

**CHARACTER THROUGH INTERACTION:
SOPHOCLES AND THE DELINEATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL**

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Lucy Van Essen-Fishman
Brasenose College, Oxford

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I argue that Sophoclean characters take shape through a number of kinds of interaction. On the most basic level, interaction occurs between characters; interactions between characters, however, provide a framework for interactions between those characters and a variety of more abstract concepts. These interactions, by allowing characters to situate themselves with respect to concepts such as, for example, the social roles which shape the society of the play, provide a complex picture of the personalities depicted onstage; a fuller view of Antigone's personality, for example, emerges both from her own interactions with the concept of sisterhood and from the differences between her interactions with that concept and Ismene's. At the same time, these interactions involve the audience in both the construction and the interpretation of Sophoclean characters; as they watch figures interact with each other onstage, the audience, in turn, interact with their own prior knowledge of the concepts which drive the characters of a play.

In my five chapters, I discuss five different areas of interaction. In my first chapter, I look at interactions between characters and myth, arguing that Sophoclean characters emerge out of a tension between novelty and familiarity. In my second chapter, I discuss the interactions between characters and their social roles, looking at the problem of appropriate role performance as it applies to Sophoclean characters. My third chapter deals with characters and their memories; I argue that Sophoclean characters shape and are shaped by their memories of past events depending on shifting present circumstances. In my fourth chapter, I discuss the interactions between characters and the passage of time and suggest that Sophoclean figures are characterized by the ways in which they move through time and respond to its passage. In my final chapter, I look at the use of general statements by Sophoclean characters, arguing that the ability of characters to generalize successfully provides a useful measure of their ability to function in the world of the play.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Above all, I would like to thank my parents, who rashly taught me to love stories and the people in them and have been dealing with the consequences ever since, and Dr Felix Budelmann, who, having supervised both my MPhil and my DPhil with great patience and care, has been throughout the process a source of remarkable good humour, rigorous criticism, and unfailing support.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following commentaries will be listed in the footnotes by author's name only:

Brown	Brown, A. 1987. <i>Sophocles: Antigone</i> . Warminster: Aris & Phillips.
Campbell	Campbell, L. 1871-1881. <i>Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments</i> . 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Davies	Davies, M. 1991. <i>Sophocles: Trachiniae</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Dawe	Dawe, R. D. 2006. <i>Sophocles: Oedipus Rex</i> . 2 nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Easterling	Easterling, P. E. 1982. <i>Sophocles: Trachiniae</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Finglass	Finglass, P. J. 2007. <i>Sophocles: Electra</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Finglass	Finglass, P. J. 2011. <i>Sophocles: Ajax</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Garvie	Garvie, A. F. 1998. <i>Sophocles: Ajax</i> . Warminster: Aris & Phillips.
Griffith	Griffith, M. 1999. <i>Sophocles: Antigone</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Guidorizzi	Guidorizzi, G., G. Avezzi, and G. Cerri. 2008. <i>Sofocle: Edipo a Colono</i> . Rome: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla.
Jebb	Jebb, R. C. 1883-1896. <i>Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments</i> . 7 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Kamerbeek	Kamerbeek, J. C. 1953-1984. <i>The Plays of Sophocles: Commentaries</i> . Leiden: Brill.
Kells	Kells, J. H. 1973. <i>Sophocles: Electra</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Pucci	Pucci, P., G. Avezzi, and G. Cerri. 2003. <i>Sofocle: Filottete</i> . Rome: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla.
Schein	Schein, S. L. 2013. <i>Sophocles: Philoctetes</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

All quotations from Sophocles are taken from the Oxford Classical Text of Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (Oxford, 1990). Quotations from other Greek authors are taken from the current Oxford Classical Text unless otherwise noted

INTRODUCTION

As a study of Sophoclean character, this thesis is a study not only of who the figures who inhabit the tragedies of Sophocles are, but of how those figures take shape over the course of their respective plays and of how they work upon the imaginations of their audience. Character in tragedy has long been of profound interest to scholars, readers, and audiences; although Aristotle maintains in the *Poetics* that tragedy is primarily a representation of action and is only a representation of character insofar as characters carry out actions (1450b), he nevertheless devotes a significant amount of energy to describing the sorts of people who ought to be represented in tragedy (1452b-1453a, 1454a). Much more recently, various scholars have argued that tragedy is about character after all; Knox begins *The Heroic Temper* with the claim that ‘the existence of a single central character’ is central to ‘the modern concept of tragic drama’, and Gould comments, ‘Plays, we say, are about people, about people doing and saying things’.¹

Neither Knox’s opening premise nor Gould’s has gone uncontested; Knox’s ‘modern concept of tragic drama’ is heavily reliant on Romantic ideas about the primacy of the individual, while Gould devotes the rest of his essay to picking apart the apparently straightforward statement with which he began.² Insofar as Greek tragedies are about people, they are about a different sort of people than we might see walking down the street; not only are the characters of Greek tragedies figures from the heroic past as seen through the lens of fifth-century Athens, but they are also dramatic constructs, whose existence is defined in large part by the decisions of the playwright and, in the case of

¹ Knox 1964:1, Gould 1978:43. Gould refers also to Vickers (1973:3), who claims, ‘Greek tragedy is about people, and what they do to each other’.

² Rutherford 2012:287 discusses ‘the difficulties of applying to tragedy a concept of character derived from more naturalistic drama or from the nineteenth-century realist novel’.

performance, by the various figures involved in the production.³ Even though dramatic characters differ in many ways from real people, character remains a powerful element of the audience's experience of tragedy.⁴ I would like to suggest, moreover, that at many points in the tragedies of Sophocles, the text encourages a particular focus on character and the effect of character on the action of the play. It is my goal therefore to examine the ways in which Sophoclean characters are defined within their plays, and, in turn, the ways in which the plays are defined by the characters who inhabit them.

Sophoclean figures, I argue, are not characterized all at once, but are instead defined through a complex network of interactions.⁵ Not only do Sophoclean characters interact with each other onstage, but they are also shown to interact with their own ideas of themselves, and, mediated by the audience, to interact with generic convention and the mythological framework that underlies their plays. These multiple levels of interaction often take place simultaneously, contributing in different ways to the audience's knowledge of a character. In the opening scenes of Sophocles' *Electra*, for example, Electra interacts with her own personal history as she speaks about the behaviour appropriate for a daughter of Agamemnon, Electra argues about her role and the appropriate way to fulfil it with both the chorus and Chrysothemis, and the audience frame what they see in the context both of their own knowledge of family dynamics and of their prior knowledge of the particular circumstances in the house of Atreus. The figure of Electra who takes shape over the course of the beginning of the play is the sum-total of the interactions which have contributed in different ways to her identity.

³ Gould 1978 lays out some of the possible effects of dramatic form on an audience's perception of Greek tragic character. Goldhill 1986:144-147 examines some of the differences between epic and tragic treatments of heroes.

⁴ On the importance of character in the experience of tragedy, see, e.g., Gould 1978:43-44, Easterling 1990:89-90, Seidensticker 2008, Thévenet 2009:11, Budelmann and Easterling 2010:169-170.

⁵ Easterling 1990:88 anticipates this approach when she says that scholars of tragic character should 'attend to the *dynamics of action and interaction* rather than look for static "character portraits" with the notion of a unitary character as our starting point' (Easterling's emphasis). Rutherford 2012:286 similarly notes that 'characters do not exist in isolation but in context'.

As something which takes place through interaction, character cannot be detached from plot.⁶ On a very basic level, the interactions between characters are often a driving force in the events of a play; the plots of many Greek tragedies centre around clashes between figures with conflicting priorities and views of the world. More interestingly, the interactions which shape character often provide the audience with a new lens through which to view the events of the play. Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, for example, begins with Odysseus giving the young Neoptolemus an assignment, which, while crucial to the success of the Trojan War, is nonetheless said to be antithetical to the character of Neoptolemus.⁷ Both Neoptolemus' task, the achievement of which comprises the basic plot of the tragedy, and his character gain new dimensions after the entrance of Philoctetes; from the arrival of the wounded hero until the end of the play, Neoptolemus' actions are filtered through the character of Philoctetes, who provides his own perspective on the Greek enterprise, loyalty to one's companions, and what it might mean to be the son of Achilles.⁸ At every point, the actions which drive the plot are tied to issues of character; who people are affects what they do, and we, the audience, judge the actions of characters according to who we think the characters are.⁹

By examining Sophoclean characterization through the lens of the interactions which enable character to take shape, I hope to arrive at an interpretation which takes into account the important ways in which Sophoclean characters resemble real human beings while nevertheless remaining theatrical constructions. Because Sophoclean characters take shape through a variety of interactions, the audience must play an active part in assembling disparate pieces of information into defined characters. This process of piecing together information has much in common with the way we come to know other

⁶ Pfister 1988:160 argues for the interdependence of dramatic figures and plot. Currie 2009 discusses the relationship between character and narrative in fictional narratives, including drama.

⁷ See, e.g., Alt 1961:146-147, Nussbaum 1976:32-33, Hawkins 1999:338-339.

⁸ Erbse 1966:187-190, Roisman 1997:145-147.

⁹ Bortolussi and Dixon 2003:148-149.

people in real life, and the multifaceted image of Sophoclean character which emerges from this process—including the gaps which remain even in the case of the most vividly defined characters—encourages the audience to consider Sophoclean characters as similar in many ways to real human beings. At the same time, the involvement of the audience in many of the interactions which define character reinforces the idea that, for all their complexities, Sophoclean characters, as dramatic constructions, exist in their own world and function according to their own rules.

SELFHOOD IN AND OUT OF DRAMA

Before discussing in detail the ways in which Sophoclean characters are shaped by interaction, it will be important to lay out some general ideas about what we talk about when we talk about character. ‘Character’ is one of a variety of terms used to describe people, both as they are in real life and as they appear in literature; scholars also use the terms ‘personality’ and ‘identity’ to refer to different aspects of who people are. The terms are distinguished in different ways by different scholars, and how they are defined has implications for any given writer’s approach to the issue of real or literary personhood.¹⁰ Although I am not in this thesis invested in any particular philosophical model of real-life selfhood—my concern is with the ways in which dramatic characters come into being, not with the ontological status of the self—several common ways of thinking about selfhood in real life can be applied in different ways to the study of dramatic characters, and, in particular, the figures who inhabit Sophoclean tragedy.

The Oxford English Dictionary begins its definition of ‘self’, in its philosophical usage, as ‘That which in a person is really and intrinsically *he* (in contradistinction to what

¹⁰ States 1985 and Gill 1986, both of whom rely on a distinction between character and personality, define the terms slightly differently in their respective studies of character in drama.

is adventitious)'.¹¹ This definition opens the door to a vast network of philosophical issues, among which a few recurring questions will be particularly relevant for my purposes here.¹² The first deals with the consistency of the self over time; while the definition above goes on to add, 'a permanent subject of successive and varying states of consciousness', the next definition refers to the self as 'what one is at a particular time or in a particular aspect or relation', and there is ongoing philosophical debate about whether or not it is worth talking about a unified self which persists over time and through changing circumstances.¹³ Related to the question of whether or not the self endures over time are a set of questions about possible forces in the development of the self: if each person has a coherent self, is that self born with the individual, or is it shaped gradually by the circumstances in which that individual lives? Similarly, to what extent, if at all, can the actions or intentions of an individual change that person's identity? In particular, recent studies of selfhood have increasingly looked at the self as it functions in society, suggesting that identity is both expressed and constructed through interaction with others.¹⁴

The questions of selfhood outlined above are complicated enough when they are applied to our own identity; although it is difficult to look at one's own self objectively, it is nonetheless tempting—quite possibly deceptively so—to feel that we have a reasonably complete picture of the forces which contribute to make us who we are. As soon as we

¹¹ *OED Online* 2014: self, *pron.*, *adj.*, and *n.*

¹² It should of course be noted that conceptions of the self vary greatly across cultures and have also varied greatly throughout history (Martin *et al.* 2010:3-5); Martin *et al.* 2010 and Siderits *et al.* 2010 provide a range or perspectives both on the history of the self and on current philosophies of selfhood. I will address differences between Classical Greek and contemporary ideas of selfhood below.

¹³ Martin 2010:10-19 provides a brief history of Western philosophical views on selfhood, drawing attention in particular to Locke's idea that personal identity is a matter of continuity of consciousness, and Hume's idea that the self is an illusion. Nagel 1971, arguing on the basis of experiments with split-brain patients that people do not have countable numbers of selves, suggests both that continuity of consciousness does not determine selfhood and that the distinction between reality and illusion in arguments about selfhood is not a clear one.

¹⁴ Enfield and Levinson 2006:4-7 discuss social interaction as the basis for interpersonal understanding. See also Martin *et al.* 2010:9, and Kockleman 2013.

begin to think about others, the situation changes drastically. Learning to make valid assumptions about the thought processes and mental states of others—developing a set of skills known collectively as Theory of Mind—has been identified as an important developmental stage, one which is crucial to an individual’s ability to function in society.¹⁵ When confronted with anyone else, our access to their self is necessarily more limited than our access to our own inner experience. In evaluating the self of someone else—in drawing conclusions about who that person is ‘really and intrinsically’, to go back to the OED—we must rely on a piecemeal body of evidence. We draw some conclusions from how we see people behave under various circumstances, we draw other conclusions based on what we hear of them from others, and we draw further conclusions from what we hear them say for and about themselves; we may also extrapolate from our own experience to round out elements of their character which we assume to be similar to our own.¹⁶ Although a developed Theory of Mind can give us some information about what goes on in the minds of others, all such knowledge is mediated, one way or another.

When we consider the identity of a dramatic character, we are engaging in a special form of thinking about someone else’s self. Not only are we confronted with all of the usual uncertainty which comes with trying to understand the feelings and motivations of another person, but we are also confronted with the fact that the entity we are considering is not really a person at all.¹⁷ Although I will be arguing throughout this thesis that audiences react to dramatic characters in many ways as if they were real people, audiences remain aware that the figures they see on stage are the creation of playwright

¹⁵ e.g., Baron-Cohen 1995, Enfield and Levinson 2006:4. Primack and Woodruff 1978:515 first coined the term ‘Theory of Mind’ in the context of primatology. The importance of the Theory of Mind in literary studies has been growing rapidly in recent years; see, e.g., Palmer 2004, Zunshine 2006, Ruffell 2008:45-50, and Budelmann 2010:116-118.

¹⁶ Astington 2006:185.

¹⁷ Lada-Richards 1997:68, Goldman 2000:53.

and actor, director and producer.¹⁸ For one thing, dramatic characters exist in a world which may not follow the same rules as the non-dramatic world, and this has implications for the forces that shape dramatic characters and the traits which those characters may have; Heracles, as the son of Zeus, perhaps cannot be expected to behave like any regular man. Dramatic characters, moreover, are written and acted in a certain way in order to achieve certain effects; the audience may not know what the playwright or actor had in mind in creating a role, but they remain to some extent aware that the character in question could have been made to be different—and that the play might have been different as a result.¹⁹

Our perception of dramatic characters involves a balancing act between our awareness that dramatic characters are not real people and the temptation to evaluate them as if they were real. As I said above, when we meet another person in real life, we have only limited access to that person's inner existence; we tend to assume, however, that such an inner existence does exist and we may speculate about the aspects of that existence to which we have no access.²⁰ In the case of dramatic characters, however, there is an important sense in which what we see is what we get; strictly speaking, a character only exists for the duration of the play, and, in fact, only exists while the actor playing that character is onstage, and we cannot assume that there are definite answers to the questions about character with which we may be left at the end of a play.²¹ Despite these important limitations, when characters speak about their mental processes or other aspects of their experience which are not directly visible to the audience, such hints may encourage the

¹⁸ This point has often been stressed; see, e.g., Gould 1978:43, Easterling 1997a:166, Goldman 2000:14, Hall 2006:37-38.

¹⁹ Gould 1978:43 discusses personality in drama as a function of language and gesture; States 1985:91-92 describes dramatic characters as being designed to do certain things.

²⁰ Baron-Cohen 1995:2-3, Astington 2006:185, Martin *et al* 2010:117.

²¹ Writing about characters in novels, Forster 1927:69 comments that fictional characters become real when the readers get the sense that the author knows more about the characters than he chooses to tell. Devlin 1989:82 comments on the ephemeral nature of theatrical events.

audience to think about—and construct—inner lives for dramatic characters to supplement the qualities which are visible on stage.

Characters in a play are concentrated in a way that real people are not, and this heightened level of intensity is a function of two related features of the presentation of dramatic character. First of all, the total body of information transmitted about a character over the course of a play is more limited than the total body of information which is theoretically available about a real-life personage; only so much can be said over the course of a play, and most plays represent only a small number of the supposed events of a character's life.²² Secondly, and partially as a result of the limited segment of life which is on display in any given drama, all of the information which is transmitted about a character over the course of a play matters. Since dramatic characters are created by playwrights to fulfil various dramatic functions, everything which they do and say reflects on their identities.²³ As is true with people in real life, some actions and words are more obviously reflective of the individual character of a dramatic personage than others, but the figures in a play can do nothing by accident. If we meet someone in real life and that person is short-tempered with us, we do not necessarily assume that she is by nature short-tempered—she may be short-tempered, but she may also be having a bad day or be preoccupied by something unrelated. When one figure in a play snaps at another, however, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, we, the audience, are likely to take that shortness of temper as a character point.²⁴

²² Aristotle claims that the events of a tragedy should take place over the course of a single day (*Poetics* 5.1449b); Lowe 2001:165-167 notes that choral odes can provide a 'some slight elasticity of offstage time' (165) and discusses the various ways in which dramatists can present events beyond the temporal bounds of the play. More recent dramas often encompass a broader timescale, but even those plays which take place over a number of years typically pass over a great deal between the beginning and the end of the play.

²³ States 1995:91, Easterling 1990:89-90.

²⁴ The text of a play may indicate whether an action is characteristic; in *Electra*, others frequently comment that Electra is acting as she always does, on which see Finglass *ad* 516-633 and Chapter 4 below.

On the whole, then, we interact differently with dramatic characters than we do with people in real life; not only are we, as readers or members of an audience, forced to look at figures in plays from the outside, but we are also aware that this external view of a dramatic character is, strictly speaking, all there is. At the same time, we employ some of the same strategies in judging dramatic characters which we do in thinking about other human beings.²⁵ We are accustomed to having some gaps in our understanding whenever we interact with another human being, and we employ both our own previous knowledge of the person in question and our sense of what might be expected of someone in that person's circumstances in order to fill in those gaps.²⁶ Although we remain aware that the reality of dramatic characters differs from the reality of the people we meet in daily life, we may nonetheless speculate about what might fill the gaps in our understanding.

GREEK TRAGIC CHARACTER

Discussing dramatic character as it pertains to Greek tragedy adds several new levels of complication. While many of the same issues apply to studying Greek tragic character which apply to interpreting the actions of others in real life or making sense of dramatic figures generally, some special reservations apply to a contemporary scholar considering the figures of Greek drama. The complications of studying Greek tragic character, as opposed to dramatic character more broadly, are twofold: on the one hand, we must consider the possibility that personal identity was for the Greeks of the fifth century B.C.E. a different concept than it is for a contemporary audience, and, on the other hand, we must consider the extent to which the theatrical conventions of Athenian tragic drama encouraged the audience to treat the figures on stage as if they were real people to

²⁵ Budelmann and Easterling 2010:171.

²⁶ Baron-Cohen 1995:2; Astington 2006:85.

whom normal standards of judging personality could be reasonably applied.²⁷ These two problems are related, and I will first lay out my approaches to them before moving on to a discussion of approaches to studying character in Greek tragedy, particularly Sophocles.

I will begin with some models for the ancient Greek idea of the self.²⁸ In a pair of highly influential studies of Greek ethics and philosophy published in the middle of the twentieth century, Snell and Adkins outline developmental models of Greek selfhood, which begin with the mindset of Homeric man, which is suggested to be essentially primitive, and continue along an upward trajectory through later Greek thought and successive stages of Western philosophy. According to this model, the individual self has grown progressively more important over time; Snell begins by suggesting that ‘man’s gradual understanding of himself is revealed to us in the career of Greek poetry and philosophy’ and goes on to argue over the course of the rest of *The Discovery of the Mind* that the Greeks of the Homeric age lacked a unified conception of the self, and that the development of such a concept of selfhood is the primary philosophical achievement of the next few centuries.²⁹ Adkins frames this development in terms of personal responsibility, arguing that the moral standards suggested by Plato and Aristotle have their roots in an earlier stage of Greek thinking, according to which moral responsibility for action is complicated by a variety of human and divine forces and generally taken to be less important than conspicuously visible success.³⁰ For both Snell and Adkins, Greek thought is an important source for all subsequent Western philosophy, but both warn their readers that the ancient Greek attitudes were fundamentally different from those held by most twentieth-century thinkers.

²⁷ Goldhill 1990:100-101 cautions against assuming ‘the categories of the person [are] cross-cultural *données*’.

²⁸ For a recent overview of the debate surrounding the Greek view of the self, see Thumiger 2007:3-7.

²⁹ Snell 1953:v.

³⁰ Adkins 1960:7-9 contains an outline of his main approach; chs. II and III deal with his conception of Homeric man, with pp. 55-57 stressing the importance of ‘conspicuous excellences’ over ‘quiet virtues.’

In the years since Snell and Adkins, scholars have moved away from the idea of a linear development from primitive Homeric thinking to contemporary enlightenment, reacting in particular against the suggestion that earlier stages in the Greek conception of the self were in some way inferior to those that followed.³¹ It remains clear, however, that the culture of ancient Greece is in many ways a foreign culture, and more recent scholars have worked to develop approaches to the study of ancient Greek culture and philosophy which acknowledge the major differences between ancient and contemporary thought without relying on a hierarchical classification of different philosophical systems.³² Notably, Christopher Gill has approached the Greek conception of personality in conjunction with a reappraisal of the ways in which contemporary thinkers discuss issues of personality and selfhood.³³ Gill's enterprise is not so much to distinguish between one way of thinking which focuses on the unity of the self and another which does not as it is to distinguish between different ways of conceptualizing the self; modern ideas about selfhood usually stem from a 'subjectivist' view of the self as a thinking entity, he argues, while ancient Greek thinkers conceptualized the self in more 'objectivist' terms, focusing as much on the individual's place in society as on the simple existence of the individual.³⁴ More recently, Thumiger has attempted to expand Gill's version of objectivity in order 'to overcome the opposition or choice between mental consciousness and reality', thus positing a view of the Greek self which cannot be detached from the world as a whole.³⁵

In approaching selfhood as it pertains to the construction of character in Greek drama, I will be taking my cue from those who argue that, although the Greeks of various

³¹ Halliwell 1990:37, e.g., argues that 'Snell and others have applied a faulty method and drawn unwarranted conclusions from it'.

³² Gill 1996:3-4 suggests that the structuralist anthropological approach to Greek culture espoused by Vernant and others offers a way of studying ancient Greek culture without labelling it as primitive or inferior.

³³ Gill 1996:4-5.

³⁴ Gill 1996:8-10.

