wilhelm II (Van Steen 2011).
- 5 On Rankaves’ 1860 translation of Aristophanes’ *Clouds* and on its production eight years later, see Van Steen (2000: 68–72). On Rankaves’ archaeological interests, see Athanassopoulou (2002: 296–8). Garantoudes counts Rankaves’ translation of Aeschylus’ *Persians* among “perhaps the most unreadable renditions [of ancient drama] in modern Greek” (Garantoudes 2000: 46).
- 6 Athens, too, became caught up in the Western European infatuation with the *Oedipus* created by the actor Jean Mounet-Sully (Sideres 1976: 142–60, 174, and *passim*). Fiona Macintosh, who has studied the performance history of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, elaborates: “[I]t is Lacroix’s translation [the *Cedipe Roi* of Jules Lacroix of 1858] – mediated especially through the supreme performative powers of Mounet-Sully from 1881 onwards – that can be considered to have played an instrumental role in shaping early twentieth-century critical readings of Sophocles’ tragedy. [...] [P]erformance often articulates important shifts in orientation first.

- Mounet-Sully's performances guaranteed that Oedipus became Modernist Everyman" (Macintosh 2008: 252, 257).
- 7 Van Steen (2000: 94, 102, 113, 115–18, 119). See also Sideres (1976: 101–5, 113–28, 162–4, 174–7, 179, 185–6, 203–4, 210–26, and *passim*, 1990: 217); Chasape-Christodoulou (2002, vol. 1: 513); Chatzепantazes (2002, vol. 1.1: 139–40), (2006: 175–6, 184, 219 n. 47); De Herdt (2003, vol. 1: 89–93).

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Tony Harrison's *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*

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1 Introduction

Reception, when it works well, results in bidirectional influence – knowledge of the classical text informing how we interpret the later work, and the later work allowing its audience to see the ancient text through new eyes and from a different perspective. *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* is an example of this bidirectional influence at its most effective. Because of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, Tony Harrison became widely perceived as a poet working within the classical tradition. He had made his name as a poet in the 1970s through his verse translations and adaptations for London's National Theatre, as well as through his collections of poetry. But, even with his translation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* for Peter Hall's 1981 production, he was not particularly associated with classical drama. And so, while the *Oresteia* marked his return to classics (he had completed an undergraduate degree in the discipline and had embarked upon doctoral work before putting it aside to focus on his poetry), it was *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* that marked his début as a stage poet in his own right – as opposed to a translator – while also irrevocably associating him with the classical tradition in the public eye. As Harrison put it in an interview with Peter Lennon in *The Guardian* newspaper: “What I would normally say is ‘look at this version of an ancient play.’ I am now saying ‘this is my play, which has an ancient heart’” (Lennon 1990).

But *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* not only changed the public perception of Harrison as a poet; it also changed many people's perception of Sophocles. The tragedian, whose plays had so often over the centuries been held up as *exempla* of the classical tradition, was now associated with the long forgotten and, to some, somewhat embarrassing tradition of satyr plays. For many audience members this was their first experience of a Sophoclean play, and it introduced them to a very different aspect of Sophocles' poetry than, for example, the far more canonical *Oedipus Tyrannus* would have done. But even for those in the audience who were intimately familiar with the works of Sophocles and with the Greek tragic tradition more generally, this play encouraged a reconsideration of the intended function and reception of satyr plays in their original performance context.

In hopes of elucidating to a degree the relationship between *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* and the *Ichmeutae*, this chapter examines three aspects of Harrison's play: the place and function of the *Ichmeutae* fragments that are at its heart; the play's relationship to Sophoclean stagecraft; and the play's relationship to Harrison's non-dramatic poetry. While this is by no means a complete account of the ways in which Harrison is engaging with his Sophoclean model, I hope that it will at least begin to illustrate the ways in which the fragments of Sophocles, and his dramatic writings more generally, helped shape Harrison's play, and also the ways in which Harrison's own poetry shaped how the fragments and the stagecraft of Sophocles are presented in this play.

The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus premiered in the ancient stadium at Delphi on the evening of July 12, 1988, with a single performance. Harrison then rewrote the play, and a second version opened at the National Theatre's Olivier Auditorium on March 27, 1990. While the central cast and production crew remained the same, with Harrison directing both productions of the play, the physical and cultural spaces in which the plays were performed were very different, resulting in texts that are related, yet distinct from each other. (In 1991 Faber published a volume that contained both the Delphi and the London versions; then it republished both versions side by side in volume 5 of Harrison's collected plays.) The play, in both versions, begins with the historical narrative of the papyrologists Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, on site in Egypt in 1907, identifying and cataloging papyri fragments dug out of the sands of Oxyrhynchus, while other fragments are being packed in crates to be shipped back to Oxford. Both men are obsessed with the task at hand, but Grenfell is possessed by Apollo, who instructs him to find a play in which the god had a leading role:

He heard Apollo yammering for scraps and tatters
of a lost play of Sophocles: *The Tracking Satyrs*.
"Grenfell, Hunt!" he heard the voice abjure.
"Prevent Apollo's favourite play becoming mere manure."
Night and day the voice went: "Grenfell, Bernard Pyne,
hunt for my papyrus. This order is divine!" (Harrison 2004: 95)

Grenfell literally becomes Apollo and Hunt becomes the lead satyr, Silenus, as they act out the extant fragments of Sophocles' lost play, which they have excavated. Silenus offers the services of his chorus of satyrs to help track down Apollo's missing cattle in return for riches and their freedom. They successfully track the cattle and discover that the cows are in the possession of the infant Hermes who, when he is discovered, has just invented the lyre. Apollo agrees to forgive the theft of his cattle in exchange for the new instrument. Enchanted by the beautiful music produced by the lyre, the satyrs want a turn. Apollo, however, refuses, claiming that the music of the lyre is high art, suited to a god, and relegates the satyrs to low art, which should not aspire above its position (Harrison 2004: 70–1, 131–2).

While the satyrs are denied use of the lyre, they are given the riches and freedom they had been promised for helping to track the cattle, though neither is what the satyrs had expected. Their riches are gold bars – ghetto-blasters wrapped in gold foil, which play music to which the satyrs cannot dance. Disenfranchised from the world of art, the satyrs flee, only to return as hooligans who destroy the papyrus that brought them back to life after 2,500 years. The Delphi satyrs use the papyrus to make a soccer ball and begin to play a match (Harrison 2004: 81). The National satyrs use it to make bedding for their

makeshift homes under the stage, where they are sleeping rough (Harrison 2004: 146). Both groups of satyrs have discovered that there is no place for them in twentieth-century art, where high and low culture do not meet.

The multiple versions of the play immediately create complications for discussing *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* as a single entity. The plays are intimately related to each other, yet they are different plays. This is less problematic for Harrison than it might be for other playwrights, as Harrison's original works are plays of ideas rather than plot-driven plays. The ideas that underpin both plays are very similar, the details of the plot being written so as to evoke them in ways tailored to the performance space for each production. In short, Harrison is concerned with the cultural divisions that exist in modern Western societies between high and low culture, art and sport, and with the class divisions between their respective audiences. For the Delphi production, Harrison highlighted the discrepancy between the ancient Greek celebrations, which had taken place in the stadium, and modern cultural divisions. He wrote in his introduction: "In the Pythian Games with its athletics and flute contests, poetry and drama, held on this site, such a division would have been incomprehensible. As would the division between tragedy and satyr play, 'high' art and 'low' art" (Harrison 2004: 19). For the London production, Harrison drew attention to the community of homeless people who were living in the area adjacent to the National Theatre, associating literacy levels with people's differing fortunes, both within the world of his play and in the real world. Apollo claims for himself poetry, music, and their cultured audiences, while expelling the satyrs from their own play, out of the theater, forcing them to join the ranks of the Southbank homeless, who had similarly been excluded from society by Thatcherite policies.

2 *Ichneutae* Fragments

The middle portion of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* consists of a performance of the fragments of Sophocles' *Ichneutae*. As Grenfell begins his transformation into Apollo, he gives voice to part of the first fragment of the play, uttering the sparse letters that remain (Harrison 2004: 35, 100):

....]σ[...
]κιο[...
]πειτα[...
]πεσσυθ[...
]γ[.....]λ[...
]ω[...

As the actor playing the role vacillates between Grenfell and Apollo, Grenfell acting on Apollo's order searches through the crates of papyri for one in which Apollo has a starring role.

The first papyrus that Grenfell pulls out is an encomium for a gymnasiarch, which refers to a festival in honor of Hermes (Harrison has his character recite POxy. 1015). Apollo reads the lines:

επαντονον χειρεσσι λυρην πολυηχεα κρουων
 την αυτος τα πρωτα καμες παρα ποσσι τεκουσης

and immediately begins to construe them,

The lyre in exchange for the bulls of Apollo...

The bulls of Apollo aren't actually mentioned in the lines recited by the god, but they do appear in the following line of the poem (Page 1941: 157 translates the three relevant lines of the poem thus: "let your fingers strike the seven strings of the tuneful lyre, which your own hand first fashioned, when you were new-dropped at your mother's feet; and you gave it to Apollo in ransom for his oxen"). While the papyrus shares in common with the *Ichneutae* the story of the theft of Apollo's cattle and the invention of the lyre, Apollo rejects it, using a modern Greek pronunciation to achieve a rhyme:

But you know very well that this fragment won't do,
There's not enough of it, I'm mute, and the you
isn't me that the poem's lines address.
I want my play, my play, the *Ichneftés*
alas, long ago vanished into nothingness. (Harrison 2004: 37)

The god then begins to taunt the papyrologist with fragments from Sophocles' lost play, beginning with *απαντα χρηστα...* ("everything fine...": Lloyd-Jones 1996: 151), to which Grenfell, suffering acute mental distress, responds, "Go to hell!"

Apollo continues to taunt the papyrologist, now with a miscellany from the unplaced fragments (Hunt 1912: 63–7), before returning to the initial fragments from the play and to *απαντα χρηστα και ... λειν*, constantly exhorting Grenfell to fill in the gaps where letters are missing and to find the missing play to which they belong:

You've got to use that mercurial brain
and put all my missing letters in,
from this instant I'm in you and using your skin.
Find me the play where these fragments go.
...]σ[...]κιο[...]πειτα[...]πεσσυθ[...
...]γ[...]λ[...]ω[... etc., etc. (Harrison 2004: 39)

Grenfell attempts to flee the voice of Apollo (an impossible feat, given that the voice is coming from himself) and lands in a rubbish pit. When he emerges, he is completely possessed by the god, as indicated by a costume change, and, following a 61-line divine prologue, he delivers the opening lines of the first substantial fragment of Sophocles' play (col. i.6–22).

The performance of the extant text of *Ichneutae* continues, but its fragmentary nature is marked even in performance. At every point where the action of the play moves to a new fragment, attention is drawn to the fact that the audience is watching a play within a play, with overt metatheatrical references. The breaks between the fragments are treated almost as scene breaks, during which actors change costumes, new characters prepare for their entrances, and the performance space is reconfigured with scenery and prop changes.

At the end of Apollo's first speech, in which he announces the theft of his cattle and offers a reward to whoever finds them, the play is interrupted by Hunt. Unaware of Grenfell's transformation into Apollo or of the god's plan to "bit by bit [...] try to pick

our way/slowly back through time and this lost satyr play” (Harrison 2004: 41), Hunt calls out from inside his tent:

Grenfell, Bernard, are you sure that you're all right?
 Shall I come out and give you a hand?
 Enough work for today. You'll ruin your sight.
 It's too dark to decipher or dig in the sand. (Harrison 2004: 43)

When Hunt emerges from the tent to lend assistance to Grenfell, he is dressed in the costume of the lead satyr, Silenus. The help that Silenus is offering is to take a role in the play, which is now being performed in the darkened theater, and he delivers his lines from the second substantial fragment (col. ii.12–21), volunteering the services of himself and his fellows satyrs to track down the lost cattle in exchange for the promised reward.

At this point Sophocles' *Ichmeutae* is again interrupted and the world of the larger play seeps through, while metatheatrical references continue to draw attention to the performance of the fragments. Apollo welcomes Silenus' offer of help, but for a moment he confuses the chorus of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (the fellaheen who have been helping Grenfell and Hunt on their dig) and the satyr chorus of the *Ichmeutae* (who are the same actors, doubling in their roles):

I must say I find you commendably keen.
 I'll make you the foreman of my fellaheen.
 I'll put you in charge of my trackers, I mean. (Harrison 2004: 44)

The effect is heightened by the triplet, with each line end-stopped.

The satyrs emerge only after Silenus has repeatedly chanted the fragments that mark the entrance of the chorus in *Ichmeutae* (col. iii.5–8; Harrison 2004: 46 and 109):

ιθ αγε δ]...... [
 ποδα βα]...... [
 απαπατ]...... [
 ω ω σε τοι]...... [
].....

When the satyrs make their entrance they are greeted by Silenus, who says:

After two thousand years, lads, look, there's your text.
 It's up to you, to track what comes next.
 And once you've tracked down each missing Greek word
 then sniff out the trail of Apollo's lost herd. (Harrison 2004: 47)

The satyrs, whose preservation in the classical tradition is more marginal than that of figures such as Apollo, have their cultural significance reasserted by their presence in the textual tradition through the excavation, restoration, and interpretation of the papyrus fragments, the performance of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* further revivifying them.

When the nymph Cyllene makes her entrance in the Delphi version to deliver the final substantial Sophoclean fragment, she wonders whether, perhaps, with her tragic diction, she might have wandered into the wrong play:

ως απολλυμαι κακως ... O woe! O woe!
 I have a feeling I'm in the wrong show! (Harrison 2004: 54)

In the National Theatre version, as the satyrs prepare a stage for her, they exhort her to enter, even prompting her with her opening words from *Ichneutae* (col. ix.6):

GROUP C Out!
 You can't get away
 You're stuck same as us in Sophocles' play.

GROUP A Out! Out!
 Come on YOU
 the papyrus says "Enter" but not enter WHO.

ALL Out!
 Your first words are here
 you say "bestial creatures" when you appear.

And, as in all the earlier introductions and enactments of the fragments of Sophocles' *Ichneutae*, the performance of the play is dependent upon the discovery and reconstruction of the fragments. Where the fragments come apart and text is missing, be it lines or indications of speaker, the dramatic illusion begins to falter. How the fragments of the play are positioned in relation to one another, and how the missing letters are supplemented, depends upon the knowledge of how theater works, how entrances and exits are marked, what normative plots are in a particular genre, and so forth. An inevitable consequence for the fragments of *Ichneutae* is that, in addition to being shaped by Harrison's larger narrative in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, they are also necessarily shaped by Harrison's interpretation of the genre and by his understanding of how theater, both ancient and modern, works.

3 Harrison and Sophoclean Stagecraft

The fragments of *Ichneutae* have a dual function within the play. Harrison has used them as the scaffolding upon which he has built a performance text, but the fragments also function as significant stage properties, in ways that associate *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* not only with a specific play by Sophocles, but with Sophoclean stagecraft more generally. In 1980 Charles Segal demonstrated that significant objects were a prominent aspect of Sophocles' stagecraft, arguing that in his plays visual symbols build their meaning as the play progresses, often resulting in an overwhelmingly ethical effect rather than in an emotional or pathetic effect, something that he isolated as being a peculiarly Sophoclean trait amongst the ancient tragedians (Segal 1980: 125–42). This use of visual symbols is also employed to ethical effect by Harrison in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* through the function of papyri on stage. It is possible to see the degree to which he is engaging with Sophocles by examining the use of visual symbols in significant objects in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* and by comparing these with examples from Sophoclean plays.

The papyri constitute the "fabric" of the play, so to speak, and are ubiquitous, serving as everything, from performance text to diapers for the infant Hermes. The most visible use of the fragments in performance was as backdrop for the play. In Delphi two large papyrus screens were erected in the ancient stadium (Herbert 1991: 285). In the Olivier Theatre in London a single screen was the backdrop for the play. This backdrop is important, as all the major characters who appear on stage are defined through their relationship to papyri.

In *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* Grenfell and Hunt are present because of their search for papyri. Grenfell is possessed by his desire to find literary papyri, as opposed to the more common documentary papyri, such as receipts and bureaucratic correspondence. Apollo is seeking the papyri that contain Sophocles' lost *Ichmentae*, in which he appears. The satyrs' existence is dependent on the survival of the same papyri. The almost constant presence of the papyrus screens serves as a visual reminder that all the characters on stage are bound in their own ways to the papyri and to the notion of text. The use of papyri over the course of the play, however, comes to represent more than the use of a physical object; it comes to represent the ambiguous relationship of the characters on stage with culture and art in the twentieth century.

The most immediate Sophoclean parallel for such a use of a backdrop is the cave in *Philoctetes*, which Segal characterizes as being "expressive of the hero's ambiguous relation to civilized society" (Segal 1980: 126; see also Robinson 1969: 34–7). Philoctetes, a Greek hero, was abandoned by his fellow Greek warriors on the way to Troy due to a foot injury that left him with a festering wound, which caused him to be a poor traveling companion and a soldier of dubious combat value. Abandoned on the island of Lemnos, cut off from civilization, Philoctetes has taken up residence in a cave. The only other figure that lives in a cave in extant fifth-century Greek drama is Polyphemus, the cyclops of Euripides' satyr play and a character with a similarly liminal relationship with civilization. The backdrop to the action of *Philoctetes* creates ambiguity about whether a character – or characters, in the case of the satyrs – who originated in a civilized world would remain civilized when relocated and whether, having been abandoned by the civilized world, they have any inclination to peaceful reintegration.

The visual symbolism of the papyrus backdrop is also significant in terms of entrances. Only divine beings can enter through the papyri – only those who have a place in the artistic world of Apollo: Cyllene (Harrison 2004: 54, 118) and Hermes (pp. 64, 128). The chorus of satyrs is trapped behind the papyri screens. In both the Delphi and the National Theatre productions the shadowy figures of the satyrs appear behind the papyrus screen, but they never enter through it (pp. 44–6, 108–10). The only relation that they are allowed to have with it is to hold up the stage in front of the backdrop (pp. 54–62, 116–25) or to tear it down (pp. 83, 146). The literary papyri represent an impenetrable wall for the satyrs. Silenus, in the Delphi production, is able to enter through the papyri screen only when he plays at being in a tragedy (pp. 76–7).