³⁵ Thumiger 2007:8-9.

eras seem to have conceptualized the self differently than most Western scholars do today, differences in perspective do not preclude the discussion of selfhood in an ancient Greek context. Although it is widely acknowledged that differences between ancient Greek and contemporary values will have had considerable bearing on the interpretation of tragic character, recent scholarship has increasingly focused on elements of continuity which can still be identified.³⁶ For example, the idea propounded by Snell and Adkins that Homeric man lacked a unitary concept of the self was supported in large part by the fact that processes which we would now classify as mental functions are connected in Homer with several nouns (θυμός, ψυχή, and νόος), the distinctions between which are not clear; Halliwell argues, however, that the words used to describe a philosophical idea such as the self should not be taken as limiting the conceptualization of that idea.³⁷ Similarly, I argue that, although the terminology used to describe characters in Greek tragedy—their behaviour, their attitudes, their mental states—is not always the terminology which we would use today about people we might meet in our daily lives, many of the themes which emerge in contemporary discussions of selfhood are also important in Greek dramatic characterization. The tendency to interpret the mental states of others, moreover, is a cross-cultural one, and frequent references to various kinds of mentality in Greek tragedy suggest that ‘mind reading’ also has a place in the interpretation of ancient character.³⁸

The issue of generic convention likewise touches on perceived differences between Greek and contemporary thinking. When Aristotle describes tragedy as mimetic, he maintains that tragedy is primarily a mimesis not of characters, but of action and of life (1450a16-17); his emphasis on plot over character, however, is mitigated to some extent

³⁶ e.g., Griffith 1999:28-29, in discussing varied responses to Creon’s behaviour in *Antigone*, notes that while many modern scholars are quick to blame Creon, Demosthenes (19.247) expressed approval of the sentiments in Creon’s opening speech. Seidensticker 2008:38-39 argues that ‘we are dealing with a quantitative, and not with a qualitative difference’ between ancient and modern characterization.

³⁷ Snell 1953:8; Halliwell 1990:37-38.

³⁸ Baron-Cohen 1995: chs. 2 and 3 discusses the evolutionary basis for mind reading. Budelmann and Easterling 2010 discuss the cues for mind reading in Greek tragedy.

by the fact that his description of how plot should be represented relies heavily on the sort of characters who ought to be involved in a tragic plot. Despite the fact that even Aristotle thus grants significant importance to the figures who appear in tragedy, there remain other, practical issues to be considered when thinking about the extent to which tragedy represents people. As is frequently noted, the performance of fifth-century tragedy was highly stylized; tragic actors traditionally wore long robes which matched neither the everyday clothing of the fifth century nor that of the heroic age, and they also wore masks which prevented them from using facial expression to convey emotional responses on the part of the characters they portrayed.³⁹ All roles were played by men, the same three actors played all of the speaking roles in any given play, and it is unclear to what extent actors adapted their voices to different roles.⁴⁰ Critics who maintain that Greek tragedy cannot represent ‘real people’ have often pointed to these theatrical conventions as evidence, arguing both that the potential recognisability of actors with multiple roles suggests that realistic portrayal of individuals was not a priority on the ancient stage and that costume and mask explicitly distanced the figures onstage from people the audience might encounter in daily life.⁴¹

In thinking about the reality of tragic characters, it is worth looking back both on the aspects of personhood emphasized in classical Greek thinking and on my suggestion that differences in emphasis and terminology should not preclude the discussion of tragic character in terms which resonate with contemporary audiences. On the one hand, the stylization of fifth-century drama must have some effect on the aspects of its characters

³⁹ Gould 1978:48-50; Green 2002:97-99; Seidensticker 2008:339.

⁴⁰ Csapo 2002:140 suggests that ‘interest in representing women’s speech seems to have grown steadily in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.’, but he also suggests that it is less clear how distinctly idiosyncratic speech patterns were represented onstage.

⁴¹ Jones 1962:45 notes that the mask ‘has—more important is known to have—no inside’ and therefore argues that masking draws attention to the lack of reality behind theatrical spectacle. Wiles 2007:275 argues that ‘the mask insists that individuals are not unique, and transcending individuation is the main function of the tragic mask’.

which were visible to the audience; given the size of the Greek theatre, physical gestures must have been more emphatic than they would have been in daily life, and emotional responses which would in real life be expressed by subtle changes in facial expression or body language must have been either elided or verbalized—and therefore magnified.⁴² At the same time, it is important to note that all theatre, whether ancient or modern, represents character and action in a manner which is to some degree stylized or conventional.⁴³ What results from the stylized portrayal of Greek tragic figures is not a lack of physical characterization, but instead a kind of physical characterization which is specifically theatrical.⁴⁴ In their physical behaviour as in their words, dramatic characters are concentrated; attention is drawn to the gestures and expressions which matter, while those that would have less bearing on a particular scene are not brought to the audience's attention. The figures on stage are not real people, but they exhibit theatrical versions of many of the qualities expected of real people.⁴⁵

APPROACHES TO CHARACTER IN SOPHOCLES

The ideas about Greek selfhood and the ability of Greek drama to portray characters who resemble real people outlined above can be applied, with somewhat different results, to the works of any of the three surviving tragedians. Character functions differently in the plays of the three tragedians, however, and character in Sophocles looms particularly large both in the plays themselves and in their treatment at the hands of scholars. In this section, I will outline some influential approaches to Greek tragic, and particularly Sophoclean, character. From this starting point, I will proceed in the

⁴² Seidensticker 2008:340 notes the ability of tragic poets to draw attention to facial expression when necessary.

⁴³ Bain 1977:1-2 discusses the implied agreement between playwright and audience which occurs when we watch a play; see also States 1985:93-95, Pfister 1988:161, Goldman 2000:14.

⁴⁴ Lada-Richards 1997:90-92 discusses the embodiment of characters by Athenian actors.

⁴⁵ See Lada-Richards 1997:68 on the expectations of the theatrically experienced Athenian audience.

following section to explain my own approach to character in Sophocles, both as a unique dramatic phenomenon and as one which merits a new examination.

As I have mentioned several times before, Aristotle tries to draw a sharp distinction between character and plot as forces in tragic drama. This distinction, I have suggested in passing, is a flawed one, but questions about the relationship between character and plot provide a useful framework for thinking about character in Sophocles.⁴⁶ Broadly speaking, all of our extant Sophoclean tragedies centre around a very limited number of major characters, whose efforts to negotiate a certain situation provide the plot of the play; often a single figure can be identified as the main character, but in the case of *Trachiniae*, *Antigone*, and *Philoctetes*, scholars have argued for the priority of different characters, and I would suggest that it is not necessarily helpful to pinpoint one figure as the tragic hero at the expense of the others.⁴⁷ While there are important events in Sophoclean tragedies—Neoptolemus steals Philoctetes' bow, Orestes and Electra avenge their father's death, Ajax is driven to suicide—these actions are depicted largely in terms of their effect on the characters involved. The story of *Electra*, that is, is not so much the story of the revenge plot itself as it is the story of what years of waiting followed by the eventual chance to get revenge does to Electra.

Although individual Aeschylean and Euripidean characters have been the subject of extensive study, large-scale studies of character in Aeschylus and Euripides—or studies

⁴⁶ Pfister 1988:160 notes that the respective importance of plot and character is a cultural variable, but that the two elements depend on each other regardless of which one is seen to be more important.

⁴⁷ While much character-based criticism of *Trachiniae* focuses on Deianeira, Knox 1964:172 n.48 claims that *Trachiniae* has no clear hero, while McCall 1972 argues that Deianeira is defined almost entirely in contrast to Heracles, who is the subject of expectation throughout the play. On *Antigone*, Griffith 1999:35 notes that, although Antigone has the heroic qualities typically associated with Sophoclean heroes, 'it is Kreon, not Ant., who has the largest role and most lines to speak, and it is his downfall that commands our attention in the final scenes'; see also, among others, Winnington-Ingram 1980:118-119 and Carter 2012:11-115. Similarly, while Philoctetes' refusal to yield is the focus of much of his play, readings of *Philoctetes* as a coming-of-age story focus heavily on the figure of Neoptolemus (see, e.g., Vidal-Naquet 1988 and Roisman 1997).

of Aeschylus and Euripides which take character as their starting point—are rare.⁴⁸

Character in Sophocles, on the other hand, has attracted much more critical attention, and questions of whether character is a useful lens through which to look at Sophoclean tragedy and how Sophoclean characters ought to be interpreted have been the subject of much debate. For my purposes in this thesis, three lines of thinking about Greek tragic character will be particularly important: the first holds that it is unreasonable to look for consistent or intelligible characters in Greek tragedy; the second looks at Sophoclean figures as exemplars of a particularly tragic kind of heroism; and the third looks to read between the lines of the tragic texts in order to draw conclusions about the psychological forces that drive Sophoclean characters.⁴⁹

In *Die dramatische Technik des Sophokles*, Tycho von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff argues that it is a mistake to look for consistency in Greek tragedy; what matters instead is the dramatic effect at any given moment in the play. Having first argued that Sophocles must have counted on the theatrical audience being sufficiently caught up in the action so as not to object to apparent logical gaps between plays, Wilamowitz applies this reasoning to dramatic character. Although he writes that it is beyond the scope of his work to make general claims about the ability of Attic tragedians to portray character and their interest in doing so, Wilamowitz argues that Sophocles was not concerned with the presentation of consistent, psychologically realistic characters, but instead gave the figures in his plays only enough characterization to provide motivation for their actions at any given

⁴⁸ Dawe 1963 and Easterling 1973 present opposing views to characterization in Aeschylus; Winnington-Ingram 1983 is often concerned with characterization within the plays. On Euripides, Griffin 1990 discusses variety in Euripidean characterization, while Thumiger 2007 is an extended study of Greek tragic characterization focusing primarily on Euripides' *Bacchae*; Mossman 1995 and Mastrorade 2011 offer substantial sections on character, both of which integrate the issue of character into their discussions of rhetoric.

⁴⁹ The first line of thought was initially put forward by Tycho von Wilamowitz in 1917; Knox is the most influential twentieth-century proponent of the second; while Easterling and Segal are both in different ways closely connected to the third. The second and third lines of thought are not mutually exclusive; Winnington-Ingram 1980, e.g., bridges the gap between the two.

moment.⁵⁰ Wilamowitz's argument provoked considerable outrage amongst scholars interested in the Sophoclean hero, but it also provided a level of support for later scholarship questioning the relevance of character to the study of Greek tragedy.⁵¹ Although scholars interested in tragic characters as theatrical constructs rarely identify themselves with Wilamowitz in so many words, studies which argue for the priority of dramatic effect over 'human intelligibility' share some important premises with Wilamowitz's approach to character.⁵² Similarly, Griffith's recent claim that Sophoclean characters can best be interpreted in terms of their set social roles has its own echoes of Wilamowitz's utilitarian approach to the construction of Sophoclean figures.⁵³

The second line of thought, which focuses on the tragic heroism of Sophoclean figures, has roots in Romantic readings of tragedy in the nineteenth century, but gained particular prominence in the mid-twentieth century, in part as a reaction to Wilamowitz. This line of thought has at its core the idea that Sophoclean tragedies are populated in large part by figures who, for one reason or another, defy analysis in normal human terms. Rather than interpreting their oddities, as Wilamowitz did, as a sign that Sophocles was not interested in depicting coherent characters, scholars set about to examine Sophoclean characters as figures in tension with the world. In the introduction to his analysis of *Ajax*, Whitman first claims that, 'the Greeks invented, among their other contributions to culture, the concept of heroism', and then goes on to argue that the Greek concept of heroism—the concept which shapes Sophoclean heroes—is marked firstly by self-destructiveness and secondly by a particular closeness to the gods.⁵⁴ A few years later, in

⁵⁰ Wilamowitz 1917:39-40.

⁵¹ Garton 1957:248-250 suggests a milder version of Wilamowitz's position, according to which character arises from the drama, but is on the whole more consistent than not. Dawe 1963 argues against consistent characterization in Aeschylus.

⁵² Gellie 1963:249-250; Gould 1978:54 draws attention to the fact that the language of the playwright can effect striking differences in the presentation of an individual character.

⁵³ Griffith 1999:37-38. Goldhill 1990 similarly argues for the importance of appropriate cultural categories.

⁵⁴ Whitman 1951:59-60.

The Heroic Temper, Knox presents a related view of Sophoclean heroism, arguing that the heroes of Sophoclean plays are marked by a refusal to yield which, in the end, makes them strangers to the rest of the world.⁵⁵

Writing between Whitman and Knox, Kirkwood offers a modified view of Sophoclean heroism. In his analysis of the portrayal of character in Sophocles, Kirkwood comments, ‘the special mark of Sophocles’ procedure is the delineation not of character in and for itself, but of noble character faced with, and in its special way responding to, a situation that serves as a complete and ultimate revelation of its nature’.⁵⁶ Kirkwood’s definition of what makes a Sophoclean hero unique has much in common with that proposed by Whitman and Knox, but Kirkwood focuses not so much on the inability of heroes to function in society as on the idea that the hero of a Sophoclean tragedy is always forced to negotiate some kind of intensely difficult situation, and that heroism arises through such difficulties. With this in mind, Kirkwood examines Sophoclean heroes in the context of their relationships with those around them, arguing that the impact of the action of each play depends on ‘the power and fullness with which the major characters are presented to us’.⁵⁷

Kirkwood’s analysis of the Sophoclean hero in society provides a bridge between the heroic ideals of Whitman and Knox and a third trend, which, while still attracted to the idea of the extraordinary hero, seeks also to define that hero in psychologically plausible terms. In discussing Neoptolemus’ revelation of the deception of Philoctetes, Kirkwood argues that the characterization of Neoptolemus earlier in the play has provided a psychological justification for his inability to keep the secret, and that this psychological

⁵⁵ Knox 1964:9-24 and *passim*. Knox comments in particular that Sophoclean heroes and their actions are frequently described as δεινός (23-24).

⁵⁶ Kirkwood 1958:99. See, similarly, Seidensticker 1994:279-280.

⁵⁷ Kirkwood 1958:155. Kirkwood’s focus on relationships has more recently been echoed in Podlecki 1989:281-282, Easterling 1990:88, and Rutherford 2012:286.

preparation aids the forward motion of the plot.⁵⁸ This interest in explaining tragic events in psychological terms, although visible in the work of earlier scholars, gained momentum in the second half of the twentieth century. Of particular interest was the question of the psychological processes that underpin the words and actions of characters; these readings add an unspoken psychological dimension to Sophoclean characters which makes them more than just the sum of what they do and say. In this vein, for example, Segal describes Oedipus' search for his identity in terms of neurotic anxiety, and discusses the effect of this anxiety on the course of the play.⁵⁹ Easterling's work on the idea of 'human intelligibility' as a force in tragic characterization, although less explicitly psychological than Segal's, similarly makes the point that tragedies often provide their audiences with the information they need to draw their own conclusions about the mental states of the figures depicted onstage.⁶⁰

Over the last twenty years, character has receded somewhat as a key term in studies of Greek tragedy. Although the people who inhabit tragedies have remained a matter of scholarly interest, the study of those people has in recent years undergone several shifts in emphasis. In particular, several recent studies have focused on characters largely in terms of their relationship to the dramatic world; Wiles, for example, claims that characters in Greek tragic theatre are defined entirely in terms of their external relationships, while Thumiger argues for a view of tragic characterization which takes into account the effect of the world on the construction of dramatic characters.⁶¹ In a similar vein, although Yoon leaves room for the suggestion of interiority on the part of major characters, her study of anonymous characters in tragedy focuses not on psychological

⁵⁸ Kirkwood 1958:159-160.

⁵⁹ Segal 1995:164-166.

⁶⁰ Easterling 1977:125 discusses the 'impression of depth, of solid individual consciousness behind the words' of Sophoclean characters. Cf. also Easterling 1990.

⁶¹ Wiles: 2007:271, 274-277; Thumiger 2007:9, 18. Wiles argues for the primacy of external relationships both because he sees the convention of masking as precluding interiority (271, 275) and on the grounds that 'the fifth century has no concept of selfhood that can be isolated from external relationships' (274).

interiority but on the use of anonymous characters to advance particular interpretations of tragic heroes.⁶² Where interiority remains an important focal point, it is increasingly detached from the broader issue of character; Hall discusses ‘minds’ in connection with madness and the effect of the mind on the body, but she says very little about the relationship of mind to character.⁶³

Some recent readings of Sophoclean character have tried to draw the various possible approaches to dramatic character closer together; Nooter revisits some of the ideas of heroism propounded by Knox, but she does so by examining the ways in which Sophoclean heroes are defined—and also isolated—by the poetic register in which they sing.⁶⁴ In focusing on poetic language, Nooter participates in a general movement towards looking at Greek tragedy in artistic terms rather than in terms of strictly realistic representation of people and action; few people now would argue that Sophoclean characters are exactly like real people, or that the experience of watching a character in a play is equivalent to meeting someone on the street.⁶⁵ The challenge, then, has been to reconcile the fact that theatrical experience is in crucial ways not like real life—and that audiences know that it is not—with the tendency of audiences to think about dramatic characters as if their existence extends in certain ways beyond the text of the play or the space of the stage.⁶⁶ Rather than taking the sometimes fragmentary presentation of character as a sign that character is not a driving force in Sophoclean tragedy, I argue that we should look to the ways in which our interactions with Sophoclean characters are shaped by the gaps in characterization which we are left to fill in.

⁶² Yoon 2012:3, 7-8.

⁶³ Hall 2010:182-197; she briefly discusses the possibility of tragic portrayal of personality at 182. Similarly, Hall 2009 discusses the deliberations of several Sophoclean characters, but she looks for the most part at these deliberations as mental processes which drive the plot, not as mental processes which may be indicative of character.

⁶⁴ Nooter 2012:3.

⁶⁵ In this vein, Lada-Richards 1997 and 2002 discusses the importance of the theatrical experience in fifth-century Athens.

⁶⁶ Budelmann and Easterling 2010:171-172. Seidensticker 2008:345 comments that the audience ‘should neither ask questions which the text does not allow, nor omit questions which the text appears to prompt’.

CHARACTER THROUGH INTERACTION

My approach to character in Sophocles takes as its starting point the fact that neither human beings nor dramatic characters exist in a vacuum. Neither half of this starting premise is in itself a new claim. Theories of selfhood in psychology and sociology have over the last fifty years increasingly drawn on the idea that people conceptualize themselves not only in isolation, but also in terms of their interactions; some studies of selfhood have gone so far as to claim that interaction is what defines the self.⁶⁷ In the case of Greek tragedy, views of character which take into account the relationships both between individual characters and between characters and society have offered a nuanced view both of the Sophoclean hero and of the importance of character to the audience's experience of tragedy.⁶⁸ So far, however, studies of character which have acknowledged the importance of interaction have looked at interaction strictly as an on-stage phenomenon. My goal here is, by including the audience in the complex network of interactions which contribute to the construction of Sophoclean character, to develop a comprehensive view of Sophoclean character as a phenomenon which occurs at the intersection between audience, actor, and text.⁶⁹

Interaction, as I will be defining it throughout this thesis, is something which occurs at several levels, often simultaneously. Most obviously, characters interact with each other onstage, and these onstage interactions provide various kinds of information about the characters involved. During Electra's dispute with Clytemnestra, for example, Electra's character is revealed through her treatment of her mother, through her comments

⁶⁷ Goffman 1961:77; Martin *et al.* 2010:9; Kockleman 2013:6.

⁶⁸ Kirkwood 1958:101 declares the need to focus on character interaction; Easterling 1990:88 argues that we ought to 'attend to the *dynamics of action and interaction* rather than look for static "character portraits" with the notion of a unitary character as our starting point'.

⁶⁹ A somewhat similar model for dramatic characterization as shaped by a network of interconnected processes is suggested in Culpeper 2001:34-38, although Culpeper approaches characterization from a cognitive perspective.

about how she believes they both ought to behave, and through Clytemnestra's comments about Electra's behaviour. Onstage interactions between characters, however, are also often indicative of interactions between characters and more abstract concepts. When Haemon and Creon debate Creon's treatment of Antigone, their argument is not only an interaction between a father and a son, but also an interaction between both figures and the roles—father and son, king and subject—which they are meant to play in their interactions with each other.⁷⁰ Similarly, when Ajax speaks to Tecmessa and Eurysaces about his hopes for his son's future, he interacts not only with his concubine and their child, but also with the Homeric precedent of Hector addressing Andromache.⁷¹ The triangular arrangement of these interactions, in which interaction between characters shapes and is shaped by a conceptual interaction, is, in my view, one of the defining features of how Sophoclean characters come into being for the audience.

Looking at character as something which develops through a variety of multifaceted and interconnected interactions has three main advantages. First of all, interaction provides a useful framework for thinking about the close relationship between Sophoclean character and Sophoclean plot. Some of the interactions which shape character actively move the plot forward; when Oedipus grows increasingly violent in his questioning of the old servant of Laius, threatening him, *οὐ πρὸς χάριν μὲν οὐκ ἔρεϊς, κλαίων δ' ἔρεϊς* (*OT* 1152), his behaviour is not only an indication of his state of mind and his potential to become a dangerously volatile ruler, but is also a crucial step on the way to the revelation of his identity. Perhaps more interesting, other interactions reinforce the connection between character and plot by encouraging the audience to think about how a character functions within the plot, and, perhaps, how the plot might be different if it

⁷⁰ This scene will be discussed further in Chapter 2 below; Blundell 1989:120-122 and Griffith 1998:65-70 both note the complex interactions between the two characters and their roles.

⁷¹ The parallels between the scene in *Ajax* and the scene in *Iliad* are frequently noted; see Lattimore 1958:68; Brown 1965:118; Winnington-Ingram 1980:16-19; Easterling 1984; Burian 1997:193; Garvie *ad* 485-524. Cf. also Chapter 1 below.

were inhabited by different characters. When Chrysothemis tells Electra, ἀλλ' ἦν ἄν, εἰ σύ γ' εὔφρονεῖν ἠπίστασο (*El.* 394), the audience is forced, if only briefly, to imagine an Electra who is very different from the one they see on stage, and with that awareness comes the realization that a different Electra would lead to a very different play.

Secondly, if we look at character as something which happens through interaction, the sometimes piecemeal way in which Sophoclean characters are presented to the audience ceases to be disturbing; any given character, rather than coming into being fully formed at the beginning of a play, comes into existence gradually, through a series of interactions of different kinds.⁷² The characters who emerge from this process are both multifaceted—inasmuch as they are shaped by interactions with each other, with their own ideas about themselves, and with the information which the audience brings to the play—and also limited—inasmuch as the interactions which shape characters make it clear not only what dramatic characters are and do but also what they are not and what they cannot do.⁷³ Thinking about interaction thus helps to locate dramatic characters on the continuum between illusion and fully-fledged reality; the awareness of the ways in which dramatic characters are not like real people is an important part of the experience of watching a play, and it is this awareness which encourages the audience to engage somewhat differently with the issues that arise over the course of the play than they would with similar issues in real life.⁷⁴

Thirdly, interaction provides a model for the role of the audience in the construction of character.⁷⁵ Interactions between characters and abstract concepts must be mediated by the audience; although there may be close verbal echoes between the Sophoclean texts and their literary or mythological intertexts, and although characters may

⁷² Easterling 1990:88.

⁷³ Seidensticker 2008:345.

⁷⁴ Easterling 1990:89-90; Goldhill 1990:110-111.

⁷⁵ In his discussion of fictional characterization, Docherty 1983:xiv focuses similarly on the role of the reader.

speak directly about social roles, the interactions between characters and myth or roles take on full force only when the audience bring their own knowledge to their interpretation of what they see onstage.⁷⁶ That is, the similarities and differences between Sophocles' Ajax and the Homeric Hector matter only if the audience actually thinks about the *Iliad*. Similarly, when Deianeira draws on her memory in explaining her current feelings, her account gains a new dimension if the audience consider that memory is a subjective process, and, in turn, wonder how Deianeira interacts with her own memories. The audience's engagement with the mental states of characters is a sort of mind reading, and it requires the audience to look both outward at the characters they see before them and inward at the functioning of their own minds; although the differences between onstage characters and real-life people remain apparent, audiences in the first instance use their own experience of humanity to provide a working model for the figures they see onstage.⁷⁷

Overall, then, Sophoclean characters acquire a certain kind of depth from the multiple levels of interaction by which they are shaped. This sense of depth comes not so much from the fact that Sophoclean characters appear to be fully realized human beings—they do not—but from the fact that we come to know Sophoclean characters gradually, by piecing together information of several different kinds.⁷⁸ At any given moment, our understanding of a character is incomplete, but the interactions in which that character is engaged enable us to expand our knowledge.⁷⁹ As these interactions accumulate, Sophoclean characters acquire an existence beyond what we see depicted onstage; not

⁷⁶ The contribution of audience knowledge to the construction of character is what Culpeper 2001:35 calls a 'bottom-up' process ('top-down' processes being those which derive directly from the text).