The papyri backdrop also comes to be a significant object symbolizing the inarticulate anger that the satyrs feel, having been disenfranchised from the world of literary art. It is the papyri screens that the hooligans destroy in their frustration at their disenfranchisement at the end of the play. In the Delphi production the satyrs destroy these screens, leaving only the bare frames from which they hung, looking like goalposts, and a now visible space between those goalposts, which is marked out like a soccer pitch and upon which the satyrs begin to play a game with a ball made out of papyrus (pp. 83–5). In the National Theatre production it is Silenus who destroys the papyrus backdrop, arguing that it can be put to better uses, such as providing bedding for the South Bank homeless (p. 146). While the papyrus is being used to try to provide some warmth and comfort to the homeless as they build their crate city out of the Egypt Exploration Fund crates, images of the National Theatre and Royal Festival Hall are projected onto the bare wall of the Olivier Theatre, which the papyrus had recently covered (p. 147). The papyrus comes to represent a physical divider between the world of art and the world inhabited by football hooligans and the homeless.

In this second world poetry has no value; it serves instead as material for makeshift footballs or bedding.

A Sophoclean parallel can perhaps be seen in the use of the robe in *Trachinae*, a play that tells the story of Heracles' return home after the completion of his labors and of his death by means of a poisoned robe sent to him by his wife Deianeira. As Segal says, the robe "is the physical link between their two worlds [of Heracles and of Deianeira], the enclosed realm of the house and the wild places where Heracles battles monsters and sacks cities" (Segal 1980: 129). Deianeira intends for the robe to secure her relationship with Heracles. Fearing that her role as wife will be taken over by the captive princess Iole, whom Heracles has sent home ahead of him, Deianeira sends Heracles, as a homecoming gift, a robe smeared with what she mistakenly believes to be a love potion. The robe is intended to function in the same way as the papyri function at the beginning of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*; it is meant to revive what Deianeira fears is lost – her place in Heracles' marriage bed (*S. Tr.* 531–87). Yet, like the papyri in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, it comes to symbolize not the union of their two worlds, but the destruction of both. The robe, once donned, cannot be removed and begins to burn Heracles alive. Deianeira, belatedly realizing what she has done, commits suicide, knowing that she is responsible for the very thing that she had long feared: the death of Heracles.

For Harrison, however, papyri have the ability to conquer death, as the fragments in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* bring the ancient past to life: not only Sophocles' *Ichneutae* but also the ancient gods, their worshippers, and the poetry written in their honor, which is central to the preservation of the cultural memory of ancient Greece. In the Delphi production it is the lines from a Pythian ode by Pindar, chanted by the fellaheen, that call forth Apollo (Harrison 2004: 40). It is the chanted fragments of Sophocles' *Ichneutae* that call forth the ghosts of the ancient audiences (p. 46) and the chorus of satyrs (pp. 46–7, 109–10). In Harrison's world, papyri, when given voice, have the power to bring the ancient, lost past to life.

In addition to the ever present visual symbolism of the papyrus screen backdrops and of the significant literary papyri, there are also the supposedly insignificant pieces of papyri. These papyri, including the "Petition, petition, receipt, receipt, receipt./Orders for the payment of supplies of wheat" (p. 31), are important because they are of no interest to Grenfell, who is only seeking poetry. Grenfell's division of the papyri into those that are valuable and those that are not is representative of the class issues that dominate the end of Harrison's play. In the National Theatre production, Apollo is specific that the literary papyri are his domain and that the satyrs will have to make do with the papyri petitions, which represent their own fate in the twentieth-century Apollinian world of art:

μη μεταναστης ... "don't make me a stray"
 cry the vagrants evicted out of their play.
 μη μεταναστης ...they'll find every street
 strewn with petitions like that to repeat.
 I'll keep the poetry and cloggies like those
 will have to exist on petitioners' prose. (Harrison 2004: 134)

For Apollo, petitioners, both ancient and modern, have no place in his world of art and no claim to poetry, either as producers or as consumers.

4 The Poetry of Tony Harrison

While the fragments of Sophocles' *Ichneutae* and Sophoclean stagecraft are important to the play, Harrison's own poetry is also central to an understanding of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*. This play challenged its audience in a way that none of Harrison's previous theatrical writings had, and there are a number of factors that contributed to the overt political challenge. In part this represents a fairly natural progression, as Harrison's classical plays developed over the course of the 1980s (compare *Medea: A Sex-War Opera* and *The Common Chorus*). While neither of these plays made it to the stage, the progressively political intent is obvious from the published texts. Another contributing factor to the overt politics of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* was the critical response to the poem/film version of Harrison's "v." broadcast on the UK's Channel 4 on November 4, 1987. The broadcast of the poem/film caused a furore, with newspapers, tabloids, MPs, and other public figures joining in the debate as to whether "v." was literature or obscenity; in other words, whether it was high or low art.

The poem "v." describes Harrison's response when he stops to visit his familial tomb in Leeds and discovers that it has been desecrated by football hooligans. The poem is about much more than the desecration of graves, however, as the graffiti move Harrison to meditate upon the fate of the Leeds working class buried in the graveyard, whose tombstones are now listing due to the worked-out coal pit beneath them and to their working-class descendants, whose future, in the aftermath of the bitter coal miners' strike of 1984/5, seemed more precarious than that of the listing gravestones.

"v." begins with an epigraph from Arthur Scargill, head of the National Union of Mineworkers during the miners' strike: "My father still reads the dictionary every day. He says your life depends on your power to master words" (Harrison 2007b: 263). Like in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, a central theme of the poem is the power and value of words. It seeks to use words to articulate a vast array of versus/verses in life, including the deep conflict that existed in the United Kingdom under Thatcher's government, especially between the northern working class and the southern ruling class and business elite. The conflict also existed within the context of Harrison's own personal life. "v." is very much in the tradition of Harrison's earlier published verse – indeed, for those familiar with his poetry it draws part of its power from the fact that he is visiting the grave of his parents, who figure so prominently in his sonnet sequence *The School of Eloquence* (an ever changing collection, published most recently in Harrison 2007b: 119–215). Harrison had already elucidated the existing divisions in his own family that were caused by education and articulation, and he explores those same divisions on a larger scale, in British society, in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*.

The furore over "v." was, to Harrison's mind, an artificially created storm, which had resulted largely from the fact that "the offensive words have been taken out of context by people who have neither seen the programme nor read my poem" (Harrison 1989: 51). As Byrne has written, "Harrison does not ignore offensiveness, he uses it, but v.'s invective is directed less against aerosolling hooligans than against the policies which deprive them of education and employment" (Byrne 1998: 69). In the public debate surrounding "v." there was no discussion of such policies. By and large the debate focused on whether a poem that contained so many obscenities could be considered literature or be anything but a sign of the decaying moral and literary standards of the late twentieth century, and whether it consequently ought to be censored. Almost no

one expressed concern about the working-class youth of northern England, whose members were poorly educated and saw little prospect of gainful employment in their future. In *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, Harrison would reframe his argument to insist on a public discussion of cultural divisions between high and low, literate and illiterate, and of the corporate responsibility of the literate haves for the illiterate have-nots, putting the play in a long tradition of classical reception that uses the veil of myth and history for political purposes.

While Harrison, as I have argued, maintains a loyalty to Sophoclean dramaturgy throughout the play and a fidelity to the fragments of the *Ichneutae*, it is through the titular chorus that Harrison's political concerns are brought to the forefront. In the case of Delphi, the fellaheen evoke the world of Egypt through their costumes and actions (Harrison 2004: 27–34) and, through their relay race, they define the space within the stadium and evoke the sporting theme (p. 39). When it is time for the chorus to re-emerge as satyrs, Silenus has the audience help him chant the first words of the satyrs' lines from *Ichneutae* (pp. 45–6). The audience's chant is echoed by the ghosts of spectators from the ancient Pythian games, which connects the present performance to the ancient past (p. 47). It is the surprise appearance of the chorus of satyrs that leads the audience to accept that they have entered the world of ancient Greece and are witnessing a satyr play that has not been performed in 2,500 years. At the end of the play it is the satyrs who reintroduce the present and its politics when they emerge as hooligans and burn the papyrus backdrop, thus transforming the stadium into a soccer pitch (pp. 81–5).

The National production varies from the Delphi production in how it uses the chorus to define the space and the audience's relationship to it. The fellaheen are again used to help evoke an Egyptian archaeological dig, though this time there was no need for a relay race to define the playing space within the Olivier Theatre (pp. 91–9), since the stage was already established as a site for art. Silenus nevertheless still has the audience chant lines from Sophocles' *Ichneutae* to evoke the world of ancient Greece (pp. 109–10). At the end of the play, however, the National satyrs return the audience to a different present from the one in Delphi. At the National, the chorus of satyrs brings the world of the South Bank homeless, which in the late-1980s and early-1990s existed literally on the doorstep of the National, inside to the audience by placing them on-stage (p. 146). In both plays, the chorus locates the action for the audience both geographically and temporally, while representing the socially and culturally disenfranchised of each time and place.

The choruses of the Delphi and National productions seem to be representative of different social problems: the Delphi chorus, of European soccer hooliganism; the National chorus, of the social problems, particularly homelessness, of Thatcher's Britain. For Harrison, however, these are not separate issues, but rather different faces of a single issue – the social divisions, especially the class divisions, that exist in, and are perpetuated by, European culture. Richard Eyre has said: “Tony wants the whole body of society, not just its head, to be involved in art. He wants art to be accessible to everyone, for the distinction between High and Low to be annulled, and for art to be removed from the clutches of class distinction” (Eyre 1997: 45). In the Delphi production the chorus leader Silenus identifies the role of the satyrs thus:

Deferential, rustic, suitably in awe
of new inventions is what your satyr's for. (Harrison 2004: 78–9)

It is Silenus, however, who in this play gives an awe-inspiring performance, fulfilling his own description of his fellow satyr Marsyas:

It confounds their categories of high and low
when your Caliban outplays your Prospero. (Harrison 2004: 137)

Both choruses are used by Harrison to examine the divisions between high and low art and the relation between artistic and social divisions.

There is another element to this division, however – one that, while not apparent in the text, became apparent in performance. The costumes of the chorus members continually emphasized the class distinction between chorus and central characters. In each production the first two sets of costumes for the chorus were the same. Their first costume is that of the fellaheen, the local Egyptian workers, criticized by Grenfell and Hunt for their ignorance of the value of the papyri they excavate (Harrison 2004: 28 and 94). The second costume is that of satyrs. Their half-human/half-animal appearance immediately puts them in a sub-human category:

You need no consolations of high art.
Your human pain's cancelled by your horse/goat part. (Harrison 2004: 71, 131)

The third set of choral costumes differed between the two productions. At the National the chorus members at the end of the play appeared on stage as South Bank homeless, carrying their satyr costumes in plastic bags. Their social status was clear as they curled up to go to sleep in the crate city that they had built. In the Delphi production the chorus appeared at the end not as homeless, but as soccer hooligans. And, while football hooligans in Europe are generally perceived to come from the lower end of the socio-economic scale, the costume the chorus members wore made clear their status. These hooligans wore not the yellow and black jerseys of the middle-class AEK Athens football club, but the red and white jerseys of the rival Olympiacos team, a team favored by the working class (drawings of the fellaheen, satyrs, and Delphi hooligans can be found in Courtney 1993: 128–31).

Harrison used the chorus to revive Sophocles' ancient satyr play and to address the modern cultural division between high and low, but also to comment on class divisions, as he frequently has in his non-dramatic poetry. These final choruses can be seen as facets of the Yorkshire skinhead with whom Harrison converses in his poem "v." In that poem Harrison is torn between rage at the hooligans who have desecrated his familial tomb and sympathy for these youths trapped by the British class system.

"Listen, cunt!" I said, "before you start your jeering
the reason why I want this in a book
's to give ungrateful cunts like you a hearing!" (Harrison 2007b: 271)

Yet, despite Harrison's striving to give voice to the troubled working class of Leeds, the skinhead refuses to allow the poet to defend him:

*Don't talk to me of fucking representing
the class yer were born into any more.
Yer going to get 'urt and start resenting
it's not poetry we need in this class war.* (Harrison 2007b: 273)

The interaction between the audience and the chorus in *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* parallels that between Harrison and the skinhead. We are at first shocked by their crudeness; then we begin to sympathize with their plight, only to be rejected, cursed at, and alienated by them.

In both versions of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* the chorus of satyrs, near the end of the play, begins to resent its inferior status.

Feellaheen, phallus-bearers only for farce.
Well, show us a tragedy, we'll show you our arse.
Aeschylus, Sophocles, gerroff our backs.
We're hijacking Culture and leaving no tracks. (Harrison 2004: 83)

The satyrs turn not against characters like Apollo and Cyllene, who insist that they be mindful of their lowliness, but against the lead satyr, Silenus, who speaks for them and is trying to preserve them. As the satyrs move to destroy the papyrus backdrop that has brought them back to life, Silenus pleads with them not to do it:

Don't burn the papyrus. We're all inside.
Don't burn the papyrus. It's satyricide! (Harrison 2004: 84)

The chorus of satyrs, however, refuses his pleas, saying: "Either fuck off, old feller, or give us a hand." And, when Silenus remains still, they spurn him, saying: "Then fuck off, old feller, back to fairyland" (Harrison 2004: 84).

The endings of both versions offer different takes on the situation of the satyrs, now that they are bereft of the papyrus fragments from which they emerged. In the final moments of each play Harrison raises the issue of freedom. In both versions Silenus occupies the middle position between Apollo, who has refused the satyrs any place in the world of "high art," and his fellow satyrs, who resent the place in "low art" to which Apollo has relegated them. The satyrs believe they are willfully rejecting and destroying Apollinian culture in the form of the papyrus. Silenus sees it differently:

They don't see it, do they, silly young fools
how divine Apollo divides us and rules. (Harrison 2004: 144)

The chorus of satyrs may be crude, destructive, and unappreciative of culture, but Apollo bears responsibility for their behavior as well.

The chorus of satyrs comes to resent and destroy the literary creation that has given them life and that the audience has come to see. Harrison once said in an interview: "I use the Oxford papyrologists, who are committed to a higher ideal of Greek culture, in a way, being overthrown by their own discovery" (McDonald 1992: 130–1). Harrison himself was overthrown by his own discovery of ancient Greek literature, and he is acutely aware of the walls built by education. Frequently, both in his poetry and in interviews, Harrison has discussed the internal struggle that resulted when, as a "promising" boy from an uneducated and inarticulate family, he was sent on a scholarship to Leeds Grammar School, where, by the age of 11, he was studying ancient Greek. He is keenly aware of what literacy and articulation have given him and, by extension, of what was not given to those amongst whom he grew up and like whom he could so easily have become. When the skinhead in "v." has finished cursing Harrison and his "fucking poufy words,"

he turns back to his task of defacing the gravestones, and Harrison observes: "He aerosolled his name. And it was mine." (Harrison 2007b: 273)

The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus is a celebration of text and literacy, and yet at the same time the play mourns for those who have been excluded from this world and who have come to resent it. The chorus defines more than the performance space; it defines the place of satyr plays within the traditional reception of ancient drama, as well as within the socially divided world that Harrison inhabits, and it is in the chorus that Sophocles' play is most inextricably tied to Harrison's own poetic voice.

Despite the fact that the textual tradition has granted us limited knowledge of satyr plays, Euripides' *Cyclops* being the only complete surviving example, something is known about the general length and plot line of these plays. At the same time, however, the lack of texts means that we are bound to have a limited understanding of their function in relation to tragedy, or of the audience's experience of these plays in performance, following a trilogy of tragedies. Harrison nevertheless clearly articulates his interpretation of the place and function of the satyr play:

Without the satyr play we cannot know enough about the way in which the Greek spirit coped with catastrophe. The residue of a few tragedies might give us the illusion of something resolutely high-minded but it is a distortion [...] the shrivelled private scope of readership rather than presence in shared light and space made both parts of the Greek spirit harder to accommodate. The essential catholicity of Greek drama, the unity of tragedy and satyr play, has been betrayed into divided and divisive categories, "high" and "low" [...] the loss of satyr plays is both a symptom and a consequence of this division. What is lost is a clue to the wholeness of the Greek imagination and its deep compulsion to unite sufferer and celebrant in the same space and light. (Harrison 2004: 8–11)

The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus, though not in and of itself a satyr play, clearly manifests this interpretation of the place and function of the satyr play. As Taplin has pointed out: "*The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* is a satyr play which is also a tragedy, but the tragedy of Caliban and of the have-nots rather than of the great king" (Taplin 1991: 464). For Harrison, tragedy and satyr play are inextricably linked, and we cannot understand the joy and celebration of one without witnessing the catastrophe of the other. There is a fragmentary satyr play at the heart of *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, but the play as a whole is an examination of the ways in which the literature of the past comes to us, and of the place that literature finds in modern culture. Harrison is not writing in an ancient genre – he is creating a modern play about an ancient genre and its reception. It is a play that is bound to the fragments of the *Ichneutae* and to ideas about Sophoclean stagecraft, exploiting both in order to bring to the stage Harrison's understanding of the function of ancient Greek drama. With this ancient heart, Harrison can address modern social issues in his own distinct poetic voice.

Guide to Further Reading

This chapter touches on a number of different areas, so the suggestions for further reading will necessarily be limited for each topic. For satyr plays, see Sutton (1980), Seaford (1984): 1–61, G. Harrison (2005). Numerous books and articles on the reception of classical drama have been published in recent years and it is not possible to list all the

worthwhile volumes here. For an introduction to the field of reception studies, see Hardwick (2003). As a starting point for more specific studies on the reception of classical drama I would suggest the publications list of the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama at Oxford University, which can be found online at: <http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/publications.htm>. For academic discussions of Harrison's work specifically, the best starting points are the edited collections by Astley (1991) and Byrne (1997). A substantial portion of *Arion* 15.2 (2007) is also dedicated to Harrison's work, especially his dramatic poetry. Much of Harrison's poetry is now available in collected volumes. Faber has published five volumes of collected plays (1996, 1999, 2002a, 2002b, and 2004), but these volumes do not contain *Hecuba* (Harrison 2005) or *Fram* (Harrison 2008). Faber has also published Harrison's *Collected Film Poetry* (2007a) and Viking has published his *Collected Poetry* (2007b).