⁷⁷ Budelmann and Easterling 2010:171.

⁷⁸ In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster 1927:79 speaks about 'round' characters as figures about whom the author knows far more than he represents in his novel. I am not here drawing a distinction between round and flat dramatic characters, but instead arguing that character depth in drama has as much to do with how we come to understand characters as it does with what we know about them in the end.

⁷⁹ Easterling 1990:88.

only do we begin to think about the figures who inhabit Sophoclean drama as figures with pasts and futures outside the timescale of the play, but we also begin to be able to situate them within our wider understanding. Interactional characters resonate not only within the spatially and temporally constricted world of the play, but also with our general sense of how events depend on the actions and characteristics of the people involved.

Two final methodological points about my approach to interaction as a framework for the interpretation of Sophoclean character remain. First, I will in the following chapters be looking at the interactions which shape character in terms of various rhetorical and psychological frameworks which the audience may use in interpreting those interactions. In discussing the ways in which Sophoclean characters interact with their memories, for instance, I will look not only at the occurrences of memory in Sophoclean tragedy, but also at the importance of memory in the construction of non-dramatic identity in order to see what light psychological theories of memory may shed on Sophoclean characterization.⁸⁰ In similar vein, when I consider how characters interact with statements of general truth, I will consider the generalizations made by Sophoclean characters in the light of the rhetorical implications of proverbs and other generalizations not only in tragedy but also in other genres and cultures.⁸¹ Although the connections between these rhetorical and psychological frameworks—particularly those developed and studied recently, in cultures very different from fifth-century Athens—and Sophoclean characterization will not be perfect, I would nonetheless like to suggest that they can help to model the interactions which take place between character and audience.⁸²

⁸⁰ King 2000 and McKechnie and Körner 2009 discuss the importance of memory in the formation of non-dramatic identity; Worthington 1996, Nalbatian 2003, Cohen 2003, Sullivan 2005, and Favorini 2008 explore the application of memory studies to figures in various literary genres.

⁸¹ Lardinois 1997 advances an argument for the applicability of cross-cultural studies of proverb usage to Homeric *gnomai*; Lardinois 2000 applies these studies of proverb usage to characterization in the *Iliad*.

⁸² The difficulty of applying cross-cultural studies to various aspects of ancient literature has been much discussed. On the subject of character, Gill 1990 and 1996 uses the distinction between character and personality as a way of avoiding the assumption of 'transcultural absolutes' (1990:6); see also, e.g., Goldhill 1990:100-105 on the need to avoid assume a consistent idea of human nature. There has also recently been

Second, although the idea of dramatic character as constructed through interaction could also be fruitfully applied to the Sophoclean chorus, I will nevertheless be limiting my discussion to the interactions which shape individual characters. There is ongoing debate about the status of the chorus in Greek tragedy and, of particular relevance to my study, about whether or not tragic choruses count as characters.⁸³ In general, while the chorus of each play is given a loosely defined identity—unmarried women of Trachis in *Trachiniae*, citizens of Thebes in *Antigone*—their level of characterization varies throughout each play; sometimes they draw attention to their identity insofar as it depends on their personal stake in the matter at hand and their relationships with the other figures involved, but sometimes they are far more detached from the rest of the play. In *Trachiniae*, for example, while the chorus rejoice on Deianeira’s behalf when they hear that Heracles is coming safely home and advise her as her friends when she is planning to send him the robe (*Trach.* 205-224, 588-593), in other lyric passages they offer more detached narratives of the play’s back-story or general truths which pertain to the action.⁸⁴ While much could be said in terms of interaction about the fluid characterization of Sophoclean choruses, I will in this thesis be leaving the chorus for the most part to one side. I will often discuss the chorus as they interact with and thereby shape named characters, but I will not be discussing them as characters in their own right.

much discussion of the possibility of applying cross-cultural ideas about the emotions to the study of the ancient world; Harris 2001:32-40, e.g., argues for a view of the emotions as determined both socially and biologically, while Cairns 2003:12 similarly argues for cross-cultural dialogue about the emotions ‘which avoids both the naïve assumption of shared humanity and unsustainable strategies of alienation’; see also Cairns 2008:45-46.

⁸³ For different approaches to the degree to which Sophoclean choruses are characterized and the effect of their characterization, see, e.g., Henrichs 1994/5, Gould 1996, Goldhill 1996, and Gagné and Hopman 2013; Kitzinger 2008, in her analysis of the choruses of *Antigone* and *Philoctetes*, lays out her general approach to the differences between chorus and actors at pp. 3-5; Dhuga 2006 discusses the authority of the chorus in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Nooter 2012:110-111 comments on the close relationship between Electra and the chorus, suggesting also that Electra takes on much of what might be expected to be the chorus’s role.

⁸⁴ Deianeira frequently comments on the social position of the chorus, particularly their lack of experience; see, e.g., Winnington-Ingram 1980:79-80, Seaford 1986:50-51, Kraus 1991:83.

In the five chapters of this thesis, I will be treating five of the types of interaction which shape Sophoclean characters one at a time; I will begin with a discussion of the interactions between Sophoclean characters and (1) mythological context, and I will continue with discussions of the interactions between characters and (2) social roles, (3) memories, (4) the passage of time, and (5) general statements. The separation of these five strands of interaction is to some degree artificial; although characters interact differently with these different concepts, the interactions which shape character do not take place in isolation, and different strands of interaction tend to feed into each other. In order to illustrate both the way in which different layers of interaction help to bring about Sophoclean characters and the interdependence of those different layers, I will in the next section offer a brief case study of the prologue of *Ajax*. Over the course of the play's opening scene, the figures of Athena, Odysseus, and Ajax himself emerge both in interaction with each other and also in interaction with all five of the concepts on which I will focus in subsequent chapters.

CASE STUDY: INTERACTING WITH CHARACTER IN THE PROLOGUE OF *AJAX*

The first two lines of *Ajax* already begin to establish a complicated network of interactions. When Athena says, Ἄει μὲν, ᾧ παῖ Λαρτίου, δέδορκά σε | πειρᾶν τιν' ἐχθρῶν ἀρπάσαι θηρώμενον (*Aj.* 1-2), her opening statement serves to locate herself and Odysseus in several ways. Her claim that she has always been watching Odysseus situates their relationship in a timescale beyond the scope of the play; while it is possible that her ἄει refers only to the duration of Odysseus' current hunt for Ajax, it also suggests that the relationship between Odysseus and Athena is already established.⁸⁵ At the same time, her ἄει amplifies her description of Odysseus as πειρᾶν τιν' ἐχθρῶν ἀρπάσαι

⁸⁵ Heath 1987:166 comments on the importance of Odysseus' familiarity with Athena.

θηρώμενον into a character point; although Odysseus has not always been tracking Ajax, he is, according to Athena's description of him, always tracking something.⁸⁶ By addressing Odysseus as παῖ Λαρτίου, moreover, Athena identifies Odysseus in a way which specifically locates him within his broader mythological context. As the scene continues, this initial web of interactions takes on new dimensions, expanding to include and define the figure of Ajax.

The story of Ajax figures prominently in Greek epic, and, from the first lines of the play, the audience are encouraged to consider the relationship between Sophocles' treatment of the story and other versions of the myth.⁸⁷ Both Odysseus' status as the son of Laertes and his close relationship with Athena locate the beginning of the play in a mythological framework which has particular ties to Homeric epic, and, as Heath and Okell note, the audience use their prior knowledge to supplement the information presented by Athena and Odysseus.⁸⁸ The tragedy's early interactions with Homer help to shape the audience's expectations for the characters they see onstage and their interactions with each other; given Athena's constant planning on Odysseus' behalf in the *Odyssey*, the audience is likely to assume that her intervention in *Ajax* will be unequivocally welcome to her favourite.⁸⁹ Although Athena's first speech suggests a straightforward mapping of Homeric relationships onto the tragedy—Athena and her traditional protégé Odysseus are united against Odysseus' traditional enemy Ajax—the interactions between Sophoclean figures and their mythological counterparts grow more complicated. As Odysseus begins to push back against Athena's suggestion that he is in a position to gloat over his humiliated enemy, the balance of Homeric relationships shifts; Odysseus distances himself somewhat from his patron goddess, and the audience are encouraged to think not just of

⁸⁶ Knox 1961:18 comments that, although Athena tries to characterize Odysseus with her αεί, over the course the prologue, 'The word "always" is belied by the action of Odysseus'.

⁸⁷ Golder 1990:12 notes the gaps in the story of Ajax in surviving Greek epic.

⁸⁸ Heath and Okell 2007:365.

⁸⁹ Barker 2004:5 suggests a tension between Odyssean and Iliadic models of divinity in the prologue.

Ajax's enduring hatred for Odysseus in *Odyssey* 11, but also of the conciliatory gestures made by Odysseus in the Homeric scene.⁹⁰

The mythological precedents for the interactions between Athena, Odysseus, and, eventually, Ajax himself dictate, to some extent, the roles which the three figures will play in the tragedy. It soon becomes apparent, however, that all three figures interact with their established roles in somewhat complicated ways. Odysseus and Ajax are in part differentiated from each other by means of their respective willingness to acknowledge the divide between god and mortal.⁹¹ Odysseus throughout the prologue can be seen to balance his respect for Athena with a growing sense that her perspective on Ajax differs from his own. He begins speaking to Athena in a tone of pronounced respect, but later cries out in fear, τί δρᾶς, Ἀθήνα; μηδαμῶς σφ' ἔξω κάλει (74); when he finally yields to Athena's insistence on summoning Ajax, it is only after reasserting the superiority of the goddess, admitting, γένοιτο μέντ' ἄν πᾶν θεοῦ τεχνωμένου (86).⁹² Although Ajax too initially addresses Athena deferentially, beginning with χαῖρ' Ἀθήνα, χαῖρε Διογενὲς τέκνον and going on to promise offerings to the goddess (91-94), he, unlike Odysseus, insists more and more on his own autonomy over the course of the scene.⁹³ While Ajax's words push back against the pious relationship between human and divine which was suggested by Odysseus' behaviour, Athena's overarching control of the situation is such that Ajax's attempt to take command only reinforces his helpless position.⁹⁴

As the prologue focuses increasingly on the behaviour of Ajax, it becomes clear that his fraught interaction with divine authority is similar in many ways to his interaction

⁹⁰ Hesk 2003:27 notes the overarching importance of the scene in *Odyssey* 11 throughout *Ajax*.

⁹¹ Heath 1987:170 comments on the importance of appropriate human interaction with the divine in the play.

⁹² Heath 1987:169 and Finglass *ad* 74-88 suggest that his concern for his own safety at 74 must be very great if it can override his previous scrupulous deference.

⁹³ Blundell 1989:64; Nooter 2012:32 argues that Ajax's greeting to Athena implies belief on his part in a strong reciprocal relationship between himself and the goddess.

⁹⁴ Ringer 1998:35 discusses Athena's orchestration of Ajax's appearance as metatheatrical; cf. Barker 2004:5.

with his role in the Greek force at Troy. Ajax's apparent reluctance to acknowledge Athena's superior position is part of a general trend of resistance to accept a subordinate position in any hierarchy.⁹⁵ Ajax's role amongst the Greeks has recently changed, and the fact that he used to occupy a position of honour in the Greek army and now has been ranked below Odysseus drives his sense that he needs revenge; when he tells Athena that he has punished the Atreidae ὥστ' οὐποτ' Αἴανθ' οἶδ' ἀτιμάσους' ἔτι (98), he declares himself to be specifically invested in the restoration of his former role as acknowledged champion. This insistence on the honours which he is due forms a curious point of contact between Ajax and Odysseus, whose interaction with the status of his rival and former comrade pulls him in conflicting directions. On the one hand, when Odysseus asks Athena somewhat incredulously, ἦ καὶ τὸ βούλευμ' ὡς ἐπ' Ἀργείοις τόδ' ἦν; (44), his question suggests that the magnitude of Ajax's crimes is increased by the fact that they were carried out against his former comrades.⁹⁶ At the same time, however, Odysseus remains aware of the magnitude of Ajax's fall, and he finds something both pitiable and awe-inspiring in his enemy's diminished status (121-126).

The emphasis which Athena, Odysseus, and Ajax place on Ajax's changed status is one of several ways in which the characters in the prologue interact with events outside the timescale of the play; both Ajax's conception of himself and Odysseus' conception of Ajax are shaped by their memories of earlier events. Although Ajax says little about the contest over the arms, his memory of the event is biased; by referring to the arms as τᾶμ'... ὄπλα (100), Ajax glosses over the fact that the arms were actually awarded to Odysseus, thus making a decision which went against his wishes into a case of outright

⁹⁵ Winnington-Ingram 1980:14-15 notes Ajax's refusal to make an exception for Achilles in his account of himself as the best of the Greeks.

⁹⁶ Rosivach 1975:201-202 suggests that Athena's statement and Odysseus' following question imply that Ajax meant to attack not just the generals but the entire Greek army.

theft.⁹⁷ Ajax's remembered sense of himself and his place in the Greek force is one of the defining points of his character throughout the play, and, in the prologue, it provides a contrast with Odysseus' more flexible approach to his own memories. Odysseus acknowledges both that Ajax was ἐχθρός γε τῷδε τάνδρῳ καὶ τανῶν ἔτι (78) and that he can think of no one who could have rivalled him; whereas Ajax, faced with a past which he cannot reconcile with his self-image, replaces it with a version which makes more sense to him, Odysseus acknowledges the conflicting aspects of Ajax's past, and tempers his opinions accordingly.⁹⁸ For both men, however, memory is an active force, and they position themselves in the world in part on the basis of their interactions with remembered events.

As they situate themselves with respect to past events, Ajax and Odysseus interact more generally with the passage of time.⁹⁹ Odysseus and Ajax differ in their ability to carry their actions to completion and plan for the future, and their thoughts about their personal trajectories are an important part of their respective interactions with the world at large. Ajax's personal trajectory has come to a halt; having set out to attack the Greek leaders, Ajax has been driven off course by Athena, who tells Odysseus, ἐγὼ σφ' ἀπείργω... τῆς ἀνηκέστου χαρᾶς (51-52). Although he believes that he is still moving forward, promising future offerings to Athena and ordering her to remain his ally αἰεί, Ajax's hopes have little to do with the future which is in store for him.¹⁰⁰ Odysseus, on the other hand, begins the play in a state of doubt, explaining to Athena, τὰ δ' ἐκπέπληγμαί, κούκ ἔχω μαθεῖν ὅπου (33).¹⁰¹ Although Athena helps him to achieve his immediate goal of finding Ajax, Odysseus' doubts remain as the prologue continues,

⁹⁷ Garvie *ad* 100.

⁹⁸ Blundell 1989:63-64 comments on Odysseus' more general tendency to avoid absolutes.

⁹⁹ Segal 1989/90:400 sees a temporal shift during the prologue from a focus on the past to a focus on the present.

¹⁰⁰ Knox 1961:18.

¹⁰¹ Hesk 2003:42 notes the incongruity of Odysseus' confusion in light of his traditional character.

shifting, after the exit of Ajax, from specific doubt about the success of his mission, to a more general state of uncertainty about the future. His interaction with the passage of time is related to his interaction with Ajax; suffering from the sense, brought about by his glimpse of Ajax, that at any moment he might stop moving forward, Odysseus explains, ὁρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν | εἶδωλ' ὅσοιπερ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν (125-126).¹⁰²

By framing his observations about the uncertain future which he and Ajax—and all mortals—share in general terms, Odysseus reveals a great deal about his way of thinking about the world. Odysseus uses generalizations in the prologue in order to process the other interactions in which he is involved; when he generalizes about the human condition on the basis of what he has seen of Ajax's madness, his enmity for Ajax is tempered by the assumption that he and Ajax belong, on the most basic level, in the same category.¹⁰³ Although Odysseus is like many tragic characters—including both Athena and Ajax—in his tendency to generalize, different characters interact differently both with their own statements of general truth and with those of others; while Odysseus uses generalizations in order to provide a conceptual framework for his own actions, Athena generalizes in order to elicit certain behaviours from Odysseus.¹⁰⁴ Immediately after the departure of Ajax, for example, she asks Odysseus to observe the extent of divine power (118), and, in her following speech, she warns him to moderate his behaviour accordingly (127-130). Eliciting the appropriate response from Odysseus, however, requires that he interpret Athena's general statements the way she intends, and, as the prologue nears its end, Odysseus without explicitly contradicting Athena uses her generalizations to justify a different course of action than the one which she has suggested. Prompted by Athena's

¹⁰² Knox 1961:18.

¹⁰³ Blundell 1989:63; Hesk 2003:45; Rutherford 2012:390.

¹⁰⁴ Rutherford 2012:390-391 comments on the different purposes of Odysseus' and Athena's generalizations, although Rutherford argues that 'her emphasis is on the moral justification of retribution from the gods'.

generalization, Odysseus considers two opposing models for human behaviour, and he chooses the one which fits best with his own human perspective.¹⁰⁵

By the time Odysseus and Athena leave the stage at the end of the prologue, the audience have received a great deal of information about the two of them, Ajax, and the relationships between the three figures. Some of this information is delivered directly—Athena says that Odysseus hunts accurately, like a Laconian hound (7-8), Odysseus says that he is and will be guided by her hand (34-35), and both agree that, before his madness, there was no one better than Ajax (119-121). Much of the audience's information about the three characters, however, comes into focus more gradually, as the audience watches them interact with each other and otherwise situate themselves in the world of the play.¹⁰⁶ Ajax is shaped not just by what he says and does, but also by the fact that his words and actions seem to be motivated by a sense of himself—where he has come from, where he is going, what his role in the Greek army ought to be, how he relates to the gods—which differs in crucial ways from that of Athena or Odysseus. The various facets of each character interact with each other and with the audience's expectations in order to produce a composite identity which is more real than the sum of its parts.

FRAMEWORKS FOR INTERACTION

In the preceding case study, I have examined the various interactions which contribute to the construction of character in the prologue of *Ajax*. I have looked at these various interactions more or less in tandem, because that is most often how such interactions take place in Sophocles; when Ajax, in the lyric lament which he delivers in the first episode, looks back on a time when he was a warrior such as the streams of

¹⁰⁵ Hesk 2003:45 notes that Odysseus 'defines himself as a figure who exercises a form of *sôphrosunê* which is more humane and morally compassionate than that espoused by Athena'.

¹⁰⁶ de Jong 2006:73 comments on the gradual release of information.

Scamander had never before seen (*Aj.* 421-426), his recollection interacts with his belief that his place of honour in the Greek army is lost beyond recovery and that he can thus no longer hope for a glorious future at Troy.¹⁰⁷ Elsewhere in Sophocles the same holds true, inasmuch as when a character interacts with her memory, she is often simultaneously interacting with her sense of the roles she must play in the world and her sense of the trajectory along which she has been moving since the remembered event. With this general premise—that is, that the interactions which shape Sophoclean character can very rarely be isolated from each other completely—in mind, I will in the following chapters of this thesis be separating out five main interactional frameworks and examining each one individually, so as to provide a more detailed view of the complexities which are inherent in Sophoclean character.

In my first chapter, I explore the interactions between Sophoclean characters and their mythological backgrounds. All seven of our extant Sophoclean tragedies take their subjects from a body of traditional stories which we would today classify as myth, and the more or less traditional characters who appear in Sophoclean versions of traditional stories interact in complicated ways with their predecessors.¹⁰⁸ In some cases, moreover, mythological interactions are further complicated by the existence of earlier Sophoclean treatments of the same story or characters, often to very different effect. The interactions which take place between Sophoclean characters and their mythic or tragic predecessors are mediated by the audience; both references to earlier instantiations of a character or event and divergences from canonical versions gain their force from the prior knowledge

¹⁰⁷ Winnington-Ingram 1980:14-15 and Finglass *ad* 421-426 comment on the divergence between Ajax's memory of himself and the general consensus; de Jong 2006:81 notes that Ajax is concerned with past, present and future in his account of his own deeds.

¹⁰⁸ Aeschylus' *Persians* is our only extant non-mythological Athenian tragedy; see Chapter 1 below on the overall dominance of mythological storylines in tragedy. Not all Sophoclean characters exist in pre-Sophoclean versions of a given story.

which the audience brings with them to the theatre.¹⁰⁹ The weight of tradition can bestow an element of authority on Sophoclean characterization, while divergences from that tradition can, in turn, draw attention to the aspects of a character which are most important in that character's current dramatic context. In this way, I argue that Sophoclean versions of traditional characters emerge out of a tension between novelty and familiarity.

Sophoclean characters can be classified not only by their relationships with their mythological predecessors—a level of interaction which reaches outside the boundaries of the play—but also by the roles which they play within the world of the play, and in my second chapter I examine the ways in which characters interact with those roles. Within each play, characters play a range of social and familial roles—they are kings, generals, soldiers, subjects, parents, children, siblings, husbands, wives, etc.—and each of these roles exerts a degree of control over the ways in which characters behave.¹¹⁰ In addition, many characters must play multiple social roles simultaneously, and these roles often subject characters to conflicting obligations. The extent to which characters fulfil their role obligations successfully is a subject of much discussion within the texts of Sophoclean tragedy, and it is also a subject concerning which the audience are encouraged to make their own judgements; when Electra accuses her sister of being a disloyal daughter to Agamemnon, for example, the audience can judge Chrysothemis' behaviour not only on the basis of what they have seen onstage, but also on the basis of what they know about the filial obligations of daughterhood.¹¹¹ As Sophoclean characters take on particular roles in the world of the play or have such roles imposed upon them externally, they are defined in part by their interactions with those roles and their attendant obligations.

¹⁰⁹ Segal 1983:173-175 discusses myth as a system of symbols which requires the interpretation of a knowing audience.

¹¹⁰ Griffith 1999:37-38.

¹¹¹ See, e.g., Goldhill 2012:232-245 on the 'politics of sisterhood' in *Electra* and *Antigone*; Foley 2001 suggests different cultural models for the behaviour of the two pairs of sisters.

The obligations imposed by social roles root characters firmly in the world of the play. In my third chapter, I explore the role of memory both in providing another kind of context for the present actions of characters and in providing the audience with a window into the mental states of the figures on stage. In each tragedy, Sophoclean characters are depicted as looking back on prior events, some of which have taken place since the beginning of the play, and some of which have taken place further in the past. As they speak about the past, Sophoclean characters interact with their memories in complex ways, sometimes revising their memories in light of current circumstances and sometimes interpreting current circumstances in light of remembered events.¹¹² Both their present constructions of their own identity and their interactions with others are often shaped by their particular memories of the past; Philoctetes, even after years alone on Lemnos, still defines himself first as the one to whom Heracles bequeathed his bow, while his fond memories of Achilles prompt him to look favourably upon Achilles' son Neoptolemus.¹¹³ In speaking about their lives, Sophoclean characters rely on deeply personal versions of the past in order to make sense of both present and future.