Acknowledgment

This work has been supported by the Government of Canada through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

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Black Oedipus

Emily Wilson

1 Out of Africa?

My title invites comparison with the notorious work of Martin Bernal, author of *Black Athena* (Bernal 1987). Bernal's monumental study argued that ancient historians since the nineteenth century had systematically repressed the (supposed) fact that ancient Greek myth, religion, art, literature, and culture had their roots in African (especially Egyptian) traditions, as well as – less controversially – in those of the Near East. There was an immediate outcry from some classicists and ancient historians, who claimed that Bernal's work involved some major exaggerations, distortions, and unjustifiable manipulations of the relevant sources (Lefkowitz 1996). On the other side, Bernal's work was heralded by Afrocentrists outside the mainstream of classical academia, who were delighted to find scholarly authority for the idea that the roots of the “Western tradition” should actually be traced back to Africa. From another perspective, this brand of Afrocentrism might be seen as oddly patronizing, and even Eurocentric: there are plenty of reasons to value the ancient cultures of Egypt or Ethiopia that have nothing to do with their putative relation to ancient Athens.

For the purposes of this chapter, there is no need to decide whether Bernal's work has any historical value or to judge which side won the ideological argument. The important fact to notice is that the debate took place over an extended period of time and that it aroused such heated feelings on all sides. This in itself is a good indication of the problematic position of ancient Greek culture from the perspective of contemporary African American and Afro-Caribbean traditions. Bernal may well have been misleading in his discussions of ancient Greek sources, but he was right to notice that, in modern times, the culture of ancient Greece has often been seen as the property of the white man. Classicists who think seriously about the ideological uses and implications of their own discipline must inevitably find themselves wondering about how the study of Greek and Latin has been used to further – as well as to question – modern systems of racial and ethnic oppression (see Goff 2005; Dominik 2007; Fleming 2007; Hardwick and Gillespie 2007).

Modern African, postcolonial, and African American writers who try to combine the traditions of Greece and Africa are thus in a complex position. On the one hand, they may be seen as reclaiming a lost heritage for Africa. On the other, such works may seem unsuccessful, either on literary or on ideological grounds, if the writer fails to make the two traditions speak to one another, or if readers suspect that either Greece or Africa has been dragged in merely to give some extra cultural cachet to a thinly imagined story. The juxtaposition of disparate traditions may seem arbitrary or disrespectful to the heritage of one or both sides. Adaptations that combine Greek literature or Greek myth with non-Western and African traditions can invite accusations of selling out: one can see the use of Western and European texts as implying that black traditions are somehow inferior, or that black writers can achieve respectability only by speaking the language of white people. Conversely, a willingness to claim all traditions as one's own can be seen as an inclusive gesture, an attempt to show that the classics, as well as African traditions, are part of a universal human heritage.

Discussing the reception of Greek tragedy in particular, Kevin Wetmore has suggested that we should distinguish between three different categories of modern works that combine classical and African influences: "Black Orpheus," "Black Athena," and "Black Dionysus" (Wetmore 2003). These categories roughly correspond to Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism, and some (preferable) third term, which allows for the possibility of real cultural exchange. Wetmore's terminology provides a useful initial map, but there are some important gaps in his account. In particular, there is more to say about what makes for a successful interaction between Greek and African literary traditions and what motivates contemporary writers to attempt the juxtaposition. In this chapter I will explore the contemporary African American reception of Greek literature by looking at two contemporary adaptations of Sophocles' two Oedipus plays: Lee Breuer and Bob Telson's *Gospel at Colonus*, and Rita Dove's *The Darker Face of the Earth*. Concentrating most fully on the latter, I will suggest that Sophocles' Oedipus provides a particularly rich case through which to explore complex issues of racial identity – for two main reasons.

The first is that Sophocles' work has held a particularly privileged place within the Western canon, ever since his own lifetime. Aristotle in particular regarded *Oedipus Tyrannus* as the most perfect Greek tragedy. This assessment played a crucial role in the neo-classical and modern reception of Greek tragedy and helped ensure the central status of Oedipus in contemporary visions of the Greeks. The word "classical" – which comes from the Latin *classicus*, meaning citizen of high class – is associated with privileged social class, as well as with a privileged position within the educational canon and with assumptions of high aesthetic value (see Hall 2008). Classical literature in general, and *Oedipus Tyrannus* in particular, is freighted with enormous cultural prestige. This in itself is a good reason to consider what it means to rework the Oedipus story from the perspective of black America.

The second reason is that the plays of Sophocles in general, and the Oedipus plays in particular, are themselves especially relevant for a multi-racial and postcolonial world. I would like to add the phrase "Black Oedipus" to Wetlock's trilogy of labels, as a way of indicating the possibility that the problem of origins may be implicit in the source text itself.

Sophoclean tragedy tends to deal with the status of outsiders and liminal characters, who stand on the outskirts of a social group. The issue of when, and whether, outsiders can be integrated into a larger social group has obvious relevance for the multicultural, multi-racial world of the contemporary US. It is, then, perhaps unsurprising that there

have been many performances and adaptations of Sophocles' work in North America over the past few years, including highly praised productions of *Electra* (National Theater of Greece, New York, fall 2007; David Leveaux, Princeton, NJ, fall 1998; Pearl Theater, New York, 1988) and important meditations on *Philoctetes* by both Seamus Heaney and Derek Walcott (Heaney 1991; Walcott 1990; for a discussion of contemporary US theater adaptations of Greek tragedy, see Hartigan 1995).

The most commonly adapted and performed play of Sophocles has been *Antigone*, throughout the twentieth century and worldwide: it is a drama that has proved adaptable to almost any modern political struggle (Steiner 1984). Anouilh set the play in France at the time of the Résistance, making Creon a Fascist and Antigone a freedom fighter (see Deppman's chapter in this volume). Antigone has also proved a good figure through whom to think about postcolonial struggles. Several African political dramas of the past 30 years or so have presented Antigone as a rebel against an unjust regime (Dominik, 2007: 118–20), and the play has been equally popular as an image of political tyranny and political resistance in South America and in Ireland (Heaney 2004; Hardwick 2006a and 2006b; Wilmer 2007).

But there is an even more specific resonance between the Sophoclean figure of Oedipus and the position of African Americans within the larger American community, because Sophocles' Oedipus plays are particularly concerned with issues of blood, of background, and of belonging. Oedipus is apparently a foreigner, but in fact far too close to home in Thebes. His gradual discovery of his own unintended acts of incest and parricide in *Oedipus Tyrannus* creates a crisis of identity: normal human words, such as "son," "father," "brother," and "husband," can no longer apply in a simple way to Oedipus (*OT* 1403–8; Wilson 2004: 28–40). *Oedipus at Colonus* raises new questions about the relationship of the past to the present and about the possibilities and limits of social integration.

2 Dramas of Oedipus

The study of reception is a reminder that the same text (or painting, sculpture, film, piece of music) may have a very different meaning from one historical period to the next. Looking at the differences between contemporary responses to classical literature and those of earlier ages, we learn a great deal about the distinctive preoccupations of our own age. Racial interpretations of the Oedipus plays are a case in point, since earlier retellings have brought out many different aspects of these dramas (Edmunds 1985, 2006; Hall and Macintosh 2005), but none, until very recently, has viewed the Oedipus story in terms of race. Themes that have seemed most pressing at various times since antiquity have included tyranny and kingship; rationality and its limits; incest and other sexual taboos; sin, divine will, and redemption.

Within the twentieth century, fate and sexuality have been particularly important themes in the reading and re-writing of Sophocles' Oedipus plays. Freud's idea of the Oedipus complex (e.g. Freud 1999: 201–4) has had a major impact on the ways these works have been read. The plays have held a dominant cultural position, inspiring translations and re-interpretations that make use of them for a variety of political purposes – for instance, to claim higher status for subordinate or colonized countries, or to resist old models of Western imperialism.

Modern re-tellings of Sophocles' plays always look both backwards and sideways: back to the original text and sideways to contemporary culture and to the text's meanings

within its new historical context. Increasing consciousness of the complexities of ethnic and racial conflict has introduced the theme of race as a new strand in the interpretation of Sophocles' Oedipus plays in the past generation.

Before turning to two texts that set these plays in an African American context, I would like to mention what is probably the first attempt at a racially charged re-writing of Oedipus: Ola Rotimi's powerful play *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1971). The most striking feature of this drama is, by contrast with the American texts, the simplicity of its moral lesson. Tribal divisions are bad; mutual respect is good. We should bear in mind the possibility of this way of looking at the Oedipus story, the better to appreciate the complexity of the American approaches to a racial Sophocles.

Rotimi's text is politically problematic from an Africanist standpoint, in that he uses this Western European myth to criticize the African tradition of tribalism. The central lesson learnt by Rotimi's Oedipus – "Odewale" – is that he was wrong to kill a man from another tribe, not realizing that he was his own father. At the end of the play Odewale tells his people: "Do not blame the gods [...] My people, learn from my fall" (Rotimi 1971: 71). Odewale – an Oedipus who has a far more obvious "tragic flaw" than Sophocles' original ever had – blames himself for his single-minded determination to defend his own tribe, even at the cost of killing those from neighboring tribes. He is – unlike Shakespeare's Othello – a man easily moved, all too quick to attack in a pre-emptive self-defense: "They knew my weakness: the weakness of a man easily moved to the defense of his tribe against others" (p. 71). The moral of the story is, clearly, that the people of Nigeria, and perhaps of Africa in general, must recognize the fact of their kinship and give up the old divisions between tribes.

3 *The Gospel at Colonus*

The Gospel at Colonus is a musical version of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, set in the context of an African American Pentecostalist church service. Emerging as a companion piece to the "doo-wop opera" *Sister Suzie Cinema*, the work was first performed as a stand-alone piece at the Brooklyn Academy of Music Next Wave Festival in 1983 (with an all-star cast – including Morgan Freeman as Preacher Oedipus and the Five Blind Boys of Alabama as the Oedipus Quintet). *Gospel* toured the country, and the Philadelphia production of 1985 is available on DVD (Breuer and Telson 1985).

The Gospel at Colonus is one of the best known and most controversial modern adaptations of Greek tragedy. When the musical was first performed on Broadway, the *New York Times* critic Frank Rich condemned the "matching of Christian theology with Greek mythology" as a "marriage of glib intellectual convenience that distorts and dilutes both" (Rich 1988). Other critics found in it a "brilliant synthesis of an enduring classical plot wedded to the indigenous storytelling tradition, both narrative and musical, of its American Pentecostal church setting" (D'Aponte 1991: 106).

It could be argued that *The Gospel at Colonus*, which has been read as "a stunning metaphor for the easing of Black-White relations around the world" (p. 106), is the American parallel to Rotimi's interpretation of the Oedipus story as a parable about the importance of overcoming tribal and ethnic divisions. Oedipus, despite his pollution, is welcomed into Colonus, and his story of redemption and liberation can be seen as an image of the integration of blacks into mainstream American culture and society.

But this interpretation is neglectful of two important basic facts about *Gospel*: that all its characters, not just Oedipus himself, are black; and that its co-authors – Lee Breuer, who adapted the words from Robert Fitzgerald’s translation of Sophocles, and Bob Telson, who wrote the music – are white.

The issue of tribal conflict within Nigeria is, of course, significantly different from the problem of race relations in the United States, both because divisions between blacks and whites are marked in an obvious way, by skin color, and because the history of slavery and generations of social inequality have created an enormous imbalance of power between African and Caucasian Americans: the two tribes are not equal neighbors. The complexity of race relations in America is recognized by the most successful attempts to re-write Sophocles’ Oedipus plays in an American context – either consciously, as in the case of Rita Dove’s *The Darker Face of the Earth* (discussed below), or unconsciously – as, arguably, in the case of *Gospel*.

Lee Breuer, the author of the libretto, had a clear political agenda in transferring Sophocles’ play into the context of a Pentecostalist service. He has said in interview, “I am trying to work against measuring everything by European rules” (Cody and Breuer 1989: 61). Asked whether his gestures of “interculturalism” – such as the combination of ancient Greek tragedy with modern, Christian, black American traditions – may risk “depoliticizing” or “neutralizing” culture, Breuer insisted that his hope was to see “the resurgence of cultures that have been wiped out by the European imperative.” An important goal in the production of *Gospel* was presumably to give African American traditions greater cultural prominence by combining gospel music with the “high culture” of Greek tragedy.

But one of the most interesting aspects of this work is the ambiguity it creates about who Oedipus may be, and – a related set of questions – who the outcast and who the insider are. This set of issues is paralleled both by the relationship between the Pentecostal context and the imported classical text (Robert Fitzgerald’s translation of *Oedipus at Colonus*), and by the relationship of the all-black cast with the all-white director and composer. It is also applicable to Oedipus himself. The part of Oedipus is divided, in *Gospel*, between multiple different actors: Morgan Freeman plays “Preacher Oedipus” as well as the Messenger, while the Five Blind Boys of Alabama play Singer Oedipus. The multiplication of performers makes particularly obvious the contradiction within the Sophoclean character in the source play: he is both the most authoritative figure in the drama and a blind, broken old man, desperate for sanctuary.

Lee Breuer has suggested that he sees *Oedipus at Colonus* in particular, and Greek tragedy in general, in terms of “a communal catharsis which forges religious, cultural and political bonds” (Breuer and Telson 1989: ix), which is parallel, in his eyes, to the “power of the Pentecostal service.” Modern classical scholars have generally moved some distance away from religious readings of *Oedipus at Colonus*, as well as of tragedy as an institution; political readings have been more popular over the past ten years or so (Wilson 1997 gives a powerful attack on the interpretation of the play as a religious “suppliant drama”).

But the important question here is not whether Breuer is right or wrong as an interpreter of Sophocles within an Athenian context, but rather what the effect is of his idea of an oddly contentless “catharsis,” a shared emotional experience that is available to anybody, regardless of their specific religious beliefs and cultural background. One might well object that this notion robs both the Christian and the Greek tradition of any specific meaning: a committed worshipper of a Pentecostal God would not, and should not, identify his or her experience with that of an ancient participant in a festival to Dionysus.

Oedipus, as critics of *Gospel* pointed out, is not really equivalent to Christ; and one might well feel suspicious about the pursuit of emotionally intense experience and of the sensation of healing without any corresponding religious or intellectual commitment.

I would suggest that part of the power of *Gospel* in performance – apart from the brilliance of its musical score and the talent of its performers – lies precisely in the fact that the text does deal with this issue, perhaps without Breuer's conscious knowledge. There are powerful musical renditions of the confrontation between the treacherous Creon and Oedipus, and between Oedipus and his bad son, Polyneices. When Creon steals away Oedipus' daughters, the whole internal audience of singers turns on him, and as the climax of the first part of the drama, we hear two versions of the Ode to Man from the *Antigone* (S. *Ant.* 332–75), “Numberless are the world's wonders”: the first is spoken by Theseus, the second sung by the Ismene Quartet (Breuer and Telson 1985: chapter 8). The effect in context is to associate Oedipus, even at his most vulnerable, with the power of humanity in general, and also to suggest that Oedipus' enemies Creon and Polyneices are not merely evil, but inhuman.

The Polyneices scene, which comes immediately after the Ode to Man in *Gospel*, seems particularly hard to integrate with the Christian setting: one may well wonder why a man who confesses his sins should be refused absolution. Polyneices makes extensive use of religious language, telling his father, “I come on a pilgrimage!” (Breuer and Telson 1989: 38). If Breuer's goal were to bring Sophocles closer to Christian ideology – as opposed to a Christian performance context – he could have suggested a possibility for redemption for the prodigal son. But Polyneices is utterly rejected, by the choral audience, by Preacher Oedipus – who hurls at him the word “LIAR!” – and by Singer Oedipus, who tells him: “You are no son of mine!” (p. 41).

In the Sophoclean original, the famous ode that includes the line “Not to be born is best of all” (S. *OC* 1224) precedes the encounter between Oedipus and his son. Breuer shifts the ode, placing it after the curse on Polyneices, and weaves it together with the Ode to Love from the *Antigone* (S. *Ant.* 781–805) and with Oedipus' triumphant announcement of his own future: “My soul is salvation bound!” (Breuer and Telson 1989: 44). By eliminating Antigone's attempt to mediate between her father and her brother (S. *OC* 1181–251), Breuer makes the rejection of Polyneices more unambiguously the right thing to do than it had been in Sophocles. Oedipus is saved, and Breuer creates a more uplifting, joyful ending than Sophocles did by reversing the lamentation of Antigone and Ismene with the Messenger speech, which tells of Oedipus' painless and mysterious departure from the world.

On a conscious level, then, Breuer hopes to present *Gospel* as an illustration of the possibility of total interculturalism and integration: African American and classical traditions are melded together, and both are honored. But it is striking that, through the structural and editorial decisions he makes, he actually strengthens the idea that Oedipus' final triumph depends on the absolute, and absolutely correct, rejection of certain people from his family and from his community. I would suggest that, if there is a submerged racial meaning to *Gospel*, it is not so much about the redemption of African Americans and their integration into mainstream US culture, but rather about the white director's and composer's sense of acceptance by the black community. The whole-hearted rejection of Creon and Polyneices can be read as a symptom of anxiety about the outsider's place within the Pentecostalist tradition: Breuer himself, who has no history of participation in this kind of service, acts as a kind of Polyneices figure, muscling in on a world where he does not belong.

4 *The Darker Face of the Earth*

Rita Dove's verse play, *The Darker Face of the Earth* (Dove 1994, revised as Dove 1998), transposes elements of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* to a slave plantation in antebellum South Carolina. One might think that re-casting Oedipus as a mulatto slave would seem gimmicky or forced, as if Dove were trying to serve too many masters at once. But Dove's language and her characters are imagined deeply enough to feel alive in their own right. The result is a complex piece of work, which – like the Sophoclean original – is concerned both with human dignity and with the limitations of human knowledge.

Augustus, the Oedipus figure, is the son of Amalia – the white upper-class wife of the plantation owner – and of Hector, a black slave. In the opening prologue, the Doctor attending on his birth, appalled to discover that the baby is black, persuades Amalia to let him take the child away in a basket, to a family in Charleston, SC, that specializes in raising mulatto slaves. Amalia's husband, Louis, resentful at the evidence of his wife's infidelity, slips a pair of spurs into the basket, hoping that they will kill the newborn baby; he survives, but with terrible scars on his side, which – Amalia tells him later – look like “crowns. /Or suns – exploding suns!” Augustus, here as elsewhere, is associated with Apollo, the Sun King god.