In my fourth chapter, I expand the temporal perspective suggested by my study of memory as a force in characterization and look at the ways in which Sophoclean characters interact with the passage of time. On the most basic level, Sophoclean characters move through time like everyone else—they are born (always before the beginning of the play), they grow older, and they eventually die (sometimes during the play and sometimes after its conclusion). Between birth and death, however, many Sophoclean characters interact with the passage of time in ways which separate them from most other mortals; although many of the ways in which the figures of Sophoclean tragedy move through their lives are recognizable to the audience, they are normally taken to an

¹¹² Kraus 1991:79-81 discusses Deianeira's processing of her own past experience.

¹¹³ Roberts 1989 discusses the importance of different views of the past in *Philoctetes*.

extreme beyond what the audience can be expected to have experienced in their own lives.¹¹⁴ In particular, many Sophoclean characters—despite what Ajax and the aged Oedipus say to the contrary—deny the passage of time in various ways; while the world goes on around them, they remain entrenched in habitual actions and patterns of mind which make it impossible for them to interact with changing circumstances.¹¹⁵

In my final chapter, I look at the importance of generalizations as speech acts which allow Sophoclean characters to define their interactions with the world around them. Sophoclean characters deliver general statements under a wide variety of circumstances, but usually at moments of heightened tension, and both the purposes for which a character chooses to deploy generalizations and the reactions of those who hear the generalization can be indicative of that character's wider ability to function within the world of the play.¹¹⁶ As characters process the events in which they are involved and make claims for their own authority, their generalizations often become a focal point for the various kinds of interaction implicit in those processes; the generalities upon which characters rely in times of stress can be seen to arise out of characters' memories, their senses of their own personal trajectories, their beliefs about the obligations which go along with various social roles, and their desire to situate themselves in the context of a broader tradition. When Deianeira begins her first speech in *Trachiniae* by rejecting a famous gnomic statement, she makes a case for being able to speak authoritatively about her life by pitting her own past experience and her current expectations as Heracles' wife against the weight of tradition which gave rise to the proverb.¹¹⁷ As is the case with many

¹¹⁴ de Romilly 1968:110-111 and Hutchinson 1999:48 comment on individual experiences of time in Sophocles.

¹¹⁵ Knox 1961 discusses Ajax's resistance to the passage of time as a heroic quality; on heroic time see also Rosenmeyer 1963:184, Golder 1990:20-22.

¹¹⁶ Martin 2009:117-119 comments on some of the possible purposes of dramatic *gnomai*; see also Rutherford 2012:390-394.

¹¹⁷ Deianeira's interaction with this proverb will be discussed in depth in Chapter 5 below. On the authority implicit in her use of the proverb, see, e.g., Lawrence 1978:289-290, Kraus 1991:79, Heiden 2012:136.

Sophoclean characters, Deianeira the individual arises through her interaction with the generalities which may or may not apply to the reality of her situation.

* * *

As Sophoclean figures interact with each other onstage, their individual characters emerge through a variety of more abstract interactions. All of these interactions provide a context for each character which extends in various ways beyond the confines of the play; both mythological references and prominent social structures help the audience to draw connections both between a tragedy and other traditional stories and between the same tragedy and everyday life, while the memories, personal trajectories, and general statements of individual characters help to expand the world of the play beyond the immediate spatial and temporal boundaries of the performance. The network of interactions which combine to shape Sophoclean characters gives those characters a complexity which is in many ways reminiscent of the complexity of real human beings; since not all of the interactions which shape theatrical characters map perfectly onto the non-theatrical world, however, Sophoclean characters remain fully theatrical, poised between reality and illusion.

CHAPTER 1 – INTERACTING WITH MYTH: THE PULL OF THE FAMILIAR

As soon as Antigone begins to speak in the prologue of *Antigone*, she draws attention to the complicated network of stories that surround her family. After addressing her sister as κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἰσμίνης κάρα (1), and thus drawing attention to their shared stake in the fate of their family, Antigone continues by asking, ἄρ' οἴσθ' ὅ τι Ζεὺς τῶν ἀπ' Οἰδίου κακῶν— | ἄ, ποῖον οὐχὶ νῶν ἔτι ζώσαιν τελεῖ (2-3). Neither here nor at any other point in the play does Antigone explicitly identify τῶν ἀπ' Οἰδίου κακῶν, but she can count on Ismene to know what she means. Perhaps more importantly, Sophocles can count on his audience knowing what Antigone means as well.¹ When, later in the same scene, Ismene offers a slightly fuller version of the family story, reminding Antigone, πατήρ | ὡς νῶν ἀπεχθῆς δυσκλεῆς τ' ἀπώλετο | πρὸς αὐτοφώρων ἀμπλακημάτων (49-51), her account is so compressed as to be nearly unintelligible to anyone not already acquainted with Oedipus' fate. Antigone must be able to understand Ismene's abbreviated narrative, and so must the audience.

Oedipus and his family, of course, are prominent in Greek literature from early epic onwards; Odysseus mentions seeing Epicaste, the wife and mother of Oedipus, in the Underworld in Book 11 of the *Odyssey* (271-280), and the ruling family of Thebes was also the subject of its own cycle of epic poems, beginning with the story of Oedipus in the *Oedipodea* and continuing with the stories of his descendants in the *Thebaid* and the *Epigoni*.² Although Sophocles does not always choose to dwell on the mythical background of the characters in *Antigone*, Antigone's opening lines connect the tragedy

¹ This is often true in Sophocles; Heath and Okell 2007:365-366 discuss the knowledge which the audience bring to *Ajax*. Else 1972:29 notes the swift pace of Antigone's first speech.

² The fragments of the epic treatments of Theban legend are collected in West 2003; pp. 4-10 contain a summary of the events which seem to be covered by the Theban epics. Baldry 1956:27-28 discusses the elements of the Theban legend which can be recovered from epic fragments and their relationship to tragedy.

with the wider mythical tradition surrounding Oedipus.³ As the play continues, oblique references to the play's mythical background encourage the audience to use their own prior knowledge of the myth to fill in whatever blanks may be left by the play itself.

Although it is clear by the end of Antigone's first speech that the woes which she and Ismene share are somehow connected to Oedipus, it is not immediately clear how she and her sister fit into Oedipus' history. Antigone does not directly identify herself and her sister as children of Oedipus, and, when Ismene first addresses Antigone by name and mentions the mutual slaughter of their brothers (10-14), her reply may still not provide the audience with much information about what to expect of the two young women on stage. While the story of the conflict between Oedipus' sons goes back at least to epic, Oedipus' daughters are far less prominent in pre-Sophoclean versions of the story. The name 'Ismene' has been connected with Oedipus since the 7th century, and both Antigone and Ismene were mentioned by name in the early fifth century by Pherekydes of Athens as daughters of Oedipus by his second wife, Euryganeia, but little seems to have been said before Sophocles about the role of Oedipus' daughters after their father's death.⁴ Knowing that Antigone and Ismene are daughters of Oedipus, then, may leave the audience with room for uncertainty about their importance in the play that has just begun.

As a daughter of Oedipus and as a potentially novel figure in a familiar story, the figure of Antigone necessarily interacts with other versions of her family story known to the audience. Along with interacting implicitly with her own myth—an interaction which must be mediated by the knowledge of the audience—Sophocles' Antigone also interacts onstage with other mythological paradigms; in the *kommos* which precedes her

³ Brown *ad* 2-3 suggests that Antigone's opening lines imply that all of the evils associated with Oedipus are now being inflicted in concentrated form on the two sisters.

⁴ In surviving texts, Ismene is first mentioned by name in Mimnermus Fr. 21 West. Zimmermann 1993:89-92 discusses the account given by Pherekydes (*FrGrHist* 3 Fr. 95); Fowler 2013:405-407 discusses the disconnect between Pherekydes' account and those contained in other sources. More generally, see Griffith 1999:8-10 on the pre-Sophoclean history of Oedipus' children.

justification of her burial of Polyneices, Antigone, in response to the choral claim that no other woman has had a death like hers, compares herself to Niobe, another woman who was once entombed in rock (823-832).⁵ This mythical parallel, like all *exempla*, is imperfect, and the chorus note that there are several crucial differences between Antigone's fate and that of Niobe, commenting, ἀλλὰ θεός τοι καὶ θεογεννής, | ἡμεῖς δὲ βροτοὶ καὶ θνητογενεῖς (834-835). In the stasimon which follows Antigone's final exit, the chorus present some mythical parallels of their own; they sing first of Danae (944-954), then of Lycurgus (955-965), and, finally, of Cleopatra and her children (966-987). The chorus's *exempla*, like Antigone's earlier reference to Niobe, overlap with Antigone's story in some ways while diverging in others.⁶ The exact significance of the various *exempla* introduced in *Antigone*, I would suggest, is less important than the kind of thinking which they encourage; by drawing parallels between her story and the stories of prior mythical figures, both the chorus and Antigone herself suggest that Antigone's story partakes of recurring mythical themes. Although Sophocles' *Antigone* at Thebes may be profoundly isolated, parallels elsewhere in myth may offer clues for understanding both her situation and her actions.

The *exempla* employed by Antigone and the chorus, along with Antigone's position as a daughter of the mythical king Oedipus, help to locate the otherwise obscure figure of Antigone within a complex network of mythological interactions. When Antigone mentions Niobe or the chorus sing of Danae, Lycourgus, or Cleopatra, they reach beyond Antigone's own story in order to draw upon relevant aspects of other myths,

⁵ Griffith *ad* 823-33 notes that Antigone denies the chorus' idea of her uniqueness.

⁶ Griffith *ad* 944-87 discusses the difficulties of finding a consistent interpretation for the three *exempla* presented by the chorus. Burton 1980:132 claims that, although there are some similarities between Antigone's story and those of Danae, Lycourgus, and Cleopatra, the stasimon 'could indeed with very little alteration be made relevant to any character in any tragedy who is under sentence of death and who stands in need of exhortation before the stroke falls', while Winnington-Ingram 1980:98-109 and Seaford 1990 suggest various reasons for the chorus's selection of these particular parallels. Garner 1990:85 suggests that the chorus, in using these *exempla*, misuse a standard technique for consolation.

and certain facets of Antigone's character are thrown into sharper relief by the comparison. The interactions which take place between Antigone and other mythological figures, who are similar to her in some ways but very different in others, are discussed openly by Antigone and the chorus, and such clearly signalled interactions coexist with the implicit mythological interactions which take place between Sophocles' *Antigone* and other stories about the house of Oedipus. Both explicit and implicit interactions vary in their specificity; some aspects of Sophocles' *Antigone*, such as Ismene's two-line account of the death of her brothers, merely gesture at the general outlines of Oedipus' story, while other moments in the play suggest specific earlier versions of the Oedipus myth.⁷

The knowledge of mythology which an audience brings to the theatre exerts a two-way pull on tragic characters. On the one hand, characters in any given tragedy are not exactly like their mythological namesakes, nor do they map perfectly onto the models provided by the other mythological figures to whom they are compared. The differences between different figures in myth and between different versions of the same figure are often prominent, and many scholars have suggested that tragic poets use myth largely as a source of illuminating contrasts: Antigone, as the chorus point out, is not entirely like Niobe, and Ajax is importantly different from Hector, despite the similarities between his conversation with Tecmessa in Sophocles' *Ajax* and Hector's with Andromache in *Iliad* 6.⁸ Even where the differences between tragic characters and their mythical antecedents are striking, however, mythological resonances can add important dimensions to the figures of tragedy. On a fairly basic level, by claiming that she is like Niobe, Antigone endows her own story with a new degree of dignity, and the existence of a mythical

⁷ Griffith 1999:7-8 suggests that Sophocles' accounts of the attack against Thebes and the misfortunes of Laius' family suggest the influence of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*; Griffith nonetheless cautions against placing too much weight on these apparent allusions, given that other influential versions may have been lost.

⁸ On myth as a source of contrasts, see Kirkwood 1965:56-59, Easterling 1984b:3-5, March 1987:66-67, Burian 1997:190, Buxton 2007:176. The Ajax-Hector comparison will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

framework can give a similar depth to many other tragic characters.⁹ In this chapter, I will explore the tension between novelty and familiarity which plays out in the interactions between Sophoclean characters and their mythological precedents.

TRAGIC MYTHOLOGIES

With the exception of Aeschylus' *Persians*, all of our extant Greek tragedies take their storylines from a body of material which today we would classify as myth. Although Aristotle refers to the existence of tragedies dealing with wholly imaginary characters and events (*Poetics* 1451b21-22), he names only one such tragedy, Agathon's *Antheus*, and we have no evidence for any others; similarly, although there are known to have been other early Athenian tragedies besides *Persians* which dealt with recent historical events, there is no suggestion that any such non-mythological tragedies were produced after *Persians*.¹⁰ The subsequent reliance of playwrights on mythological material to supply the plots of their tragedies has important implications for tragic character; although tragic poets have considerable room for innovation within the framework imposed by traditional plots, the fact remains that many key figures will already be familiar to the audience at the start of any play. In the section which follows, I will offer a brief and necessarily incomplete discussion of some of the major issues of tradition, authority, and innovation which are at stake in all tragic appropriations of myth before going on to outline my approach to thinking about these issues with regard to Sophoclean character.

The familiarity of traditional characters is reinforced by the fact that mythological material is typically granted a certain degree of authority. In today's casual usage, 'myth'

⁹ Electra employs a similar rhetorical strategy in the first *kommos* of her play, when she first takes Procne as a model for her ongoing mourning and then invokes Niobe as a goddess (*El.* 147-152); cf. Finglass *ad* 145-152.

¹⁰ Burian 1997:185-186; Lowe 2000:158. Phrynichus is known to have written a *Sack of Miletus* and a *Phoenician Women*; See Cartledge 1997:24-25 for a brief discussion of the likely reasons that recent history passed out of fashion as a subject for tragedy.

has become shorthand for any widely circulated falsehood, and this scepticism about the truth value of myth has its roots in antiquity; Thucydides drew a distinction between supposedly true history and mythological accounts, while Plato referred to potentially misleading μῦθοι as the opposite of more rationally founded λόγοι.¹¹ Despite this longstanding association between myth and falsehood, however, it has more recently been noted that myths are generally presented as true; while many myths take place at an earlier stage of history in which some different rules—including those which govern human interactions with the divine—may apply, tellers of mythological stories still tend on the whole to claim to be dealing with historical fact rather than fiction.¹² Thus when Herodotus traces the origins of Greco-Persian hostility in the beginning of his *Histories*, although he refuses to arbitrate between different stories of the Trojan War (1.5), he nevertheless refers to events narrated in Homer's *Iliad*, events which are part of the Greek mythological tradition, as events which contain a kernel of historical truth and have lasting implications for more recent political allegiances (1.3-1.5).¹³ The idea that there is some truth behind canonical versions of traditional stories limits to some extent the flexibility of myth; although traditional tales can be expanded or contracted to suit the interests of the audience or the amount of time available to the teller, certain elements of a traditional story cannot be altered without transforming the myth into a different story altogether.¹⁴

¹¹ For the use of 'myth' in modern parlance, see *OED Online* 2014: myth, *n.*, definition 2. On Thucydides' ideas about myth, see Graf 1987:2, citing Thucydides 1.22.4. Buxton 1994:12-13 notes that many ancient writers do not adhere to Plato's distinction between μῦθος and λόγος, and that Plato himself classifies some μῦθοι as a type of λόγος (*Rep.* 377a).

¹² The question of the definition of myth is a complicated one, and has been approached from many angles. Csapo 2005 provides a survey of possible approaches, and, in his first chapter, addresses the broader problem of arriving at a satisfactory definition at all; pp. 2-3 discuss the tension between the current equation of myth and falsehood and the authority traditionally granted to myths. Later in this section I will offer a provisional definition of myth as I will be using it in this chapter.

¹³ The relationship between myth and historical fact is complicated and much discussed; Burkert 1979:27, e.g., comments that myth 'bears the marks of its history, of multiple levels of application and crystallization', while Veyne 1988:4-15 discusses the overlap between history and tradition (including myth) in the ancient world.

¹⁴ Woodard 2007:2 notes 'a concern for preserving still more ancient forms and notions about gods and heroes' even in our earliest sources for Greek myth.

Despite the force which tradition exerts on the adaptation of myth—Oedipus must at the very least kill his father and marry his mother—multiple versions of a myth can be active at the same time.¹⁵ Different groups may tell different versions of the same myth, and, perhaps more interestingly, different versions of a myth may be deployed by the same group or individual under different circumstances and to very different effect. When Herodotus argues for a version of Helen’s story in which Helen never went to Troy but was instead detained in Egypt by Proteus (*Hdt.* 2.113-120), for example, he pits the story of Helen told by the Egyptian priests against part of the Persian explanation of the root cause of hostilities between the Greeks and the Persians which he presented at the very beginning of his *Histories* (1.3). In the same vein, neither Euripides’ *Helen*, in which Helen waited out the war in Egypt while the Greeks and the Trojans fought over her image, nor the similar alternative versions of Helen’s story suggested by Stesichorus and Gorgias manage to supplant the canonical version of the story told in the *Iliad* and the Epic Cycle, nor does it seem that they were expected to do so.¹⁶ Even more strikingly, individual poets are not obliged to be consistent in their interpretation of a given myth over the course of their careers; although he maintains in *Helen* that Helen did not go to Troy, Euripides uses a more traditional story of the Trojan War in *Orestes*, where, despite

¹⁵ Ahl 1991 notoriously argues that Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* presents a radical revision of the Oedipus story, one in which Oedipus is innocent of his traditional crimes; according to this reading, the whole of Sophocles’ play stands in tension with the version of the myth which would have been expected by the Athenian audience and which has been taken for granted by most subsequent readers and audiences. Along with most critics, I find little or no evidence for Ahl’s position in the text of the play, and, in the absence of strong evidence in favour of Oedipus’ innocence, I think it is most reasonable to assume that Sophocles’ Oedipus is supposed to have committed his traditional crimes.

¹⁶ On the tension between myth and innovation in Euripides, see, e.g., Arnott 1973 on ‘Euripides and the Unexpected’ and Wright 2005b: ch. 2 on myth in *Helen*, *Andromeda*, and *Iphigenia in Tauris*; Wright argues that ‘Euripides has not simply “made use of” myth, but has written plays which are, in an important sense, actually *about* myth and fiction’ (57); Allen 2008:18-28 discusses the myth in *Helen* in relation to other versions of the story. Stesichorus’ *Palinode*, in which the poet claims that Helen never went to Troy, is traditionally (most notably in Plato’s *Phaedrus* 243a2-243b2) said to have been written as a corrective for another, earlier treatment of Helen’s story. For the position of the *Palinode* in relation to the Homeric tradition see, e.g., Graziosi and Haubold 2009:103 and Bassi 1993:52-62; on the multiplicity of versions of the Helen myth, Beecroft 2006:55 notes, ‘it is one specific form of the story of Helen that Stesichorus is repudiating [in the *Palinode*]’.

other mythological innovations, the plot requires Helen to have spent the duration of the war in Troy.¹⁷

Treatments of myth thus walk a line between adherence to apparently canonical versions of traditional stories and innovations of various kinds. Sometimes variations between different versions of a story are a matter of changes in emphasis; within tragic versions of the latter part of the Oedipus story, for instance, there is significant variation in the treatment of Oedipus' curse against his sons, which is prominent in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, is never explicitly mentioned in Sophocles' *Antigone*, and is treated at length once again in *Oedipus at Colonus*.¹⁸ Although none of the three plays denies the existence of the curse, Sophocles' decision to focus more on the curse in *Oedipus at Colonus* than he did in *Antigone* changes the ways in which the characters in the two plays engage with their circumstances. Other challenges to canonical versions of myth, such as Euripides' *Orestes*, which calls into question major parts of the *Odyssey*, are considerably more drastic. Similarly, although Philoctetes plays a crucial role in the sack of Troy in the Epic Cycle, Sophocles in his *Philoctetes* suggests the possibility of a version of Philoctetes' story in which the wounded hero does not return to help the Greeks. This deviation from the version of the story told in the *Little Iliad*, however, is temporary, and much of the action of play, in fact, is concerned with bringing Philoctetes' steadfast refusal to help the Greek cause back in line with the traditional story of the sack of Troy.¹⁹

Commentators on Greek tragedy regularly note the parallels between tragic versions of myths and earlier iterations, but scholars discussing the tragedians' use of

¹⁷ Mastrorarde 1994:19 makes this point regarding the question of whether Euripides is likely to have used the same version of Theban history in his *Chrysippus* which he suggests in *Phoenissae*.

¹⁸ West 1999:39-40 discusses the curse in the *Oedipodeia* and *Seven Against Thebes*; Burian 1974:425-427 discusses its importance in *Oedipus at Colonus*.

¹⁹ Gellie 1972:144 comments on the tension between the audience's knowledge that Philoctetes must go willingly to Troy and the fact that he seems unlikely to do so. Easterling 1978:30 argues that this tension is not a source of perplexity for the audience. For other discussions of the interaction between the plot of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and other versions of the story, including those told by Aeschylus and Euripides, see, e.g., Gelin 1959, Fuqua 1976, Hoppin 1981, and Pucci 2003: xvi-xxi.

mythological material in more depth have tended to identify parallels largely as a means to home in on significant differences in tragedy. Since our earliest evidence for the storylines of many tragedies comes from the events surrounding the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, many scholars have focused particularly on tragic divergences from Homer.²⁰ Although more recent scholars have added nuance to his interpretation of the scene between Ajax and Tecmessa, for example, Lattimore's comment that the Homeric echoes in the encounter are 'just off key and to the disadvantage of Ajax' has remained important to many readings of the scene.²¹ When Sophocles diverges from the versions of myth which can be found in Homer, moreover, the precise nature of his divergences are often taken to be the key not only to his opinions about his epic sources, but also to the more general issues which may be at stake in the play. In particular, Sophocles is often seen to adapt traditional material in order to comment on fifth-century Athenian civic issues. In his chapter on 'Text and Tradition', for example, Goldhill, having acknowledged the Homeric characteristics of the Odysseus who appears in *Ajax*, argues that Sophocles' Odysseus is nonetheless 'a figure adapted to and by the fifth-century enlightenment'.²² More recently, Schein has interpreted various figures in *Philoctetes* as 'ethically compromised, fifth-century tragic version[s]' of their Homeric counterparts, and Anderson has argued that it is important to understand tragic versions of myth as 'contemporary, predominantly Athenian appropriation[s]' of traditional material.²³

While it can neither be denied that Sophocles often diverges from traditional material nor that his divergences often reflect contemporary, fifth-century Athenian

²⁰ See, e.g., Davidson 2003, Schein 2006, Davidson 2012, and Dunn 2012a.

²¹ Lattimore 1958:68. Winnington-Ingram 1980:16-19 and Easterling 1984b both complicate Lattimore's reading.

²² Goldhill 1986:159. See also, e.g., Vernant 1988a:53; Scodel 2003 similarly discusses the ways in which Homeric characters are changed to give rise to the political system underlying Sophocles' *Ajax*.