When the play proper begins, 20 years have passed, and an older, tougher, more bitter Amalia runs the slave plantation, while her husband spends his time withdrawn in his study, scrutinizing the stars, and Hector, gone crazy, haunts the swamp outside the plantation, hunting snakes. Amalia buys a notoriously rebellious new slave, who turns out, of course, to be Augustus. Augustus and Amalia become lovers, while at the same time Augustus joins a conspiracy of slaves, hoping to overthrow their white oppressors. Out in the swamp after talking to his fellow plotters, he meets Hector, who tells him: “You are planning a great evil” (Dove 1998: 118) and begins to scream and shout, risking giving away the whole conspiracy. To shut him up, Augustus throttles him and realizes regretfully what he has done: “Damn you, old man! I came to save you” (Dove 1998: 119). After the burial of Hector, the conspirators challenge Augustus to prove his loyalty by killing both Louis and Amalia. He knifes Louis, under the mistaken belief that Louis is his own father (having sired him with a black slave woman). Amalia and Augustus finally realize the truth about their relationship, and Amalia stabs herself just as the slaves burst in, to their triumphant cry of “Freedom, freedom, freedom!”

Dove has commented: “I didn't want the play to be a kind of checklist against a Greek myth” (Pereira 1999: 186), and she clearly thinks it important that her own work be more than a version of Greek tragedy transposed to a different historical context. There are several important changes to the Sophoclean plot. For instance, Augustus kills Hector, his real father, only after he has already embarked on his relationship with Amalia, his mother; and the killing is politically motivated rather than merely the result of a chance meeting (unlike the killing of Laius at the crossroads). Moreover, Augustus has two father-figures, not one, and he kills the man whom he believes to be his father – Louis, whose name obviously recalls that of Laius – on purpose, not by accident: unlike Oedipus, he wants to be a parricide. More generally, the historical context for Dove's play – which is set in a specific place, South Carolina, and at a specific time, around 1820 and then ahead to 1840 – is quite different from Sophocles' mythic setting in Thebes, and it makes it possible to read *The Darker Face* as a play concerned primarily with race, slavery, and the African American experience.

But there are resonances between Dove's text and Sophocles' that go beyond the details of plot. Dove made significant changes to the play in the course of her revisions (Dove 1994, 1998; Sexton 2008), most obviously to the ending: in the original version Augustus was shot dead by the conspirators, whereas in the revised version he survives, haunted by his discovery. Dove has commented that she did not change the ending in order to conform more precisely to the Sophoclean original; rather she realized – after talking to her daughter – that survival was a more appropriate, and more terrible, ending for the character's story than death could be. Dove is committed to making her text work on its own terms, which makes it particularly striking that these terms sometimes overlap with those of Sophocles.

Sophoclean themes that may seem, on a first reading, to be absent from Dove's version of the story are often used as central elements in its metaphorical structure. The most notable of these reworked motifs are the kingship of Oedipus and the plague at Thebes.

There is, of course, no real royal family in Dove's play. But her text suggests a complex meditation on what kingship should mean and, more generally, on the relationship between power and personal responsibility. When Augustus first meets his new fellow slaves on the plantation, one of them asks him: "Au-gus-tus? [...] What kind of name is that?" and he replies, to the uneasy bewilderment of his listeners: "The name of a king" (Dove 1998: 47). The declaration invites the other slaves to view Augustus as a natural leader, not merely because his name is that of a king, but also because he, unlike the rest of them, can trace the classical origins of their slave names. Augustus, who has been educated and has read "Milton. The Bible./And the Tales of the Greeks" (p. 83), feels in control of foreign, white people's learning and their riddles, and this knowledge seems to make him a king among his own people. But Augustus is importantly inaccurate in his claim about his own name. The Roman Augustus called himself *Princeps*, "First Man" or "Leader," and later "Emperor" (*Imperator*, literally "supreme military commander with *imperium*"); but he was never king (*rex*) – a title extremely unpopular in Rome, which hung on to the notion of republicanism at all times after the expulsion of its last (half-mythical) king (Tarquinius Superbus). Augustus' mistake hints at his weakness as a political leader: he acts out of a personal, lifelong resentment at the supposed white man who, he believes, raped his black mother – rather than from a desire to build a new and more egalitarian society, in which slavery might be abolished. Phebe, the slave girl who falls in love with Augustus, tells him that, when he talks about victory and vengeance, it is "[a]s if you didn't care about/anyone's pain but yours" (p. 138).

Augustus is by no means the only "king" in *Darker Face*. Both Hector and Louis are presented as mad, Lear-like kings, in exile from their kingdoms. Louis, rightful owner of the plantation, leaves its governing to his wife and spends his nights star-gazing, searching for a revelation in the heavens, while Hector hunts snakes in the swamp and tells Augustus: "This is my home now./I am king here" (p. 117). Kingship is possible only through withdrawal from human society.

Amalia views her own position as ruler of the plantation as incompatible with her own emotional needs: she tells Augustus: "A master cannot allow himself/the privilege of sorrow. A master/must rule or die" (p. 128). She tells a fairy-story in which she – daughter of the old plantation owner – is the daughter of a "king" who tries to force her into marriage; she tries to run away, but she finds to her horror that – through the dream-logic of a fairy-tale – a pebble inside her shoe turns first into her father's head, then into her husband's, and then into her own (pp. 122–3). The burden of royalty becomes an image

of the woman's inability to escape from herself. Amalia longs for a "sweet" fairy-tale world in which love might be possible and she and her lover or her son could be happy together; but each reference to herself as "princess" and to Augustus as "prince" is tainted by violence (p. 129). In one of the most touching moments in the play, Amalia tries to tell Augustus how much she loved his baby self: "Silk for my prince, and a canopy of roses! / You were so tiny [...] so sweet and tiny. / I didn't know about the spurs" (p. 157).

In Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* the title character opens the play by defining good kingship in terms of the intimate, family-like relationship that ought to exist between a king and his people. When his people are dying of the plague, Oedipus addresses them as "Children" (*OT* 1) and declares: "My spirit groans / for city and myself and you at once" (ll. 63–4). The ideal of a close bond that ought to exist between ruler and ruled is brutally shattered in the only literal description of the plague in *Darker Face*, when Phebe tells Augustus the terrible story of her mother's death. The mother, a house slave who used to sneak food and wild flowers and take them out to the field hands even when they were afflicted with fever, became sick herself. When Amalia's father, "Massa Jennings," found out, she begged him for shelter: "'Where am I gonna lay / my poor sick head?' she asked" (Dove 1998: 102). But Jennings, no Oedipus, refuses to acknowledge any connection between his sick slaves and himself. He asks her: "You dare ask me what to do / with your nappy black head?" (p. 102); then he leaves her to die.

In *Oedipus Tyrannus* sickness is metaphorical as well as literal: Oedipus acknowledges the physical sickness of the plague but is unable to see the sickness of his own pollution, even as he declares: "there is not one of you, sick thought you are, / that is as sick as I myself" (*S. OT* 60–1). Metaphorical as well as literal sickness, scars, and wounding form an important thread in *Darker Face*. Augustus' body is marked twice over: by the spurs with which Louis tried to kill him as a baby, and by the later floggings he has received as a slave. Amalia, caressing the latter, comments: "Your back is like a book / no one can bear to read to the end" (Dove 1998: 129; on the association between scars and reading in this play, see Carlisle 2000). Her more optimistic reading of the spur scars, as magical markings of a prince in disguise, is both right and wrong: they do mark Augustus with a secret higher birth, but not in a good way. Both sets of scars represent books that are neither legible nor erasable: as the Doctor says in the beginning: "Some mistakes you live with until you die" (Dove 1998: 23).

Augustus is, of course, aware of his scars, but he fails to realize that the pain they represent cannot be healed by any act of revenge. Scylla, the voodoo prophetess and the Teiresias figure of *Darker Face*, warns Phebe that, despite his cleverness and worldly knowledge, Augustus is afflicted by an internal wound that can never be healed: "what's festering inside him / nothing this side of the living / can heal" (p. 111). Augustus has multiple wounds: the literal scars of spurs and beatings and the internal scars caused both by slavery and by the horrible truth of his own relationship with his family. In the end, after Amalia dies in his arms, the opening of the personal wounds seems also to provoke the opening of the old wounds of slavery: he has visions – like Orestes with the Furies – of the incurable suffering he has seen: "so many of them, limping, with brands on their cheeks!" (p. 161). For the audience or the reader, the play itself makes fresh the pain of a long American history of racial oppression. Derek Walcott once commented that literature opens up old wounds. Literature makes one alive to intense feelings, including painful emotions that we might prefer to let heal.

But one of the strengths of *Darker Face* is that, like all great drama, it tells its story from multiple different points of view. The thinnest and least important characters, who

go for the most part unnamed, are the conspirators: they view slavery in simple, “black and white” terms, as a conflict between good and evil, freedom and oppression, and they regard rebellion as a fulfillment of “fate” (“May fate be with you” is their password). By contrast, all the main characters have their own, complex and clearly individuated ways of making sense of the relationship between the personal and the political – or the meta-physical. Amalia’s pride and reflective re-tellings of her own life-story are a quite different strategy from Augustus’ faith in his own reason and his own determination. It is different again from Louis’ astronomy and astrology, the slave chorus’ apocalyptic Christianity, Scylla’s voodoo powers, Hector’s battle against the snakes of evil, or the slave girl Phebe’s love. Dove’s acknowledgment of the limitation of any single individual’s point of view is an essential feature of her work, and it is one of her most Sophoclean characteristics.