²³ Schein 2006:138; Anderson 2005:123. The influence of fifth-century political thinking on Athenian tragedy is much studied; discussions of the subject from different perspectives are collected in, e.g., Euben 1986, Sommerstein *et al* 1993, and Pelling 1997.

concerns, I will approach the interactions between myth and Sophoclean character from a different angle. Divergence from tradition is only one of the several ways in which Sophoclean characters can interact with myth; for divergences to have an important effect, in fact, mythological resonances must first add a dimension to the figures in a play which those figures would lack if they were entirely invented. Innovation in the form of novel use of mythological material by tragic poets takes place within a general framework of familiarity, and this framework of familiarity is important in shaping likely audience responses to the particular version of a story or character which they see on the tragic stage. On the most basic level, the familiarity of traditional stories makes it possible for an author to use myth as a kind of shorthand; as the comic poet Antiphanes famously suggested, a tragic poet can tap into the network of stories associated with a mythical character simply by mentioning that character's name.²⁴

At the same time, the associations which go along with myth can add a degree of moral weight to tragic characterization. Since, as was mentioned before, myths are generally presented as true, despite potentially fantastic elements, the deployment of myth gives the poet access to a certain kind of authority. The authority of myth, which is partially a matter of presentation but is also acquired over time with successive retellings, goes hand-in-hand with the fact that myths tend to deal with figures who are, for one reason or another, somewhat larger than life. In particular, a number of the mythological characters who appear in tragedy were eventually given hero cult in various Greek cities, and the possibility of heroization adds an important dimension to their tragic

²⁴ Antiphanes fr. 189.5-8 K-A: Οἰδίπουν γὰρ ἂν μόνον | φῶ, τᾶλλα πάντ' ἴσασι· ὁ πατήρ Λάιος, | μήτηρ Ἰοκάστη, θυγατέρες, παῖδες τίνες, | τί πείσῃ οὔτος, τί πεποίηκεν. As a comic exaggeration, these lines ignore the potential flexibility of myth. Vernant 1988b:246 notes, 'Thanks to the freedom afforded it by the fiction of the *muthos*, [tragedy] could acquire a general significance'. For mythology as a network of connected stories, see Lowe 2000:159-160.

counterparts.²⁵ Although the attitudes and actions of a tragic Ajax or Heracles may be partially recognizable in terms of the audience's daily life, the mythical pedigree of these characters may also suggest that they cannot be judged adequately in normal human terms. At the same time, certain moral values which are also important in real life—honour, courage, loyalty to and protection of family and friends, to name a few—are often thematically important to many myths, including the stories of the cult heroes who sometimes figure in tragedy, and tragic versions of mythological figures can be judged for their ability or failure to live up to the values which shape earlier versions of their own stories.

In discussing the various ways in which Sophoclean characters interact with myth, I am going to be defining myth very broadly as any information about a tragedy's story or characters which the audience brings with them to a performance. Myth, according to this definition, includes not only Homer and other epic but also any other versions of mythological stories which may have been active in the minds of an Athenian audience when they arrived in the theatre, including, importantly, earlier tragic versions. Two days before the City Dionysia, a *proagon* took place, in which playwrights introduced the subjects of the plays they were to present in the festival proper; while it is unclear how much detail was included in the *proagon*, it is reasonable to assume that it would have encouraged the audience to consider their own prior knowledge of the stories about to be portrayed onstage.²⁶ The audience's prior knowledge can be called up in various ways; sometimes characters interact on a general level either with traditional aspects of their own

²⁵ Ajax, Oedipus, and Heracles all received cult honours. Ajax's status as an Athenian hero is discussed in Burian 1972:151, Henrichs 1993:175, Kowalzig 2006:85-87, and Finglass 2011:46-47; Kearns 1989:82 suggests that Eurysaces was the earlier figure of Athenian hero cult and that the cult of Ajax, as the father of Eurysaces, was introduced in the 6th century; Burian 1974 argues for the importance of Oedipus' eventual heroization in *Oedipus at Colonus*; Holt 1989 discusses the grounds for seeing a reflection of Heracles' heroization in *Trachiniae*. On hero cult in Sophocles in general, see, e.g., Currie 2012 and Mikalson 2012:444-446.

²⁶ The *proagon* is discussed in Pickard-Cambridge *et al.* 1988:65-68, and in Hunter 2009:11.

stories or with other equivalent characters and story patterns, but sometimes Sophocles alludes to a specific earlier version of a story, whether his own or that of another poet. By the time Sophocles returns to the story of the house of Oedipus for the third time in *Oedipus at Colonus*, he is in effect using *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* as mythological material; *Oedipus at Colonus* interacts not only with the Oedipus myth generally, as it occurred in the Theban epics and other pre-Sophoclean sources, but also with Sophocles' own prior treatments of the myth.²⁷

In the rest of this chapter, I will be examining the ways in which mythologies of different kinds provide a framework for understanding Sophoclean characters. Although some of the interactions between Sophoclean characters and other treatments of mythological material take place at a textual level and could therefore be classed as intertextuality, I will for the most part be avoiding the term on the grounds that specific textual interactions are at any given moment only part of the network of mythological interactions which shape Sophoclean character. Different Sophoclean characters, of course, interact with myth in different ways; the relationship between the Homeric and Sophoclean Ajaxes differs from the relationship between Sophocles' successive treatments of Oedipus, Antigone, and Creon. Similarly, although Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* and Antigone in the play that bears her name both interact with the network of mythological material concerning the ruling family of Thebes, the existence of a previous Sophoclean tragedy with Oedipus as its protagonist complicates Oedipus' interaction with his mythical prehistory in *Oedipus at Colonus*. I will begin by looking at the ways in which Homeric parallels help to illustrate the complicated questions of guilt and responsibility which surround the Sophoclean figure of Deianeira; in the following discussion of *Ajax*, I will suggest that Homeric modelling eventually breaks down when it is used to evaluate the

²⁷ On the relationship between *Oedipus at Colonus* and earlier Sophoclean plays, see especially the general discussions in Seidensticker 1972 and Kelly 2009:46-51; see also 'Repeated Sophoclean Interactions' below, with discussions of the particular relationship between *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone* listed in note 103.

figures of Ajax and Odysseus who appear in that play. In the final section of the chapter, I will look at the interactions between Sophoclean versions of the same characters, arguing that the characters who appear in later plays gain an important dimension from their specifically Sophoclean prehistory.

HOMERIC EXEMPLARITY

Although Sophoclean characters are not infrequently compared to characters from elsewhere in myth, sustained comparisons with figures who occur in the Homeric poems are particularly prominent.²⁸ Despite the tendency of tragedy to avoid the actual events of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Homeric figures often function in tragedy as models for particular types of heroic—or anti-heroic—behaviour.²⁹ The possibility of such future comparisons is suggested in both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, in which characters and events are often discussed in terms of their subsequent reputations.³⁰ When this focus on reputation is explicitly linked to the possibility of exemplarity, as it is when the souls of the suitors arrive in Hades in *Odyssey* 24, and the shade of Agamemnon comments on the respective reputations of his wife and Odysseus', it has implications for the use of mythological *exempla* as a method of characterization in other genres, including tragedy. Penelope's fame, says Agamemnon, will endure in future song, while Clytemnestra χαλεπήν δέ τε φῆμιν ὀπάσσει | θηλυτέρησι γυναιξί, καὶ ἥ κ' εὐεργὸς ἔησιν (*Od.* 24.201-202). While Penelope's faithfulness suggests that women can be good, Agamemnon argues that the negative *exemplum* of Clytemnestra will linger in the

²⁸ The loss of other early epic makes it impossible to tell how much specific interaction existed between Sophoclean texts and non-Homeric epic sources.

²⁹ Davidson 2012:261.

³⁰ Hector speaks of his own reputation and that of his son at *Il.* 6.479-481; Achilles says at *Il.* 9.410-416 that he has been offered a choice between a long life in obscurity or a short life with everlasting fame; and at *Od.* 8.579-580, Alcinous tells Odysseus that current sufferings will be subjects of song in the future.

background, providing reason enough to condemn all women, even those who might be more like Penelope.

Agamemnon's idea of the positive and negative exemplarity which will eventually be attached to Penelope and Clytemnestra, respectively, works to some extent as a model for the interactions which take place between tragic characters and figures from elsewhere in myth. Not only are a majority of the named characters in tragedy likely to be traditional figures themselves, but mythological figures are also used as models for tragic characters; tragic heroes, for example, often share character traits associated with the quintessential heroes of Homeric epic, particularly Achilles.³¹ Homeric resonances in tragedy, however, are rarely simple; similarities between tragic characters and figures from Homer often raise expectations which are subsequently denied or complicated over the course of the play.³² In this way, tragic characters often take shape in the minds of the audience at the point of intersection between different—and sometimes apparently contradictory—Homeric models. In the following section of this chapter, I will first examine the ways in which the epic models of Penelope and Clytemnestra allow Sophocles in *Trachiniae* to shape his Deianeira's interaction with her non-Homeric mythological antecedents. I will then go on to look at the uses and limitations of similar kinds of mythical thinking in the evaluation of the somewhat more complicated Sophoclean versions of Ajax and Odysseus.

Homeric Exemplarity I: Triangulating Deianeira

The figure of Deianeira goes back at least as far as the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, in which Deianeira is mentioned as the wife of Heracles and is said to have brought about his death by sending him a robe anointed with poison (fr. 25 Merkelbach

³¹ See Knox 1964 for the view that Achilles is the primary model for Sophoclean heroism.

³² Schein 2012:428-429.

and West). Deianeira, particularly in conjunction with Nessus, can also be found in numerous visual representations and is known to have been mentioned elsewhere in archaic poetry; Archilochus is reported to have treated Heracles' encounters with both Achelous and Nessus (frs. 286-288 West).³³ While these earlier versions of Deianeira tend to agree that she is responsible for her husband's death, they do not paint a consistent picture of her culpability. A fragment of the *Catalogue*, supplemented by Lobel, suggests that Deianeira δειν' ἔρξ'[, ἐπεὶ ἄάσατ]ο μέγα θυμῶι (fr. 25.20), and goes on to describe the sending of the poisoned robe (fr. 25.21-25).³⁴ This account of Deianeira as 'greatly deluded in mind' allows the resulting death of Heracles to be either accidental or deliberate, but many depictions of Heracles' slaying of Nessus, on the other hand, seem to rule out the possibility of the love charm as the eventual means of the hero's death.³⁵ From the moment when she identifies herself in the prologue of *Trachiniae*, Sophocles' Deianeira must therefore interact with the several versions of her story which are likely to have been available to the audience of the play.

The interaction between Sophocles' Deianeira and her pre-Sophoclean mythical history is filtered through her interaction with the figures of Penelope and Clytemnestra, who appear in Homer and Aeschylus as paradigms for good and bad wifely behaviour.³⁶ Although it is disconnected from the Trojan War and its aftermath, *Trachiniae* is a story of *nostos*, and, as such, it has an automatic point of comparison both with the *Odyssey* and with the parallel story of Agamemnon's homecoming from Troy.³⁷ In particular, it has frequently been noted that, as a wife waiting patiently for her husband while he performs

³³ Gantz 1993:431-434 collects the evidence for the wooing of Deianeira and the subsequent slaying of Nessus.

³⁴ Lobel's supplement is accepted by Merkelbach and West; Lobel also offers ἔρξ[εν· ἄάσατο γὰρ], which is similarly ambiguous in terms of Deianeira's intentions.

³⁵ March's translation. On the ambiguity implicit in Lobel's supplement, see Easterling 1982:16. March 1987:53-55 and Maehler 2004:166-167 both argue that the love charm requires Nessus to be slain with an arrow and therefore is precluded by visual representations of Heracles slaying Nessus with a sword or club.

³⁶ Segal 1983:180 describes *Trachiniae* as 'suspended between two simultaneous and opposing paradigms, the myth of the *Odyssey* and the myth of the *Oresteia*'.

³⁷ e.g., Fowler 1999:162; Lowe 2001:160-161; Easterling 2005:31; Kratzer 2013:25.

his heroic tasks, Deianeira is cast as a Penelope figure.³⁸ As Deianeira's plan to regain Heracles' affection goes horribly wrong, however, her story grows more similar to that of the wife who killed her husband on his return, and Deianeira is several times described by other figures in the play in terms reminiscent of Clytemnestra as she appears in Homer and, to a lesser extent, Aeschylus. Over the course of the play, the two opposing epic models for Deianeira's behaviour work in tandem with the body of existing Heracles myths, and a complex and changeable Sophoclean Deianeira emerges out of the resulting network of mythological interactions. Perhaps more interestingly, the emergence of the two Homeric models for Deianeira's character takes place in tandem with the emergence of conflicting views on the part of Deianeira and those around her about her place in Heracles' household.

The tension between Penelope and Clytemnestra which plays out in the figure of Deianeira begins with the treatment of Agamemnon's homecoming in the *Odyssey* and grows more complex in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.³⁹ In the *Odyssey*, Clytemnestra is never actually present; thus while Penelope often expresses her views about the absent Odysseus and her own likely course of action, Clytemnestra can only be mentioned by others. When Clytemnestra is mentioned in the *Odyssey*, however, she is described as a figure with significant psychological agency; most of the Odyssean descriptions of Clytemnestra refer in some way to her thought processes or her mental state. While Nestor says that Clytemnestra was initially reluctant to betray her husband, φρεσὶ γὰρ κέχρητ' ἀγαθῆσι (*Od.* 3.266), Menelaus holds her responsible for his brother's death, saying that Agamemnon died both at the hands of another man and δόλω οὐλομένης ἀλόχοιο (*Od.* 4.92); Agamemnon in turn adds the adjective δολόμητις to Menelaus' description of

³⁸ Fowler 1999:162-163; Davidson: 2003:517.

³⁹ For repeated use of the story of Agamemnon's homecoming both as a cautionary tale for Odysseus and as a paradigm for Telemachus' behaviour, see, e.g., D'Arms and Hulley 1946; Hölscher 1967; Slatkin 1996:227-228.

Clytemnestra as ούλομένη (*Od.* 11.422), going on to tell Odysseus, ὡς οὐκ αἰνότερον καὶ κύντερον ἄλλο γυναικὸς, | ἢ τις δὴ τοιαῦτα μετὰ φρεσὶν ἔργα βάλῃται (*Od.* 11. 427-428). The Odyssean Clytemnestra is, according to her husband, not only wicked, but a model for the potential scheming wickedness of all women.

In the *Oresteia*, the focus on Clytemnestra's understanding of her own actions is even more pronounced. In the watchman's opening speech in *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra is described in terms of her ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ (*Ag.* 11); later, after the murder of Agamemnon, she tells to the chorus, ἐμοὶ δ' ἀγῶν ὄδ' οὐκ ἀφρόντιστος πάλαι | νείκης παλαιᾶς ἦλθε, σὺν χρόνῳ γε μὴν (*Ag.* 1377-1378), and explains to them why Agamemnon deserved his fate (*Ag.* 1412-1420, 1431-1443). The contrast between Clytemnestra and Penelope is less prominent in the *Oresteia* than it is in the *Odyssey*, but it is still present; Penelope is never mentioned explicitly in the *Oresteia*, but Agamemnon's reference in his homecoming speech to Odysseus' uncertain fate suggests a comparison between the *nostoi* of the two men (*Ag.* 842-843), and this comparison, in the context of Agamemnon's impending murder, implies a comparison between their respective wives.⁴⁰

Trachiniae takes place about a generation before the Trojan War in mythological time, and neither Penelope nor Clytemnestra—nor either of their respective husbands—is mentioned by name. Instead, as the audience are introduced to Deianeira, a gradual accumulation of parallels encourages the audience to think of Penelope as a possible paradigm for Deianeira's behaviour. As the play continues, however, a growing focus on Deianeira's intentions begins to complicate her interaction with the figure of Penelope. When they castigate Deianeira for the harm she has done, Hyllus and Heracles seem to play on the earlier implicit comparison with Penelope in describing Deianeira in terms

⁴⁰ Raeburn and Thomas 2011: *ad* 841-844.

more suitable for Clytemnestra; rather than eliding the model of Penelope altogether in order to revert to a pre-Sophoclean version of the Heracles myth in which Deianeira deliberately kills her husband, Hyllus and Heracles replace Penelope with her evil Homeric doublet, whose intentions are not in doubt. Given the differences in understanding and intention between Deianeira, Penelope, and Clytemnestra, however, the parallels between Deianeira's situation and those of her more prominent mythological counterparts are not exact, and the new comparison to Clytemnestra, like the comparison with Penelope, is raised only to be called into question.⁴¹ At the end of the play, the audience is left with the task of triangulating the different epic models in order to arrive at a Deianeira who is neither Penelope nor Clytemnestra, but who can, at different moments, be seen to resemble both.

The identification of Deianeira with Penelope begins early in the play and is prompted in large part by Deianeira's own comments about her situation; Deianeira identifies herself as a faithful wife waiting for her husband to return, and the audience, in turn, is encouraged to think of Penelope waiting for Odysseus. Her fear for her husband's safety and her comment that she knows nothing of his fate, *πλὴν ἐμοὶ πικρὰς | ὠδῖνας αὐτοῦ προσβαλὼν ἀποίχεται* (41-42), for example, identifies her as particularly close to Penelope, who explains that Phemius' song about the *nostoi* of the Greeks *μοι αἰεὶ ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλον κῆρ | τεῖρει, ἐπεὶ με μάλιστα καθίκετο πένθος ἄλαστον* (*Od.* 1. 341-342).⁴² Other parallels between the situations of the two women, including the fact that both have been set a deadline for their waiting (*Od.* 18.259-27 and *Trach.* 164-168), encourage the audience to project Penelope's faithful devotion to Odysseus onto the

⁴¹ Hall 2009:86-89 draws attention to the differences in deliberation and intention between Deianeira and Clytemnestra.

⁴² Heiden 2012:145 suggests that *Trachiniae* focuses less on 'the personal dimension' than the *Odyssey* does, but I argue that his view is belied by Deianeira's focus on her own feelings, particularly where Heracles is concerned.

fearful Deianeira.⁴³ A Deianeira who feels about Heracles as Penelope says that she feels about Odysseus is unlikely to take deliberate action against her husband, which, in turn, suggests that Sophocles is aligning his Deianeira with a version of the Heracles story in which Deianeira's actions are misguided, but not culpable.⁴⁴

Although Deianeira's own comments early in the play suggest a likeness to Penelope, Deianeira's role in the death of Heracles lends elements of the *Oresteia* to her story, particularly when the sexual jealousy which prompts her to send the robe is taken into account.⁴⁵ The putative similarities between Deianeira and Clytemnestra, however, are far more prominent in the speech of other characters than in Deianeira's own words or deeds; both Hyllus and Heracles take Deianeira's actions as a sign that she, like Clytemnestra, is a scheming wife who deliberately chose to destroy her husband. Hyllus sums up his report with the comment, τοιαῦτα, μήτηρ, πατρὶ βουλεύσασ' ἐμῶ | καὶ δρῶσ' ἐλήφθης (807-808), while Heracles describes his wife as ἡ δολῶπις Οἰνέως κόρη (1050). The word δολῶπις occurs only here, but, in his focus on Deianeira's treacherous plotting, Heracles echoes the Homeric shade of Agamemnon's description of his wife as Κλυταιμνήστρη δολόμητις (*Od.* 11.422).⁴⁶ In the beginning of *Agamemnon*, moreover, Clytemnestra's role in her household is several times called into question, both when she is described as a woman with an ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ (*Ag.* 11) and when the chorus suggest that she is in a position to act as Agamemnon's surrogate (*Ag.* 258-260), and Hyllus suggests a similar ambiguity of roles in his criticism of his mother.

⁴³ Fowler 1999:162.

⁴⁴ Fowler 1999:163 suggests that Sophocles' portrayal of a wholly well-meaning Deianeira may in fact be an innovation.

⁴⁵ March 1987:68 suggests that, when Deianeira first mentions the gifts which she intends to send to Heracles, the audience will take her actions as the emergence of a traditional, murderous Deianeira, in contrast to the innocent Deianeira who has so far been on display.

⁴⁶ Easterling *ad* 1050 suggests that δολῶπις may be meant as a commentary on Deianeira's (deceptive) beauty.

It is Deianeira's deeds, which Hyllus believes to have been planned in advance (807), which make him reluctant to identify as his mother ἥτις μηδὲν ὡς τεκοῦσα δρᾶ (818).

In describing a Deianeira who is more like Clytemnestra than like Penelope, Hyllus and Heracles focus on the intentions which they assume to have guided her actions. In Homer and in Aeschylus, Clytemnestra's culpability is strongly associated with her plotting, and, as both the effects of the poisoned robe and Deianeira's intentions become increasingly clear, different figures in *Trachiniae* assess Deianeira's character differently. By the time Heracles enters, Hyllus has learned that Deianeira acted unwittingly, and this knowledge makes a crucial difference to his view of his mother's character.⁴⁷ When Heracles claims that Deianeira's suicide allowed her to avoid the punishment she truly deserved (1133), Hyllus replies that Heracles would give up his anger if he knew the full story (1134) and explains that Deianeira ἤμαρτε χρηστὰ μωμένη (1136). As Hyllus, recanting his previous accusations against his mother, explains how it was that Deianeira came to send the poisoned robe to Heracles, his change of heart calls into question the mythological models that have been suggested for Deianeira throughout the play. By focusing on Deianeira's good intentions, Hyllus undercuts his mother's similarity to Clytemnestra; despite those intentions, however, Deianeira's final actions have distanced her from Penelope, and she cannot be rehabilitated in Homeric terms.

Our extant pre-Sophoclean sources for Deianeira provide relatively little information about what she thought as she set in motion the actions which would eventually bring about her husband's death.⁴⁸ Sophocles' Deianeira, on the other hand,

⁴⁷ Hyllus' belated understanding of his mother's intentions is only one of a series of instances of 'late learning' in *Trachiniae*; for discussions of late learning as a guiding principle of the play, see, e.g., Lawrence 1978, Kraus 1991; Hall 2009 makes a similar argument but frames it instead in terms of failed deliberation.

⁴⁸ Deianeira is specifically said to have been led astray in Bacchylides 16, but, if *Trachiniae* is a relatively early Sophoclean tragedy, as is suggested by most scholars, among them Easterling 1982, March 1987, and Kitzinger 2012, the temporal relationship between Bacchylides 16 and *Trachiniae* is impossible to determine. For discussions of the relationship between the two works, see Easterling 1982:16, March

begins speaking about her perception of the world in the very first lines of the play, and she continues to talk about what she knows and what she thinks until shortly before her final silent exit.⁴⁹ By emphasizing both Deianeira's intentions and her evolving understanding of her own actions in this way, Sophocles draws attention to the discrepancy between what Deianeira thinks of herself and what others think of her actions; Deianeira herself highlights the importance of this contrast when, after seeing the effect of the poison on the tuft of wool, she comments, ζῆν γὰρ κακῶς κλύουσσαν οὐκ ἀνασχετόν, | ἥτις προτιμᾷ μὴ κακὴ πεφυκέναι (721-722). Although she later holds herself responsible for Heracles' death, Deianeira throughout the first half of the play describes herself primarily as a Penelope, waiting patiently for her husband, fearing for his safety, and faithfully taking care of the household in his absence. Those who see her actions from outside, however, immediately assume that she is a Clytemnestra.⁵⁰ Both of these models enhance the tragic stature of Sophocles' Deianeira, helping her to contend with her famous husband in accounts of the play—Clytemnestra dominates the action in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, while the Homeric Penelope is frequently said to be evenly matched with her husband Odysseus.⁵¹ While both Penelope and Clytemnestra can provide models for the interpretation of Deianeira's action, however, choosing between them requires more information than anyone—on or offstage—has before the end of the play.

1987:62-63, Riemer 2000:170-173, and Maehler 2004:167; March and Maehler both argue for the likely priority of *Trachiniae*.

⁴⁹ Kitzinger 2012:114 argues that Deianeira's explanations of her own perceptions are meant to give the men in the audience a view of an essentially female world to which they might otherwise not have access.

⁵⁰ Webster 1936:177 comments, 'In Heracles' eyes, Deianeira is a Clytemnestra'.

⁵¹ On the importance of the contrast between Deianeira and Heracles, see, e.g., McCall 1972 and Kitzinger 2012.