One might well ask why Dove chooses to use Sophocles’ text at all, rather than simply creating her own historical drama. A possible answer would be that she wants to claim the cultural capital of a famous and prestigious source, to make her own story seem more important. But there is a deeper affinity between Sophocles and Dove. Both writers are interested in the human struggle to interpret and make sense of their world. It is worth remembering that one of Sophocles’ major departures from earlier treatments of the Oedipus story was the introduction of more oracles: *Oedipus Tyrannus* is not – as Aeschylus’ version probably was – a drama about the fulfillment of a family curse, but rather one about how a set of divine prophecies gradually come to be understood. In *Darker Face*, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* – as well as classical literature in general – is itself one of the quasi-oracular systems within which the story unfolds.

When we first see Amalia and Augustus talking to one another, Amalia shows Augustus the book she is reading – a translation of a Greek classic, presumably *Oedipus Tyrannus* itself – and asks him whether he finds it “Too difficult?” (Dove 1998: 83). He responds: “I’ve read that one already./ In my opinion, the Greeks were a bit too predictable” (p. 84). On one level, Dove is announcing her own independence from Sophocles: there is no guarantee that this play will turn out as the Greek one did, and we are given no license to assume that our knowledge of Sophocles will be any help in understanding the characters’ situation in *Darker Face*. On another, Augustus’ arrogant rejection of all traditions of interpretation, whether Western or African, leaves him no way to make sense of his life except, as Phebe tells him, in terms of hatred.

Scylla and Hector, the two most explicitly African characters in the play, offer an alternative model for interpretation, which turns out to be oddly compatible with the Sophoclean intertext. Augustus rejects Scylla’s warnings, just as Oedipus does with Teiresias; he also dismisses, as madness or “swamp fever” (p. 115), the ramblings on evil of his true father, Hector. But both Scylla and Hector recognize a deity whose workings can be clearly seen in Augustus’ own story. Hector and Scylla repeatedly say: “Eshu Elewa ogo gbogo!” (pp. 52, 54, 96, 120, 135, 136); only when Amalia dies does Augustus himself inherit the phrase: “(*calling out in anguish*) Eshu Elewa ogo gbogo!” (p. 160). No critic of the play, to my knowledge, discusses the meaning of this important line: those who mention it at all do not translate it and treat it simply as evidence of Hector and Scylla’s “African-ness” (Wetmore 2003: 120). But the line has much greater specific resonance, alluding as it does to the Orishu god of the crossroads, god of ambiguity and double meanings: Eshu Elewa. The line is Yoruba for: “All glory to Eshu Elewa!” or “Hail to Eshu Elewa!”

The Orisu religion originated in West Africa, and versions of it came to the US along with West African slaves; Eshu Elewa (also known as Esu) was one of the most important

gods of the diaspora religion. Henry Louis Gates has argued that Esu should be seen as a key figure to read African American literature through: the doubling, two-faced, trickerster god suggests a theoretical apparatus for understanding the position of black writing within a dominant white culture (Gates 1988). Legends about Esu present him as the messenger of the other gods and as the deity whose central fields are language and interpretation as well as sexual desire and sexual intercourse: he is the god who operates at the middle point, the crossroads, between multiple meanings, divergent paths, or different people. A common story describes how Esu went through a field wearing a hat that was black on one side, white on the other. Two men who had seen the god from different sides began to argue about the color of his hat. The next day, the god himself returns and shows them his two-sided hat (Gates 1988: 32–5). The men’s mistake, which all human beings tend to make, was their failure to realize the limitations of their own point of view.

Within *Darker Face* Eshu Elewa takes on the role of Sophocles’ Apollo, the god whose riddling prophecies are only belatedly understood by their human enactors. Augustus’ final recognition of Eshu Elewa echoes Oedipus’ cry to the chorus, after his recognition and his self-blinding: “It was Apollo, friends, Apollo, that brought this bitterness, my sorrows to completion” (*S. OT* 1329–30). In the earlier draft of the play, Dove made Augustus present himself as the bastard child of Apollo, half-brother of Phaethon, come with an obscure mission to the inhabitants of earth (Dove 1994: 104–7). In the revised version the passage is cut, leaving the divine background to the events more mysterious and Augustus himself more determinedly secular. Sophocles rather than Apollo becomes the primary classical counterpart to the riddling god of West Africa.

The title of the play in itself points to ambiguity – a contrast between light and dark – which, like the light and darkness imagery of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, can be read in more than one way. Augustus tells Amalia a story about his origins, which begins:

One soft spring night
when the pear blossoms
cast their pale faces
on the darker face of the earth,
Massa stood up from the porch swing,
and said to himself, “I think
I’ll make me another bright-eyed pickaninny.”
Then he stretched and headed
for my mother’s cabin... (Dove 1998: 92)

The relationship between the pear blossoms and the “darker face of the earth” clearly mirrors the racial miscegenation implicit in the scene: white skin looms above black just as the white flowers hover over the dark earth. Critics have suggested that there is implicit violence in the imagery here, but what seems most striking about it is its deliberate gentleness. The night is “soft,” and the blossoms – from a pear-tree, that Christmas emblem of true love – seem barely to touch the earth: “cast their pale faces” leaves it ambiguous whether, or when, the flowers move from looking down at the earth to falling upon it.

Why, then, does Augustus see the terrible violence of his mother’s rape in such gentle terms? One obvious answer is that the horror can be made all the more horrible through a falsely gentle telling: the racially derogatory language (“pickaninny”) contrasts sharply with the softness of the natural description, and we are left to imagine the brutality that Augustus’ language withholds from us.

But the audience is also aware that Augustus' story is pure fantasy: his mother was actually white, his father was black, and he is the product, not of rape, but of a consensual relationship. Dove is therefore using her imagery to tell a story of which her character is so far unaware. Sophocles uses dramatic irony to make Oedipus speak words that are more true than he knows, as when he says he will fight in defense of Laius "as if for my father" (S. *OT* 264). Similarly, Augustus' soft blossoms acknowledge a truth that the speaker himself, consumed with hatred, cannot see: that his black father and his white mother were in love – and that the white oppressor may be as weak or vulnerable as her black victim.

Love is what both Augustus and Amalia are failing to recognize, as Phebe, the slave girl who falls for him, insists. Repeated references to flowers, especially roses, reinforce the association between blooms and love, the hidden beauty that muddles the sharp division between black and white: as Augustus reluctantly tells Amalia, Hector gave her one red rose on her wedding day (Dove 1998: 22), and his gift of a perfect flower contrasts sharply with Louis' gift to his wife and her son: his riding spurs. But love, especially love between black and white, is, within this play, the scariest thing of all. It makes it impossible to see things in the simple terms of the revolutionaries. Just before he meets and kills Hector, Augustus asks softly: "If fear eats out the heart/what does love do?" (p. 114). Augustus, who has been fearless about physical pain, finds himself overwhelmed by his mother's love for his father and for himself.

A racial interpretation – the white blossoms represent the white slave-owner, the dark earth, his or her black sex object – is obviously tempting in this context. Malek Pereira has suggested that we should read this text – and Dove's oeuvre in general – in terms of anxiety about miscegenation and "cosmopolitanism" (Pereira 2003). Dove, a highly educated African American from a middle-class background who is married to a white West German man, can be seen as using the themes of incest and racial miscegenation to explore her anxieties about her own place as heir to white and black cultural traditions alike. The limitation of Pereira's reading is that it suggests that Dove identifies primarily, perhaps solely, with the mulatto, Augustus. In fact, Dove seems to channel at least as much energy into the white Amalia, the black Phebe, and the prophetic poet Scylla.

Dove's text suggests that reading the pear blooms in racial terms is itself a partial vision. The novel issue of race only adds an extra layer to the Sophoclean images of light and darkness, blindness and insight, by which *Oedipus Tyrannus* shows us how its king struggles with the god's riddles. The darker face of the moon is the side that we, from the angle of our location on earth, can never see. Dove once asked in an interview: "Why can't we admit uncertainty into our lives?" (Pereira 1999: 213). The image of the "darker face of the earth" is reminder that even on earth there are always sides of experience that we can never see. This is a truth not confined to the black characters: all the major figures in the drama, white and black, are limited to a vision of only one half of Eshu Eliwa's cap.

Guide to Further Reading

The Darker Face of the Earth and *The Gospel at Colonus* are both available in paperback: Dove (1998) and Breuer and Telson (1989). *The Gospel at Colonus* is also available on DVD, in a recording of the superb Philadelphia production with Morgan Freeman (Breuer and Telson 1985).

For further discussion of the work of Rita Dove in particular, there are two important monographs: Steffen (2001) and Pereira (2003). Both put *Darker Face* into the context of the poet's entire oeuvre.

Gospel at Colonus and *Darker Face of the Earth* are both discussed by Kevin Wetmore (2003), who also provides a useful introduction to issues of African American adaptations of Greek tragedy from an Africanist perspective.

For an analysis of the position of classical literature and of classical studies as a discipline, made from the point of view of postcolonial and African Americanist studies, good starting points are Goff (2005) and Hardwick and Gillespie (2007). Bernal (1987) is highly controversial, but very important.

For more general discussions of the reception of Greek tragedy, and of Oedipus in particular, see Hall and Macintosh (2005) and Edmunds (2006).

A useful and provocative introduction to the study of reception and classical literature is Martindale and Thomas (2006). Two excellent recent collected volumes give a good sense of the current state of the field and provide insight into many further areas for exploration: Kallendorf (2007) and Hardwick and Stray (2008).

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