Homeric Exemplarity 2: Ajax and Odysseus in the Balance

Although frequently mentioned by modern scholars, the parallels between Deianeira and the mythological paradigms of Clytemnestra and Penelope are never explicitly mentioned in the text of the play; instead, comments by various characters within the play help to connect Deianeira in the minds of the audience with the two most famous Homeric examples of good and bad wifely behaviour. The situation in *Ajax*, on the other hand, is very different. The figure of Ajax is over the course of the play established in counterpoint to various other mythological figures, starting with the conflict between Ajax and Odysseus which is established in the prologue and continuing throughout the play as parallels are drawn between Ajax and both Achilles and Hector.⁵² The various heroes, dead and alive, with whom Ajax interacts over the course of the play all come from the same body of mythological material as Ajax himself, and the links between the Sophoclean Ajax and Odysseus and the deceased Hector and Achilles derive a certain amount of force from echoes of the interactions between the heroes which take place in the *Iliad*. Moreover, while some of these interactions are simply implied and left to the audience to process, others are discussed explicitly on stage, and the gaps between the mythical interactions available to the audience and those available to the characters themselves add another dimension to the Sophoclean figures involved.

The personal animosity between Ajax and Odysseus which appears in the prologue becomes over the course of the play a debate about standards of heroic behaviour, and this debate is framed in largely Homeric terms. Despite its Homeric setting, the world of Sophocles' play is a different world than that of the *Iliad*, and the Sophoclean Odysseus and Ajax, both figures familiar from epic, are defined in part by their ability to move

⁵² The status of Sophocles' Ajax as a Homeric figure interacting with various Homeric precedents has been much discussed. For analyses of how the Sophoclean Ajax fits Homeric paradigms for heroism, see, e.g., Knox 1961:20-22; Winnington-Ingram 1980:15-19; Easterling 1984b; Nooter 2012:30-41; Schein 2012:429-431.

beyond their Homeric precedents in order to adapt to the world of the tragedy.⁵³ This tension between the need to adapt and the desire to remain true to a set of heroic values becomes, in the figure of Ajax, a tension between how he appears to others and how he sees himself to interact with the world. Ajax draws his own comparisons with Achilles, Hector, and Odysseus, but those Homeric comparisons are open to radically different interpretations both on the part of his fellow Greeks and on the part of the audience. The audience’s evaluation of the Sophoclean Ajax is thus shaped not only by his interactions with other figures in the play, but also by Ajax’s own interpretations of these interactions; Ajax and the audience would agree that Ajax interacts with Odysseus, for example, but Ajax views this interaction—and all other interactions—differently than either the audience or anyone else in the play, and this disconnect is part of what makes him such a problematic figure.

Both Ajax’s hatred of Odysseus and his more general estrangement from the Greeks stem from the conflict over the arms of Achilles, which were awarded to Odysseus and not to Ajax, who felt that he was entitled to them. This story goes back at least as far as Homer; it is mentioned by Odysseus in Book 11 of the *Odyssey* in his account of his encounter with the shade of Ajax the in Underworld (*Od.* 11. 543-565), and was also narrated in both the *Aethiopis* and the *Little Iliad*.⁵⁴ When the Sophoclean Ajax explains the source of his anger against the Greek leaders, he says,

εἰ ζῶν Ἀχιλλεὺς τῶν ὀπλῶν τῶν ᾧ περὶ
κρίνειν ἔμελλε κράτος ἀριστείας τινί,
οὐκ ἄν τις αὐτ’ ἔμαρψεν ἄλλος ἀντ’ ἐμοῦ (442-444).

This claim sets up an equality between Ajax and Achilles; Ajax’s comment assumes that Achilles would have awarded the arms to someone who lived up to his own idea of

⁵³ On Ajax’s failure to adapt to a changing world, see especially Knox 1961 and Winnington-Ingram 1980.

⁵⁴ West 2003:108-143 presents the *testimonia*, arguments, and fragments of the two poems; Gantz 1993:629-630 collects the pre-Sophoclean evidence for the fate of Ajax. Hesk 2003:27 notes that *Ajax* ‘seems to be so imbued with Homer’s underworld scene in *Odyssey* 11 that it reads like a probing and explanatory “prequel” to it’.

ἀριστεία.⁵⁵ The idea that Ajax would have been viewed by Achilles as an equal is a milder formulation than his description of himself in the preceding *kommos* as such a man as Troy never saw coming from the Greek host (421-426); in Homer, Ajax is regularly described as the best of the Achaeans, after Achilles, but Ajax in the *kommos* takes no account of the typically acknowledged superiority of Achilles.⁵⁶ The conflict between Sophocles' Ajax and Odysseus is thus, in Ajax's own assessment, a dispute about which of them best measures up to the deceased Achilles. In order for Ajax's claim to superiority to prevail, however, the comparison must be made according to Ajax's terms.

Ajax's own assessment of his relation to Achilles clashes in some ways with the more general equivalency between the two heroes which is likely to occur to the audience on the basis both of Ajax's heroic stature and of his troubled interaction with the leaders of the Greek force at Troy.⁵⁷ Like Achilles, Ajax, previously a valued member of the army and a leader in his own right, has quarrelled with the other leaders, and, like Achilles, he seeks by withholding his support—and that of his loyal followers—to make the Greek leaders regret their actions. As the play goes on, however, Ajax's view of himself as the rightful heroic heir to Achilles increasingly comes into conflict with the more problematic aspects of his parallelism with Achilles—aspects which, although apparent to the audience and sometimes to other figures in the play, are apparently lost on Ajax. Ajax compares himself to Achilles in order to magnify his own heroic stature; his suggestion that Achilles would have awarded him the arms seems, without admitting Achilles' superiority, nonetheless to take Achilles as the standard for heroic excellence.⁵⁸ The end of Ajax's own story—his suicide and the resulting uncertainty over the fate of his dependents and even his body—however, suggests a failure to live up to the example set by Achilles, who

⁵⁵ Knox 1961:23.

⁵⁶ Winnington-Ingram 1980:14-15; Finglass *ad* 421-426.

⁵⁷ Knox 1964:51-52 suggests that Achilles can be seen as the model not only for Ajax, but also for Sophoclean heroes more generally.

⁵⁸ Hesk 2003:61.

was eventually reconciled with the rest of the Greek leaders and subsequently died in combat. More generally, Achilles is a problematic figure even in the *Iliad*, and, over the course of *Ajax*, it becomes apparent that the Achillean model of heroism sits even more uneasily in the world of Sophocles' play than it does in the Homeric version of the Greek camp.⁵⁹

The version of heroism in which Ajax is shown to believe is further complicated by his interaction with the deceased Hector, the most prominent of the Trojan heroes in the *Iliad* and one who was repeatedly at odds with both Ajax and Achilles. In life—both in the *Iliad* and as he is remembered in Sophocles' play—Hector was an enemy of Ajax; the fight between Hector and Ajax in *Iliad* 7 is one of the most prominent formal duels in the poem, and Sophocles' *Ajax* kills himself by falling on the sword received in that duel, referring to it as a δῶρον μὲν ἀνδρὸς Ἑκτορος ξένων ἐμοὶ | μάλιστα μισηθέντος (817-818).⁶⁰ This bitter reference to Hector picks up on the unspoken prominence of Hector earlier in the play: as is frequently noted, the scene in which Tecmessa pleads for Ajax to think of his dependants and Ajax speaks about the future which he envisions for Eurysaces is closely connected to the encounter between Hector and Andromache in Book 6 of the *Iliad*.⁶¹ Although there are clear parallels between the two scenes—Tecmessa justifies her plea on the grounds that the rest of her family has already been killed (514-519), and Ajax prays for his son's future military prowess (550-551)—each example of Hector's tender feelings for his family is matched in Sophocles by a particularly harsh echo from Ajax.⁶² Throughout the scene in *Iliad* 6, Hector looks beyond his own likely fate in order to consider the wellbeing of those who are near and dear to him; each of

⁵⁹ Winnington-Ingram 1980:19 suggests that Sophocles' Ajax takes the model of Achillean heroism even further than Achilles himself does.

⁶⁰ Hesk 2003:33-34 notes the importance of the Iliadic duel between Ajax and Hector in establishing relationships between various figures in Sophocles' play.

⁶¹ Lattimore 1958:68; Brown 1965:118; Winnington-Ingram 1980:16-19; Easterling 1984b; Burian 1997:193; Garvie *ad* 485-524; Burian 2012:75-76; Schein 2012:429-431.

⁶² Schein 2012:430.

Ajax's utterances, on the other hand, refers back to his own authority and likely reputation.

The ongoing enmity between Ajax and Hector, which Ajax mentions in his suicide speech (817-818) and Teucer reiterates when he comments that Hector's sword and its belt have been instrumental in the deaths of both heroes (1026-1035), emphasizes the contrast between Ajax's view of his own heroism and his role as it appears to others.⁶³ In the earlier scene with Tecmessa, Hector is an implicit model for Ajax; when Hector says that nothing about the imminent fall of Troy grieves him so much as Andromache's likely fate (*Il.* 6.450-465), he acknowledges both his bond with his wife and child and his duty to the Trojan cause. Ajax, however, does not live up to the example set by his Homeric predecessor; when the chorus suggest that Ajax ought to approve of Tecmessa's words (525-526), which, as Easterling notes, are carefully constructed to fit her current circumstances and her knowledge of Ajax, Ajax replies only that she will win his approval if she complies with his instructions (527-528).⁶⁴ Although the Sophoclean Ajax cannot here be actively engaging with the example set by Hector, his later description of Hector as 'the most hated of all his guest friends' (817-818) suggests that his general attitude towards Hector is worth considering. While Hector is, on the one hand, simply a prominent member of the opposing army, Ajax's continuing hatred of him can also be taken as a sign of antagonism not just against Hector himself, but also against the model of

⁶³ I follow Garvie and Jebb in retaining 1028-1039, *contra* Lloyd-Jones and Wilson, who delete the lines on the grounds that they are unnecessarily bombastic (1990: *ad* 1028-1039). While the lines contain a degree of bombast, I see no reason to conclude therefore that Sophocles did not write the lines for Teucer, particularly given the tone of Teucer's debates with Menelaus and Agamemnon. Finglass *ad* 1028-1039 rejects the lines both on the grounds of the shift into the third person at 1028 and in terms of likely staging; changes in person within a speech are not impossible (see, e.g., *Phil.* 927-962, which alternates between direct address to Neoptolemus and apostrophe to the landscape), and, while 1024-1025 suggest that Teucer has drawn near the corpse, he could plausibly deliver 1028-1039 while standing immediately beside the corpse without having yet bent to lift it.

⁶⁴ Easterling 1984b:2-4. Easterling sees Tecmessa as having a notable effect on Ajax's subsequent reasoning.

heroism which Hector represents, a model of heroism in which individual glory does not trump obligations to home and family.

When the Sophoclean Ajax sets himself up as the rightful heroic heir to Achilles, he acknowledges the importance of being associated with an earlier hero, particularly a hero who is said to have been in a class by himself.⁶⁵ In this vein, inasmuch as he resembles the Homeric paradigms of Achilles and Hector, Sophocles' Ajax takes on some of their heroic stature. His interactions with the Homeric predecessors, however, are ambivalent; while both Achilles and Hector eventually yield to external pressure, Hector to die for his city and Achilles, after the death of Patroclus, to rejoin the Greek cause, Sophocles' Ajax continues to play by his own rules at all cost.⁶⁶ This refusal to abide by normal human standards of behaviour is best exemplified by Ajax's past rejection of divine help as reported in the messenger speech: before leaving for Troy, Ajax rejected his father's advice to win victory with the help of the gods (764-769), and, later, when Athena offered her assistance, he replied, ἄνασσα, τοῖς ἄλλοισιν Ἀργείων πέλας | ἵστω, καθ' ἡμᾶς δ' οὐποτ' ἐνρήξει μάχη (774-775). Although his independence from the divine may have roots in Homer—the Iliadic Ajax is, notably, never directly helped by a god—this aspect of his character gains new weight in Sophocles.⁶⁷ By cutting himself off from the gods, Ajax places himself in his own category, and, as it is for the Homeric Achilles, this isolation is as much a problem as a source of glory.

In counterpoint to Ajax, whose ability to interact with the world around him is shaped by his problematic Achillean aspirations, there is the Odysseus of this play, who represents a different model of Homeric behaviour altogether, and the personal and

⁶⁵ Hesk 2003:61 describes Ajax's desire to compare himself to Achilles as a kind of obsession.

⁶⁶ Winnington-Ingram 1980:17. Knox 1961:23 also comments on Ajax's desperate adherence to individualism; Knox, however, does not see a disconnect between Ajax's willingness to die rather than accept any kind of communal authority and Achilles' eventual return to battle.

⁶⁷ Winnington-Ingram 1980:18n.22. March 1991/93:10 argues that the Sophoclean Ajax's boast that he does not need divine help is a straightforward reflection of his Iliadic lack of reliance on the gods.

ideological tensions between Ajax and Odysseus provide another window into the disconnect between Ajax's own perceptions and those of others. By the fifth century, Odysseus had become a paradigm for slippery, self-serving rhetoric; much later in his career, Sophocles would go on to cast Odysseus in *Philoctetes* in a typically sophistic mould.⁶⁸ When Ajax speaks about his rival, he describes a typically petty, conniving, fifth-century Odysseus; in his exchange with Athena while he is still mad, he describes Odysseus as τούπίτριπτον κίναδος (103), and, later, he says that the Atreidae have given the arms of Achilles φωτὶ παντουργῶ φρένας (445). When Odysseus speaks for himself in *Ajax*, however, he appears to be a very different figure than the one described by Ajax and the chorus, who blame him for spreading λόγους ψιθύρους throughout the camp (148).⁶⁹ Odysseus is pragmatically inclined to consider his own interests, as he explains when he tells Agamemnon to allow the burial, καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἐνθάδ' ἴξομαι (1365), but his brand of pragmatism pushes him not towards the underhanded tactics of which he is accused by others but rather towards a willingness to compromise with those who oppose him.⁷⁰ Neither the Odysseus described by Ajax nor the Odysseus who appears before the audience ascribes to Ajax's view of heroism, but the two versions of Odysseus suggested in the play occupy very different places in the world.

In the Homeric epics, as they are in Sophocles' play, Achilles and Odysseus are sharply contrasted with each other, and the contrast between the two Homeric heroes shapes the interaction between the Sophoclean Ajax and Odysseus. Not only does Odysseus in the *Odyssey* exhibit a very different kind of heroism than Achilles does in the *Iliad*, but, more specifically, in the embassy scene in *Iliad* 9, Achilles responds to

⁶⁸ Schein 2006:132-134 comments on the Odysseus of *Philoctetes* as a typical fifth-century construction; at 134n.16 he notes that the version of Odysseus who appears in *Philoctetes* is consistent with the versions of Odysseus that appear or are described in Euripides' *Hecuba*, *Trojan Women*, and *Iphigenia at Aulis*.

⁶⁹ Knox 1961:22 notes that Odysseus is only described by his enemies. Burian 2012:72-73 comments on the divergence between Odysseus' actual behaviour and the expectations set up in the prologue.

⁷⁰ Goldhill 1986:158-159 argues that this controlled and tactful Odysseus represents another side of the fifth-century interest in rhetoric.

Odysseus with the comment, ἐχθρὸς γὰρ μοι κεῖνος ὁμῶς Αἴδαο πύλησιν | ὅς χ' ἕτερον μὲν κεύθη ἐνὶ φρεσίν, ἄλλο δὲ εἴπη (*Il.* 9.312-313); although this comment serves ostensibly to explain the bluntness of his coming response, it also lays out the key differences between himself and the diplomatic Odysseus.⁷¹ In Sophocles, Ajax at several points identifies himself with Achilles, and suggests through his descriptions of Odysseus that that the enmity he feels is not just a matter of a personal slight, but also a matter of fundamentally different beliefs about the behaviour that is suitable for prominent members of the army.⁷² Having staked his position in the Greek army on his claim to be both the best of the Greeks and the rightful recipient of Achilles' arms, however, Ajax fails to maintain an Achillean stature amongst the Greeks; although he dies for the sake of his own tarnished honour, the aftermath of his death is taken up by a series of arguments not about whether or how to mark his heroic status but about whether he should be granted a proper burial at all. Although Odysseus speaks about Ajax's past service to the Greek cause, his perspective differs from that of Ajax, and the other Greek leaders of Sophocles' play have no use for a hero whose pursuit of Achillean stature made him unable to function within the army and the wider world.⁷³

Even beyond Ajax's failure to live up to the Achillean model which he claims as his own, however, there is the suggestion throughout *Ajax* that Ajax's interpretation of Achilles is incompatible with the world of the play. In the world of *Ajax*, Achilles is problematic; his arms are at the root of the conflict which destroys Ajax, and, more importantly, his mode of heroism has dangerous consequences for the entire Greek army. Achilles sticks to his principles at great cost to those around him, and Ajax's anger against the Greek leaders is similarly destructive. In a tragic world in which figures like Achilles

⁷¹ Edwards 1987:222.

⁷² Knox 1961:22.

⁷³ Cairns 2006:115 notes that 'Odysseus' values endorse, but at the same time negate those of Ajax'.

and Ajax can defend their values only by placing their friends and dependants at great risk, Odysseus, as he encourages one character after another to behave with moderation, grows proportionally more admirable.⁷⁴ Although he and Ajax are never on stage at the same time after Ajax recovers from his delusion, Odysseus provides a third model for heroism in addition to the more obviously similar models provided by the Homeric Hector and Achilles. By the end of the play, three different models of heroic behaviour have been suggested, and it is part of Ajax's tragedy to have failed, in different ways, to live up to all of them. His life in the Greek army was defined by the interactions between these models, and his death is, at least in part, a way of acknowledging the ascendance of models which he cannot endorse.

RECURRING SOPHOCLEAN INTERACTIONS

Although Ajax is briefly mentioned in *Philoctetes* (410-415), and Sophocles is known to have treated Ajax's family in other tragedies, Ajax himself, like Deianeira, appears in only one Sophoclean tragedy.⁷⁵ Many other Sophoclean characters, however, have counterparts not only in Homer and elsewhere in myth, but also in other plays by Sophocles. Odysseus appears—and behaves very differently—in both *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*; Heracles appears both as a dying hero in *Trachiniae* and as a *deus ex machina* in *Philoctetes*; and many members of Oedipus' family occur in two or even three of the Theban plays.⁷⁶ When the same figure appears in multiple plays, it raises questions of to what extent multiple instances of that figure can be considered to be the same character

⁷⁴ Burian 2012:80-81.

⁷⁵ Finglass 2011:34-35 discusses the evidence of Sophocles' lost *Teucer* and *Eurysaces*.

⁷⁶ See above (notes 68 and 70) on the flexibility of Sophocles' treatment of Odysseus. Although the deified Heracles in *Philoctetes* behaves very differently from his counterpart in *Trachiniae*, the relationship between Heracles and Philoctetes originates with an event which immediately follows the end of *Trachiniae* in mythological time, and hints at Heracles' coming heroization in *Trachiniae* may indicate a connection between the versions of Heracles that appear in the two plays; see Holt 1989 on the issue of Heracles' heroization. The interactions between various versions of different members of the Theban royal family will be treated below.

and how those instances interact with each other. Although the differences between Sophocles' versions of Odysseus are striking enough that it is relatively easy to identify them as two different characters, other cases are not so clear-cut. Is Antigone in her eponymous play the same Antigone who appears in *Oedipus at Colonus*, or are the two versions of Oedipus' daughter so disconnected as to be entirely different characters who happen to share the same name and mythological background? Perhaps more importantly, how does the audience's awareness of an earlier Antigone shape their perception of Oedipus' daughter in the later play?

Interactions between different versions of a figure created by the same author are a specific subset of the more general interactions which take place between any particular version of a traditional character and the broader mythological tradition. Although Sophocles is not obliged to use the same version of any given traditional story throughout his career, he will still have been well aware of his own previous treatments of the story, which makes both parallels and divergences between versions likely to be meaningful.⁷⁷ He is also likely to have been able to expect that some members of the audience of a later play will have seen earlier plays dealing with the same myth or, at the very least, will have been acquainted with the version of the story told in earlier plays; the possibility that the ending of *Seven Against Thebes* was modelled on *Antigone*, for example, suggests that the particular story told in *Antigone*, although largely a Sophoclean innovation, remained in wide circulation well after the play's original production.⁷⁸ The interactions between Sophoclean instances of a given figure, moreover, can work with other mythological interactions in order to further complicate what the audience thinks they know about that figure. An audience aware of both the Homeric poems and Sophocles' *Ajax* will have to

⁷⁷ Mastronarde 1994:19 argues that Euripides can use different versions of myths at will. Where we have multiple Sophoclean treatments of the same myth, divergences are less violent than those between, say, Euripidean versions of the Helen story, but they are nonetheless noteworthy.

⁷⁸ Griffith 1999:7. On the likely inauthenticity of the ending of *Seven Against Thebes*, see, among others, Thalmann 1978:137 ff. and Hutchinson 1985: ad 1005-1078.

square two very different ideas of Odysseus with the Odysseus they see in *Philoctetes*, for example, and their memory of the more self-reflective versions of Odysseus in earlier works may help to temper their judgment of *Philoctetes*' villainous Odysseus.⁷⁹

When figures recur in multiple plays, they often do so at different stages in their lives and under very different circumstances. *Oedipus at Colonus*, which was produced after Sophocles' own death and written long after *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, takes place at a point in mythical time between the events of the two earlier plays. The Oedipus who is the central figure of *Oedipus at Colonus* has already been through the traumatic events of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and the figure of the aging, blind Oedipus interacts in complicated ways with the part of his story told in the earlier play. Although the plots of the two plays do not match perfectly, the character of Oedipus in the later play is defined in part by the knowledge which the earlier Oedipus acquired over the course of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and the interaction between Oedipus and Creon at Colonus echoes the dispute between the two men which Sophocles depicted in the earlier play.⁸⁰ *Oedipus at Colonus* also looks forward in mythological time to *Antigone*, and both Creon's behaviour and Oedipus' curse of his sons look even more ominous to an audience who know how things will turn out after Polyneices leads his army against Thebes.⁸¹ Similarly, Oedipus' relationship with his daughters at the end of his life provides a new framework for thinking about the interaction between Antigone and Ismene in both plays.

In this section, I will examine two different relationships which are portrayed in both *Oedipus at Colonus* and one of Sophocles' earlier plays about Oedipus and his family. I will begin by looking at the confrontation between Oedipus and Creon in

⁷⁹ Goldhill 1986:159 argues that there are strong Homeric elements present in the Odysseus of *Philoctetes*, while Schein 2006:134 suggests that Sophocles draws attention in *Philoctetes* to 'the contrast between the fifth-century, tragic Odysseus and the Odysseus of the *Odyssey*'.

⁸⁰ On the relationship between the past as it is presented in *Oedipus at Colonus* and the events of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, see, e.g., Winnington-Ingram 1980:261-262; Markantonatos 2002:32-33, 52-53; Kelly 2009:45-49, 53-59.

⁸¹ Burian 1978:426; Winnington-Ingram 1980:255.

Oedipus at Colonus in light of the strain in their relationship which develops over the course of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. I would like to suggest that, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, the two men characterize each other not just on the basis of their own present conflict, but also on the basis of past events which are represented in *Oedipus Tyrannus*; the implied continuity in their relationship, however, reveals different aspects of their respective characters in the later play. I will continue by looking at how the different temporal relationship between *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone* influences the portrayal of Oedipus' daughters in the later play; although the relationship between Antigone and Ismene in *Oedipus at Colonus* is not particularly notable in and of itself, it becomes striking when viewed as a precursor to their considerably more fraught interactions in *Antigone*.

Recurring Interactions 1: Oedipus and Creon

Insofar as it dramatizes the end of Oedipus' life, *Oedipus at Colonus*, as is frequently noted, ends the story begun in *Oedipus Tyrannus*.⁸² *Oedipus Tyrannus* ends with uncertainty about what will become of the blinded Oedipus—Oedipus has begged to be cast out of the city (1436-1437), but Creon sends him back into the house, pending oracular guidance (1442-1443, 1515, 1518); *Oedipus at Colonus* begins with Oedipus in the exile which he demanded at the end of the earlier play, an exile which is no longer what he wants.⁸³ Throughout *Oedipus at Colonus*, the events of previous chapters in Oedipus' life, especially those which were depicted in the earlier play, cast a long shadow over the events and figures depicted onstage. In particular, the relationship between Oedipus and Creon in *Oedipus Tyrannus* provides a useful lens through which to look at their dispute in *Oedipus at Colonus*. The later play reprises the rhetoric of the earlier one,

⁸² e.g., Bowra 1944:308; Seidensticker 1972:255; Winnington-Ingram 1980:261; Kelly 2009:45.

⁸³ I take the final scene of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, up to 1524, as largely genuine, *contra* Dawe 2006 and Kovacs 2009. For recent discussions of the reasons, both linguistic and thematic, for retaining much of the end of the play more or less as we have it, see Budelmann 2006, Finglass 2009, and Sommerstein 2011.

but the characters involved are different, and their arguments therefore reflect very differently on both Creon and Oedipus.

The dispute between Creon and Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* has at its heart the question of the relative authority of the two men, and, as such, it matters who gets the first and last word. Before Creon arrives in the second episode of *Oedipus at Colonus*, both Ismene's warning to her father that Creon is planning to bring Oedipus back to Thebes and Oedipus' subsequent increasingly emphatic warnings to Theseus, ἤξουσιν ἄνδρες— (653) and οὐκ οἴσθ' ἀπειλᾶς— (656) suggest, particularly to an audience familiar with *Oedipus Tyrannus*, that the interaction between the two men is unlikely to be cordial.⁸⁴ The comments which precede Creon's arrival, however, are vague, and the nature of the relationship between Oedipus and Creon does not really become clear until Creon arrives in person. Oedipus responds to Antigone's announcement of Creon's arrival by telling the chorus that they now have a chance to prove the extent of their good will (724-725), but, once again, he says nothing specific about Creon. In his opening speech, then, Creon has the first chance to define the terms of the interaction between the two old men.

In light of Oedipus' reaction to Creon's arrival, an audience familiar with *Oedipus Tyrannus* will expect some immediate signs of tension between Creon and Oedipus. Creon, however, begins his first speech with an address to the chorus, in which he assures them that his intentions are peaceful, and he follows this initial explanation with a direct address to Oedipus.⁸⁵ Creon supports his position by drawing on his own relationship to Oedipus and Oedipus' relationship to the city of Thebes, and he paints an initially rosy picture of both relationships.⁸⁶ After saying that he has been sent to fetch Oedipus οὐκ ἔξ

⁸⁴ Kelly 2009:116 notes that Ismene's first reference to Creon, in which she explains that he handed over the rule of Thebes to Oedipus' sons when they came of age (367-370) suggests a perfectly responsible, civic-minded Creon; her later warning about his plans, however, marks Creon as untrustworthy.

⁸⁵ Halliwell 1997:138 draws attention to the fact that Creon at first avoids addressing Oedipus directly.

⁸⁶ Markantonatos 2007:94 and Kelly 2009:116-117 note the initially appealing aspects of Creon's first speech.

ένος στείλαντος, ἀλλ' ἀστῶν ὑπὸ | πάντων κελευσθείς (737-738), Creon explains why the task fell to him, telling the chorus that he was sent on the mission οὔνεχ' ἦκέ μοι γένει | τὰ τοῦδε πενθεῖν πῆματ' εἰς πλεῖστον πόλεως (738-739). Creon's mention of γένος here is the first direct reference in the play to the familial relationship between himself and Oedipus; previous references to Creon have touched upon his role in the city of Thebes, but have left unstated his peculiar status as Oedipus' uncle and brother-in-law.⁸⁷ Creon's references to Oedipus' family in his first speech are all relatively vague; he calls his own description of Oedipus and Antigone a mark of shame ἐς σὲ κάμῃ καὶ τὸ πᾶν γένος (754) and urges Oedipus δόμους μολεῖν | τοὺς σοὺς πατρώους (757-758), but he never refers directly to the complicated status in the house of his fathers which is Oedipus' most obvious source of shame.

Creon's rhetorical strategy of alluding vaguely to the circumstances which led to Oedipus' exile allows him to elide much of the story told in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in which a conflict between himself and Oedipus emerged in tandem with Oedipus' discovery of his own identity and actions; Creon's elision of this past conflict gives him a clean slate upon which to draw both his own character and that of Oedipus. When Oedipus begins to speak, however, he immediately revises Creon's implied version of the past, drawing attention to the fact that he and Creon do not have the history of friendly interaction which Creon's speech seems to imply.⁸⁸ Where Creon had avoided mentioning specific events, Oedipus wades directly into the story of what he calls his 'household evils' (765). Under the current circumstances, Oedipus tells the story of his family troubles and his expulsion from Thebes as a history of his own interactions with Creon, and, in this history, he looks back at the events which were depicted at the very end of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. When he

⁸⁷ Halliwell 1997:138 notes that although Creon tries to present his mission as a civic matter, he eventually cannot avoid mentioning his familial relationship to Oedipus.

⁸⁸ Markantonatos 2001:65; see also Halliwell 1997:139, who comments on the rhetorical importance of Oedipus' ability to tell the story suppressed by Creon.

tells how Creon treated him, πρόσθεν τε γάρ με τοῖσιν οἰκείοις κακοῖς | νοσοῦνθ', ὅτ' ἦν μοι τέρψις ἐκπεσεῖν χθονός (765-766), his account accords with the request to be cast out of the city made by the Oedipus of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which he makes first to the chorus at 1410-1411 and restates more strongly to Creon, begging, ῥῖψόν με γῆς ἐκ τῆσδ' ὅσον τάχισθ', ὅπου | θνητῶν φανοῦμαι μηδενὸς προσήγορος (*OT* 1436-1437).⁸⁹ As Oedipus looks back to the events of the earlier play, the audience is encouraged to think about the characters of *Oedipus at Colonus* as they appeared in *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Oedipus' attacks on Creon in *Oedipus at Colonus* are tied to his efforts to establish himself as a figure with more authority than Creon can possibly have. After revealing Creon's plan to use Oedipus to gain an advantage in the coming war (*OC* 784-786), Oedipus asks Creon, ἄρ' οὐκ ἄμεινον ἢ σὺ τὰν Θήβαις φρονῶ; (791), and goes on to explain that he must know better than Creon inasmuch as he has access to better sources (792-793).⁹⁰ Although this comment seems to refer most directly to the oracles which Oedipus and Ismene have mentioned over the course of *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus' insistence here upon his superior knowledge echoes his tendency in *Oedipus Tyrannus* to associate questions about his knowledge with threats to his political authority. When in the earlier play he first accuses Teiresias of having been hired by Creon to topple Oedipus' rule, Oedipus sarcastically refers to himself as ὁ μηδὲν εἰδῶς Οἰδίπους (*OT* 397) in order to denigrate Teiresias' authority, and, somewhat later, he asks Creon, φέρ' εἰπέ πρὸς θεῶν, δειλίαν ἢ μωρίαν | ἰδῶν τιν' ἔν μοι ταῦτ' ἐβουλεύσω ποεῖν; (536-537).⁹¹ Oedipus' emphasis in *Oedipus at Colonus* on his own authority, particularly at the expense of Creon's, calls to mind the knowledge which long ago helped him to the Theban

⁸⁹ Hesk 2012:187. The version of his initial desires which Oedipus tells at this point differs from that which he told in the earlier scene with Ismene; on this discrepancy, see Kelly 2009:63-64.

⁹⁰ Markantonatos 2001:67-68 comments on the rhetorical importance of Oedipus' claim to privileged knowledge at this point.

⁹¹ Segal 2001:80 comments on the importance of Oedipus' claims for his own knowledge in the scene with Teiresias.

throne, and which became a recurring issue in his attempts to retain control in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. By drawing on the association between knowledge and power which has been a factor throughout his life, the aged Oedipus reminds Creon that his authority remains a force to be reckoned with.

While Oedipus insists on his continuing authority even in exile, the Creon who appears in *Oedipus at Colonus* has no formal standing in Thebes as of the time of the play; while he held the throne for some unspecified period of time after the beginning of Oedipus' exile (*OC* 367-370), the throne has now been assumed by Eteocles, and it is ostensibly as a representative of Eteocles and the rest of the city that Creon has now come to Colonus in search of Oedipus.⁹² Over the course of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, however, Oedipus suggested that Creon was a potential rival for the throne, and, after Oedipus' discovery of his identity as the killer of Laius, Creon seemed to step into the resulting power vacuum.⁹³ When Oedipus addresses Creon in *Oedipus at Colonus* as ὃ πάντα τολμῶν κάπὸ παντὸς ἄν φέρων | λόγου δικαίου μηχανήμα ποικίλον (*OC* 761-762), his description of Creon calls to mind the accusations which were levelled at Creon in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, when Oedipus accused Creon of trying secretly to drive him from power with the help of Teiresias (*OT* 385-389). As the scene in *Oedipus at Colonus* continues, the interplay between the current encounter between Oedipus and Creon and their encounters over the course of *Oedipus Tyrannus* allows the aged Oedipus to paint a thoroughly villainous picture of Creon.

Although he tries to suggest that his relationship with Creon has remained constant over the years, the Oedipus who appears in *Oedipus at Colonus* has a very different perspective on the world than the Oedipus who was king in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. He begins

⁹² Bernard 2001:129-130 comments on Creon's claim to be acting as the representative of the Theban people. See also Guidorizzi 2008:xxiv.

⁹³ Segal 2001:115 comments on the ambiguity of Creon and Oedipus' roles in the *exodos* of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Beer 2012:107 comments on the irony of the fact that, despite Creon's claim that he would not wish to rule, he ends *Oedipus Tyrannus* as the ruler of Thebes.

the later play by explaining that that experience has taught him to endure his troubles (*OC* 7-8), and as the play continues he offers some sense of the form that his endurance has taken over the years. In the time following his discovery of his identity, as Oedipus says at two different points in *Oedipus at Colonus*, he revised his opinion of the appropriate response to his actions; although he initially wanted either to be killed or to be expelled from the city, his desires mellowed over time, and he wished instead to live out his life at home (*OC* 433-439, 765-771).⁹⁴ The violent attitudes which Oedipus says he used to have are those which he had throughout *Oedipus Tyrannus*, both when he threatened exile for the killer of Laius (*OT* 236-254), and, even more strikingly, after he learned about his own deeds and begged to be killed or expelled from the city (*OT* 1410-1411).⁹⁵ The older Oedipus has mellowed in other ways as well; the willingness to endure his fate which he mentions at the beginning of *Oedipus at Colonus* is a striking departure from his insistence in the earlier play on going to any length to learn first the identity of Laius' killer and, later, the story of his own birth.

Although, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus draws on a history of past interactions with Creon which has much in common with the events of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Creon too is different in the later play. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus was, broadly speaking, wrong about important aspects of Creon's character; although Creon seemed perfectly ready to step into the void created by the collapse of Oedipus' rule, there is no evidence that he had anything to do with bringing Oedipus' rule to an end.⁹⁶ In *Oedipus at Colonus*, however, Creon is guilty of the crimes of which he is accused; Ismene reveals Creon's plan well before Creon arrives, and, when Oedipus resists being taken back to Thebes, Creon

⁹⁴ When exactly Oedipus' change of mind took place is uncertain; see Markantonatos 2001:59-62, 65-66.

⁹⁵ Guidorizzi *ad* 765 ff., 766.

⁹⁶ Even Ahl 1991:103 admits that 'there is no evidence to substantiate Oedipus' assumption that Teiresias is plotting with Creon against him'. Segal 2001:85 describes the Creon of *Oedipus Tyrannus* as 'reasonable and even a little pedantic'.

confirms Oedipus' depiction of his villainy by kidnapping Antigone and Ismene.⁹⁷ The Creon who boasts, παίδοι δὲ σοὶ τὴν μὲν ἀρτίως ἐγὼ | ξυναρπάσας ἔπεμψα, τὴν δ' ἄξω τάχα (*OC* 818-819), is a very different figure from the Creon who argued in *Oedipus Tyrannus* that no sensible man in his position would want more formal authority (*OT* 583-602). When employed against a Creon who really is as villainous as Oedipus once mistakenly believed him to be, the rhetoric of knowledge and power which pointed to the lapses in Oedipus' own authority in the earlier play now hits much closer to the mark, making both Creon and Oedipus into the figures which Oedipus would have them be.

When Sophocles make Oedipus and Creon reprise their old quarrel in *Oedipus at Colonus*, the rhetoric of the earlier play informs their interactions and, in turn, shapes their characters. The two old men who face off in *Oedipus at Colonus* are no longer the men who debated issues of rulership in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, but, watching them quarrel in the later play, the audience is encouraged to consider the path which led them to their confrontation at Colonus. Despite his age and his exile, Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* has in the years between the two plays gained the authority which he tried so hard to defend in *Oedipus Tyrannus*.⁹⁸ The once reasonable Creon, on the other hand, has somewhere along the way become the scheming authoritarian which Oedipus once accused him of being.⁹⁹ Although Oedipus emerges victorious from his confrontation with Creon in the later play, the audience will remember that his rhetoric has not always

⁹⁷ Bernard 2001:130; Bernard is, however, generally more willing to excuse Creon's behaviour in the play, arguing that although Creon is willing to use violent and deceptive means to achieve his ends, such tactics are not uniformly condemned in Greek literature (81).

⁹⁸ Winnington-Ingram 1980:256 suggests that 'old emotions stir in the once masterful king of the *Tyrannus*'.

⁹⁹ *contra* Bernard 2001:81, who argues that Creon is acting not out of self-interest, but to defend Thebes as best he can, by whatever means necessary. Although Kelly 2009:118 likewise acknowledges that Creon appears to believe that he is doing the best he can, Kelly concludes that, for a variety of reasons, 'Creon does not come out well'.

been infallible; his new authority is a product not only of individual character, but also of time and circumstance.

Recurring Interactions 2: Antigone and Ismene

Where *Oedipus at Colonus* can be taken as a kind of sequel to *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Oedipus at Colonus* represents a step backwards in mythological time from *Antigone*, occupying part of the interval between the two earlier plays. Although the story of the attack of the Seven, led by Polyneices, against Thebes and their defeat by the Thebans, led by Eteocles, goes back at least as far as the Theban cycle of epic poems, it is likely, as I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, that important elements of the plot of *Antigone* were Sophoclean innovations.¹⁰⁰ Most notably, although the names of Oedipus' daughters seem to predate Sophocles, there is no pre-Sophoclean evidence either for Antigone's role in the burial of Polyneices or for Ismene's attempts to dissuade and protect her.¹⁰¹ Before Sophocles, it does not seem that the figure of Antigone was of great importance to the story of Oedipus and his family, but she is prominent in later tragic treatments of the myth; her role in the probably interpolated ending of *Seven Against Thebes* suggests that Sophocles' version of her story became the canonical one, but she also figures in Euripides' *Phoenissae* and was the subject of his lost *Antigone*.¹⁰² In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Antigone is mentioned by name in the first line of the play, drawing the attention of an audience either directly familiar with Sophocles' *Antigone* or at least familiar with the plot of the earlier play.¹⁰³ Although Antigone remains a relatively minor character throughout

¹⁰⁰ Griffith 1999:6-8.

¹⁰¹ Griffith 1999:8-10. Further detail can be found in Zimmermann 1993 (see note 4 above).

¹⁰² On the ending of *Seven Against Thebes*, see Thalmann 1978:137-141 and Hutchinson 1985: ad 1005-1078; for her role in *Phoenissae*, see Mastrorarde 1994:29-30. Collard and Cropp 2008:156-157 discuss the relationship between Euripides' *Antigone* and Sophocles' play.

¹⁰³ The intertextual links between *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone* are frequently discussed; on connections between the plots of the two plays, see, e.g., Markantonatos 2001:161-165; Markantonatos 2007:216-224;

Oedipus at Colonus, over the course of the play, through her interactions with her father and particularly with Ismene, Antigone grows into the role which she occupied in the earlier play, and which, if the two plays are continuous, she will occupy later in her own life.

Before Ismene's arrival in the first episode of *Oedipus at Colonus*, Antigone is defined almost entirely in terms of her role as her father's guide. Oedipus first addresses her as Τέκνον τυφλοῦ γέροντος Ἀντιγόνη (*OC* 1), and, throughout the early part of the play, the details that are offered about Antigone deal with her habitual fulfilment of that role. When Oedipus asks her to help him to a seat and then to watch over him, Antigone reminds him somewhat sharply, χρόνου μὲν οὔνεκ' οὐ μαθεῖν με δεῖ τόδε (22), but then she largely fades from view until the entrance of the chorus. When Oedipus asks her, θύγατερ, ποῖ τις φροντίδος ἔλθη; (170), and she replies that they must listen to the local people (171-172), Oedipus appears to grant a degree of authority to Antigone. Later, when the chorus claim that they have no obligation to keep the promise which they made in ignorance of Oedipus' identity, Antigone solidifies her own authority by pleading both on both her father's behalf and on her own (237-254).¹⁰⁴ As well as being her father's guide and physical protector, she is also his advisor and advocate; although this Antigone may so far be less outspoken than her namesake from the earlier play, her role as a staunch defender of her immediate family will come as no surprise to an audience watching *Oedipus at Colonus* with the earlier tragedy in mind.¹⁰⁵

Until Antigone announces the arrival of Ismene at 310, there is no indication that Oedipus has any friends in his exile except for Antigone, and she seems to be, by default,

Kelly 2009:49-50; Hesk 2012:184-186. Kelly 2009:110 also suggests that the character of Antigone is largely consistent in the two plays.

¹⁰⁴ Kelly 2009:108 comments on the authority granted to Antigone early in *Oedipus at Colonus*.

¹⁰⁵ Guidorizzi *ad* 237-253 notes that, while Antigone's mediating role in the early part of *Oedipus at Colonus* seems to clash with the inflexibility which she displayed in *Antigone*, her deep filial loyalty to Oedipus is entirely consistent with her behaviour in the earlier play.

the most loyal member of his family. When Ismene arrives, then, her active support of her father may come as something of a surprise, particularly to an audience mindful of her role in *Antigone*, in which familial loyalty was tempered by a reluctance to run desperate risks.¹⁰⁶ In *Oedipus at Colonus*, however, while Antigone has been assisting Oedipus in his wanderings (345-352), Ismene has been looking out for his concerns in Thebes and bringing news of relevant oracles (353-356).¹⁰⁷ Antigone gets slightly more space in Oedipus' praise of his daughters than Ismene, but Ismene's lot seems to have been no easier than her sister's. On her arrival, Ismene says that she barely managed to find Oedipus and Antigone (325-326), and she begins her account with the comment,

ἐγὼ τὰ μὲν παθήμαθ' ἄπαθον, πάτερ,
ζητοῦσα τὴν σὴν ποῦ κατοικίης τροφήν,
παρεῖσ' ἔάσω (361-363),

explaining that it would be too painful to tell the story of her trials (363-364). It soon becomes clear that Ismene has an important part to play; this is not the first time she has brought news to her father, and, although it is unclear just how much of Ismene's latest report is new to Oedipus, it seems to allow him to put together a number of important pieces.¹⁰⁸

For most of the time that the two sisters are onstage together in *Oedipus at Colonus*, one speaks while the other is silent. Antigone's announcement of Ismene's arrival is enthusiastically emotional, but it is also in the third person, and Antigone says nothing more once Ismene begins to deliver her news. Neither sister addresses the other until Ismene, on her way to perform the rites of purification mandated by the chorus, instructs her sister,

¹⁰⁶ Reinhardt 1979:202 comments on the surprising aspects of Ismene's arrival in *Oedipus at Colonus*, although he does not link them to her role in *Antigone*.

¹⁰⁷ Jebb *ad* 354 suggests that Ismene's role as messenger was invented by Sophocles to give Ismene a role in supporting her father; Guidorizzi *ad* 354, following Jebb, comments on the extent to which Ismene's role raises her to Antigone's level of filial piety.

¹⁰⁸ Although Oedipus comments at 403 that he could have known without an oracle that his tomb would be *δυστυχῶν* to his enemies, Gellie 1972:164 notes that the reaction of Creon and Oedipus' sons to the oracles is news, while Burian 1974:412, Bushnell 1988:91, and Kelly 2009:66 suggest that Ismene's new oracles contribute to Oedipus' evolving understanding of his fate.

Ἀντιγόνη, σὺ δ' ἐνθάδε
φύλασσε πατέρα τόνδε· τοῖς τεκοῦσι γὰρ
οὐδ' εἰ πονῆ τις, δεῖ πόνου μνήμην ἔχειν (507-509).

Antigone does not reply, and Ismene does not speak again until the sisters' shared lament at the end of the play; she returns to the stage at 1099 after her rescue, at which point she and Antigone are several times referred to collectively by Oedipus in the dual (1102, 1107, 1113), but she remains silent throughout the rest of Oedipus' time on stage.¹⁰⁹ As Ismene stands silently onstage between her rescue and her departure with Oedipus, Antigone, and Theseus at 1555, Antigone finally takes up the role of Oedipus' more outspoken daughter. Although this contrast between the sisters is not at first emphasized, it nevertheless allows an audience familiar with *Antigone* to begin to map the sisters onto their roles in the earlier play. As Oedipus' power and authority increase near the end of his life, undertones of *Antigone* remind the audience that, in the aftermath of Oedipus' death, his hostility towards the city which cast him out will have implications not only for his enemies.¹¹⁰

Until their return to the stage after the end of Oedipus' life, there is no direct conflict between Antigone and Ismene; they have played different roles in supporting their father, but Ismene's mild admonition to Antigone at 507-509 is the closest either sister comes to suggesting that the other's role is inadequately fulfilled.¹¹¹ Nonetheless, over the course of Ismene's long silence, the contrast between their roles grows into an implicit contrast between their characters. When Antigone and not Ismene intervenes to convince Oedipus to hear Polyneices (1181-1203), connections with *Antigone* come to the forefront of *Oedipus at Colonus*. Although the events which provide the background for the earlier play have been implicit in all discussion of the growing conflict between Eteocles and Polyneices, Antigone's willingness to become involved with Polyneices' cause brings the

¹⁰⁹ Kamerbeek *ad* 1102-1105 attributes Oedipus' inconsistent use of singular, plural, and dual in addressing his daughters to Ismene's status as a silent actor.

¹¹⁰ Winnington-Ingram 1980:255 describes *Antigone* as 'a tragedy which is the direct—and unforeseen—consequence of Oedipus' curse on his sons'. See also Hesk 2012:184.

¹¹¹ Kelly 2009:109, in fact, takes these lines as an indication of the sisters' shared perspective.

connections between the two plays to a more specific and ominous level.¹¹² After Oedipus comes to the end of his curse against his son, Polyneices, addressing his sisters in the plural as ὦ τοῦδ' ὄμαιμοι παῖδες (1405), asks both of them, μή μ' ἀτιμάσητέ γε, | ἀλλ' ἐν τάφοισι θέσθε κἀν κτερίσμασιν (1409-1410). The fact that only Antigone responds can be explained in part by theatrical convention—Ismene at this point is portrayed by a non-speaking actor—but Ismene's silent presence while Antigone pleads with their brother is striking in light of their perspectives on the burial in *Antigone*.¹¹³

When the sisters return at the conclusion of the messenger's speech, their shared lament forms their first real verbal exchange in the play. As they mourn the passing of Oedipus and wonder what lies in store for them, the implicit differences which have been developing since Ismene's arrival gradually begin to be expressed in words.¹¹⁴ At first, the sisters seem united in their grief and their uncertainty; when Antigone says, τάλαινα, νῶν δ' ὀλεθρία | νύξ ἐπ' ὄμμασιν βέβρακε (1683-1684), and asks where she and her sister will find support now, Ismene replies, οὐ κάτοιδα (1689), and expresses a wish to be taken into Hades instead of living out her life (1689-1692). In the second strophe, however, differences between Antigone's and Ismene's attitudes begin to emerge. When Antigone expresses a desire to return to Oedipus' resting place, the exchange between the sisters that follows is reminiscent of the argument which follows Antigone's announcement of her plan to bury Polyneices in *Antigone*; in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Ismene replies, θέμις δὲ πῶς τάδ' ἐστὶ νῶν; | οὐχ ὀρᾶς; (*OC* 1729-1730), just as in the earlier play she explains her reluctance with the claim that Antigone's intentions are ἀπόρητον

¹¹² Winnington-Ingram 1980:252-253 comments on Antigone's growing importance from her speech on Polyneices' behalf until his final exit. Guidorizzi *ad* 1181 argues that Antigone's support for the brother for whose burial she will eventually die would have attracted the attention of an Athenian audience.

¹¹³ Kelly 2009:107 comments on the importance of the three-actor rule in Ismene's silence.

¹¹⁴ Kelly 2009:110.

πόλει (*Ant.* 44).¹¹⁵ When Antigone responds to Ismene's objection with the plea, ἄγε με, καὶ τότ' ἐπενάριξον (*OC* 1733), the willingness to put her life on the line for her cause which she displays in contrast to her more prudent sister suggests an affinity between the two versions of her character presented in *Oedipus at Colonus* and the earlier play.¹¹⁶

Throughout *Oedipus at Colonus*, echoes of *Antigone* have allowed Oedipus' daughters to draw a level of attention disproportionate to their overall stature in the play, and as *Oedipus at Colonus* nears its end, moving gradually closer to the temporal setting of *Antigone*, the roles of Antigone and Ismene begin to diverge and crystallize into the sharply contrasting roles which the two play in *Antigone*. Their disagreement in *Oedipus at Colonus* does not lead to the open hostility which follows in *Antigone*; after Antigone asks to be led to Oedipus' tomb and slain there (1733), Ismene falls silent again after wondering once more where she will live out her unfortunate life (1734-1736).¹¹⁷

Although Ismene never actually assents to Antigone's desire to see Oedipus' tomb, Antigone takes her silence as tacit agreement and tells Theseus, τύμβον θέλομεν | προσιδεῖν αὐταῖ πατρὸς ἡμετέρου (1756-1757), on behalf of both herself and Ismene. Theseus denies this request, first echoing Ismene's objection with the comment, ἀλλ' οὐ θεμιτὸν κεῖσ' <ἐστὶ> μολεῖν (1759), and then explaining that Oedipus left special instructions that the location of his tomb should remain secret (1760-1767).¹¹⁸ When Antigone accepts that Oedipus' wishes ought to be requested, and asks instead that she

¹¹⁵ Markantonatos 2007:220 comments that 'the difference of opinion between the weeping girls over returning to the hidden burial place of their father enacts vicious conflict of the earlier tragedy in microcosm'.

¹¹⁶ Markantonatos 2001:162; Hesk 2012:185-186.

¹¹⁷ Markantonatos 2007:220 notes that Antigone's devotion to her cause leads to less severe conflict in *Oedipus at Colonus* than it does in *Antigone*.

¹¹⁸ Kelly 2009:110 draws a parallel between Antigone's request for an explanation from Theseus at 1759 and Oedipus' earlier scepticism of Theseus' protection.

and her sister be sent home to Thebes, Theseus raises no objection, implicitly agreeing to send Oedipus' daughters to the tragic world of *Antigone*.¹¹⁹

Although suggestions of the events which will follow in *Antigone* grow increasingly frequent as *Oedipus at Colonus* draws to a close, the plots of the two plays are not entirely continuous. *Antigone* contains a number of references to the past of the Labdacids and, more immediately, to the conflict between Eteocles and Polyneices, but none of the characters of the earlier play speak about the events between the end of Oedipus' rule and Polyneices' attack against his native city.¹²⁰ *Antigone* contains no suggestion that Antigone and Ismene may have spent years travelling outside of Thebes at the behest of their father, but since the entire period of mythological time in which *Oedipus at Colonus* takes place is elided in the earlier play, the events of *Oedipus at Colonus* are not entirely ruled out; the frequent echoes of *Antigone* near the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*, moreover, suggest that the plot of the later play should be imagined as leading to that of the earlier one.¹²¹ By offering one possibility for how part of the temporal gap between *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* might be filled, Sophocles provides an extra layer of potential background for some of the characters he began to develop in *Antigone*. None of the figures who appear in both plays is exactly the same in both *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*—Antigone is less strident in *Oedipus at Colonus* than she is in the earlier play, Ismene plays a surprisingly active role carrying news to her father and sister, and Creon has yet to be tested by the events which will follow the death of Oedipus' sons. At the same time, the words and actions of the characters in *Oedipus at*

¹¹⁹ Winnington-Ingram 1980:255.

¹²⁰ The lack of explicit connection between the past of the Labdacids and the conflict between Oedipus' sons prompts Kyriakou 2011:12 to omit *Antigone* in her study.

¹²¹ Mastrorade 1994:30 notes, in reference to Euripides' decision to have Antigone follow Oedipus into exile at the end of *Phoenissae*, that in *Antigone* 'there is no hint that she has been abroad at an earlier time'. On the end of *Oedipus at Colonus* as a lead-in to *Antigone*, see Winnington-Ingram 1980:255, Hesk 2012:184-185.

Colonus leave room for the possibility that they may one day grow into the roles which they will play in *Antigone*—roles which the audience knows that they have played already.

CONCLUSION: MYTHOLOGIES, OLD AND NEW

When a figure appears onstage in a play, the audience will immediately begin to speculate about that figure. In a genre such as tragedy which draws heavily upon traditional material, the question of a character's identity will be bound up in related questions of where that particular character fits into a broader network of myth and of how that character copes with her mythological circumstances.¹²² The audience, may, moreover, look beyond the character's own myth for interpretive help; it has often been noted that many Greek tragedies conform to one of a relatively small number of 'story patterns', and the audience may take figures from other instances of the same story pattern as models for the figure they see before them.¹²³ The presence of mythological precedents and paradigms gives the audience clues for the issues which may be important in the dramatic life of a character, and the various ways in which that character interacts with her mythological precedents, in turn, can provide a framework for assessing the ability of the character to function within the world of the play.

Within this general framework of mythological interaction, the interactions which take place between Sophocles' successive versions of *Antigone* and *Ismene* are somewhat different from those between his versions of *Oedipus* and even further from the interactions between *Ajax*, *Odysseus*, and *Deianeira* and their respective Homeric precedents. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, *Antigone* and *Ismene*, as characters who are more than just names attached to a myth, are both thought to be Sophoclean

¹²² Lowe 2000:158 comments on myth as a source of familiarity in tragic plotting.

¹²³ See especially Lattimore 1964; c.f. also Burian 1997:186-190 and Lowe 2000:159-162.

creations, and this affects the ways in which they interact both with the broader mythological tradition in which they are situated and with successive versions of their own story.¹²⁴ On the one hand, interactions between versions are more likely to occur at the level of specific allusions than they would be for characters with a longer mythological history; Sophocles had relatively few versions of Antigone to consider as he wrote *Oedipus at Colonus*, and it seems, moreover, that his own *Antigone* had remained the dominant version of its heroine's story.¹²⁵ More generally, as relatively novel figures within the familiar myth of Oedipus, Oedipus' daughters immediately raise questions in the minds of the audience. By Sophocles' time, other members of the Labdacid family will have been well known for being rash, misguided, or, at the very least, ensnared by fate; Antigone and Ismene can be expected to be shaped by the family into which they are born, but Sophocles has free reign to decide how Oedipus' daughters react to each other and their shared circumstances.

At the same time, although there is no epic Antigone to resonate with Sophocles' interpretations of her figure in *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, Antigone is still, by the end of the later play, a figure of mythological proportion. In part this is due to the familiarity of the mythological tradition of which she is a part; the story of Oedipus and his family is at the core of one of the most prominent strands of Greek mythology, and the figure of Antigone becomes weighty by association with the versions of her family's story which have been in circulation at least since the time of Homer. More importantly, over the course of her eponymous play, Antigone becomes a figure to be reckoned with.¹²⁶ Although she goes to her death just over two-thirds of the way through the play, she remains at the play's centre of gravity even after she has left the stage for the final time;

¹²⁴ Griffith 1999:9-10.

¹²⁵ See note 102 above on the influence of Sophocles' *Antigone* on later versions.

¹²⁶ Knox 1964:62 comments on the fact that, while Creon is eventually broken by his misfortunes, Antigone maintains her resolve to the end. In a similar vein, see Kirkwood 1958:127.

throughout the rest of the play she remains the subject of much of what is said by both characters and chorus.¹²⁷ As Teiresias warns Creon of the consequences of his treatment of Antigone (1064-1076), and the messenger tells the chorus and Eurydice the story of Antigone's death and that of Haemon (1192-1243), Antigone becomes, even before the end of her own play, a part of the city's mythology. By the time she reappears in *Oedipus at Colonus*, she is a figure with her own mythological baggage, and the audience, aware of the importance of her actions in *Antigone*, will pay attention to her role in the later play.

Oedipus at Colonus, situated as it is between *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* in mythological time, models the different ways in which Sophoclean characters can interact with myth. On the one hand, *Oedipus at Colonus* is the end of the story of Oedipus, and, as such, the figure of Oedipus who appears in that play interacts with various other versions of himself and his story. Oedipus, in Sophocles' final play, interacts on a specific, intertextual level with the version of Oedipus which Sophocles himself presented in *Oedipus Tyrannus*; the aged former king of Thebes also interacts with other versions of his story told by other poets. Oedipus' curse against his sons in *Oedipus at Colonus* is striking not only because Sophocles had already depicted the aftermath of the curse in *Antigone*, but also because it helps to locate Sophocles' story of the end of Oedipus' life within the broader tradition of stories about the attack of the Seven against Thebes.¹²⁸ At the same time, while Sophocles draws Oedipus' story to a close, he also lays the groundwork for the part of Antigone's story that is still to come. One mythical figure has reached the end of his life—a particular end which may, in fact, be a Sophoclean

¹²⁷ Carter 2012:114-115 comments on the way in which Antigone dominates the scenes in which she is on stage and notes that, although *Antigone* can be described as a 'diptych', 'the panels overlap' (115).

¹²⁸ Burian 1974:427 suggests that Oedipus' curse against his sons springs in part from the fact that Polyneices' pleas remind Oedipus of 'the dreadful intertwining of their fates'.

innovation¹²⁹—while another mythical figure—a figure who is largely Sophocles’ own invention—is present onstage, ready to begin the best known part of her own story.

¹²⁹ Rosenmeyer 1952:94-95, 99.

CHAPTER 2 – INTERACTING WITH ROLES AND REVERTING TO TYPE

Haemon arrives onstage in the third episode of *Antigone* in order to make a case to Creon for Antigone's release; both the chorus and Creon initially ask whether he is enraged by the imminent loss of his betrothed, and, although Haemon claims at first that no marriage could ever be more important than his father's good opinion, he does go on to argue that Creon has erred in his treatment of Antigone. Creon's reaction to the burial of Polyneices, however, triggers a further-reaching dispute between father and son. As they debate the appropriate response to Antigone's actions, Creon and Haemon each draw attention to the various ways in which the other is not behaving as he should under the present circumstances. As Haemon presents the matter, the crucial problem is not just that Creon is being unjust in the specific case of Antigone, but that Creon's inflexibility in Antigone's case suggests that he is failing more widely at the task of ruling Thebes. Creon, similarly, sees Haemon's reaction to the situation in terms of social insubordination.¹

When Creon and Haemon speak about appropriate behaviour, they both frame their arguments in terms of established familial and political roles which carry with them certain obligations. In their first words to each other, both Creon and Haemon mention their familial relationship and suggest that it has implications for their behaviour; after addressing Haemon as ὦ παῖ, Creon's question about whether Haemon has come πατρὶ λυσσαίνων suggests that such a reaction on Haemon's part would be out of line (632).² Haemon, similarly, begins his first speech with the statement, πάτερ, σός εἰμι (635), and

¹ Carter 2012:116: suggests that, by objecting to Creon's treatment of Antigone, Haemon mounts a 'political challenge' against his father.

² Griffith 1998:33 notes the rarity of onstage father-son interactions in Greek tragedy, and comments that amicable father-son interactions are rarer still. See Strauss 1994 on the interaction between fathers and sons—which Strauss claims is always both personal and political (12)—in fifth-century Athens more broadly.

goes on to elaborate, saying that since it is Creon's place to advise his son, ἐμοὶ γὰρ οὐδεὶς ἀξιῶσεται γάμος | μείζων φέρεσθαι σοῦ καλῶς ἡγουμένου (637-638).³

Although Creon and Haemon agree both about which roles—father and son, king and subject—are at issue and about the basic responsibilities which accompany those roles, however, it quickly becomes clear that their interpretations of their respective responsibilities differ in crucial ways.⁴

Creon defines the ideal relationship between fathers and sons by saying that all men hope to have dutiful children, ὡς καὶ τὸν ἐχθρὸν ἀνταμύνωνται κακοῖς, | καὶ τὸν φίλον τιμῶσιν ἐξ ἴσου πατρί (643-644).⁵ Haemon, on the other hand, has somewhat different ideas about filial duty. As the king's son, Haemon is neither so conspicuous nor so intimidating as his father is, and he claims that this difference in political status gives him a useful perspective on public affairs, since, τὸ γὰρ σὸν ὄμμα δεινὸν ἀνδρὶ δημότῃ | λόγοις τοιούτοις οἷς σὺ μὴ τέρψη κλύων (690-691).⁶

Haemon, however, hears what Creon does not (692), and he suggests that he is, both as son and as subject, obligated to advise his father about those aspects of public opinion which may be hidden from Creon.⁷ Both men play multiple roles in the current situation; Creon connects his familial and political responsibilities with the comment, ἐν τοῖς γὰρ οἰκείοισιν ὅστις ἔστ' ἀνὴρ | χρηστός, φανεῖται κὰν πόλει δίκαιος ὢν (661-662), and Haemon, in turn, treats Creon not only as his father, but also as his king.⁸ As they hold each other to standards of behaviour dictated by their conflicting views of their various—

³ Griffith *ad* 635-638 notes that Haemon's statement of belonging to Creon leaves room for multiple interpretations.

⁴ Blundell 1989:117 notes that Haemon 'refrain[s] from questioning Creon's views, simply suggesting that others may deserve equal attention'.

⁵ Blundell 1989:120 notes that Creon's insistence on Haemon's filial loyalty conflicts with his earlier claims that the *polis* should be valued above blood ties.

⁶ Carter 2012:122 argues that these lines hint at problems in Creon's rule of Thebes.

⁷ If we read σοῦ δ' οὔν πέφυκα at the beginning of 688, along with Jebb and defended by Griffith *ad* 688, 688-689 provides a more definite statement of Haemon's filial duty.

⁸ Griffith 1998:65 discusses their interaction in terms of linked sets of roles, with Haemon as 'son/slave/citizen-subject' and Creon playing the part of 'father/master/ruler'.

and not always compatible—roles, Creon and Haemon’s ability to interact with each other gradually breaks down.

As they attempt to interact with each other within the framework of their various socially prescribed roles, Creon and Haemon, like other Sophoclean characters, also interact with the constraints imposed by those roles. They criticize each other according to their ability to fulfil their roles appropriately, and, as they do so, they also develop their own working definitions of appropriate role behaviour. In some cases, these definitions of particular roles are shaped not only by personal perspective but also by a sense of how those roles are or have been fulfilled differently by others; when Creon first begins to speak about Haemon’s filial responsibilities, he supports his case with an account of the miseries suffered by ὅστις δ’ ἀνωφέλητα φιτῦει τέκνα (645). Similarly, in asserting his right to sentence Antigone as he sees fit, Creon interacts with an abstract idea of kingship, which is related to, although not entirely the same as, the vision of civic duty which he put forward in his first speech, and which is connected in various ways to the recent history of kingship in Thebes.⁹ Creon’s interaction with the notion of kingship, in turn, prompts a similar interaction on the part of the audience, who are encouraged to measure Creon’s performance of his role against that of other mythical and historical rulers. In this chapter, I will be exploring the ways in which interactions of various kinds between Sophoclean characters and their social roles help to define individuals, both in the world of the play and in the minds of the audience.

⁹ Creon’s assimilation of familial and political power is frequently noted; see, e.g., Blundell 1989:125-127 and Griffith 1998:67-70. Podlecki 1966a:363-364 discusses the ways in which Creon’s interaction with Haemon serves to reveal aspects of his attitude towards kingship which were only suggested in his opening speech.

ROLE PLAYING, FROM DRAMA TO SOCIOLOGY AND BACK AGAIN

In exploring the importance of social roles—that is, familial relationships and political positions—in the construction of character in Sophocles, I will be focusing on only one of the several prominent and interconnected types of role playing which occur in drama. As well as playing particular social roles within the world of the play, some dramatic characters are more broadly defined by their roles; as, for example, nurses or tutors, messengers or heralds, these figures fall into the category of ‘type characters’, and an experienced audience will expect them to behave in certain ways and perform certain dramatic functions.¹⁰ Even more broadly, all drama is a matter of role playing, insofar as any play involves actors taking on certain roles over the course of the performance. Although I will not be primarily concerned with the importance of acting or the portrayal of type characters in Sophocles, I would like to suggest that our understanding of these general types of role playing informs our thinking about the performance of more specific social roles both onstage and off.

Throughout the last fifty years, the concept of role playing has been important to many models of social interaction. As a term used in sociological and psychological analyses of human behaviour, ‘role’ is borrowed from the realm of dramatic performance. In its most basic form, role theory suggests that, in most social situations, the participants play roles which correspond to certain kinds of expected behaviour.¹¹ Beyond this basic premise—that role playing takes place in most social situations—however, the connection between the role and identity remains complicated. On the one hand, the theatrical associations of role playing carry with them certain connotations of artificiality—when an

¹⁰ Yoon 2012:9-38 discusses the several different classes of anonymous characters who appear in tragedy; Rutherford 2012:289-295 discusses the importance of typology in the presentation of dramatic character. Ebbott 2005 provides a relatively recent discussion of the importance of socially marginal figures in tragedy, most of whom are defined in large part by their conformity to various character types.

¹¹ Secord 1982:33; Burr 1998:45.

actor performs a role onstage, that role is assumed by the audience to be part of a temporary dramatic illusion—and it is easy to assume that social roles are assumed consciously and can therefore be put aside at will.¹² At the same time, not all social role playing is deliberate, and, moreover, people often consider roles which they play on a regular basis to be an important part of their identity.¹³

The question of whether—or to what extent—roles are assumed on top of an essentially fixed identity or whether roles are, instead, constituent parts of any person's identity is further complicated by the fact that most people play multiple roles. Most roles are, at least to some extent, dependent on context and interaction with others; as Knowles observes, 'Certain interactions will lead us to label ourselves as male or female, mother or daughter, clerk or customer, and will lead us to learn sets of behaviours associated with these and complementary labels.'¹⁴ Within limits, people play different roles under different circumstances; sometimes one role can be put aside altogether, but sometimes people must play multiple roles at the same time. In the case of the roles of mother and daughter mentioned by Knowles, for example, the division may not be clear-cut; when a woman is with her children rather than her parents, she will put aside the role of daughter and instead perform the role of mother, but she may still think of herself as her own mother's daughter, and, if her parents as well as her children are present, she may have to perform the roles of parent and child simultaneously. Although some roles can coexist peacefully, under other circumstances people may struggle to perform the demands of conflicting roles.¹⁵

¹² Eiser 1986:285.

¹³ Eiser 1986:284-285; Goffman 1961:77-79. Goffman draws a distinction between *commitment* to a role, in which external forces lock a person into continuing performance of the role, and *attachment* to a role, in which a person develops a cognitive and emotional connection to her role.

¹⁴ Knowles 1982:6. See also Athay and Darley 1982:56-57.

¹⁵ McIntyre 2011:126-127.

Along with contributing to a person's sense of her own identity, roles provide a framework according to which others may understand—and possibly judge—her. The social roles which a person plays are often some of the most immediately apparent facts about her, and the fact that a person is playing a given role may encourage others to draw certain conclusions about her likely traits.¹⁶ At the same time, how a person performs a given role matters; others often express approval when a role is performed well and disapproval when an individual deviates from her expected role.¹⁷ This connection between role performance and social approval or disapproval can exacerbate the difficulty of deciding which role to play or of figuring out how to juggle several roles simultaneously. Different roles bring with them different expectations for behaviour, which may conflict with each other; given the likelihood that the unsuccessful performance of a role will lead to negative judgements on the part of others, someone with conflicting roles may find herself subject to painful scrutiny no matter how she chooses to act.

When these sociological and psychological aspects of role playing are brought back into the realm of theatrical performance, they can have important implications for the interpretation of dramatic character.¹⁸ As I mentioned above, theatrical role playing takes place on several different levels, and these levels work together to allow the audience to develop a sense of the figures they see onstage. The most basic theatrical role playing, that in which an actor assumes a part, depends on a degree of cooperation from the audience; for the duration of the play—or, in productions in which single actors take on

¹⁶ Zebrowitz 1990:15. The importance of roles in social perception varies across cultures; Zebrowitz notes, 'US adults' descriptions of friends focus relatively more on personality traits, whereas descriptions of strangers focus more on context'.

¹⁷ Burr 1998:41.

¹⁸ Role playing in Greek drama has been discussed by various scholars from various angles; on metatheatrical role playing, see, e.g., Lada-Richards 1997 and 2002, Falkner 1998, and Ringer 1998; on social roles as important aspects of tragic characterization see, e.g., Zeitlin 1996, Hall 1997, Griffith 1998 and 2005, Foley 2001, Mossman 2005, Ebbott 2005, Yoon 2012.

multiple roles, so long as the actor is playing a given part—the audience views the actor not only as an actor, but also as the character being depicted.¹⁹ The actor speaks and is addressed as his theatrical character, and various elements of stagecraft, including costume and mask, further encourage the identification of actor and role.²⁰ At the same time, even as they are complicit in the identification of the actor with the figure that he represents, the audience remains aware that the actor is playing a part.²¹ Being aware both of the role playing in which actors engage whenever they are onstage and of the tension inherent in that role playing, I suggest, primes the audience to consider the complexities of the other roles which are performed within the world of the play.

The audience's ability to interpret the roles performed by figures in a play is influenced both by their knowledge of theatrical convention and by their awareness of role playing in everyday life. On the one hand, the social roles performed by figures in a play may correspond to some degree to established dramatic character types; many characters in Greek tragedy, for example, are defined primarily by their occupation, and for these characters the link between dramatic function and social role within the world of the play is particularly strong.²² At the same time, roles often imply particular relationships between individual characters, and the audience's prior experience of such relationships will inform their expectations.²³ In the world of *Electra*, for example, the audience, on learning about the Tutor's status as an old family servant, will expect him to perform a certain function in the development of the plot; the Tutor himself, however, speaks of his own role in terms of his personal history with successive generations of Agamemnon's

¹⁹ Barranger 1995:13, 16; Goldman 2000:53; Bell 2008:12.

²⁰ Devlin 1989:53, 63-64.

²¹ Goldman 2000:14. On the ancient audience's awareness of the theatrical illusion, see Easterling 1997a:166; Lada-Richards 1997:68; and Hall 2006:37-38.

²² Yoon 2012:10-25 discusses the primacy of dramatic function in the characterization of tragic servants.

²³ Blundell 1989, in assessing the ways in which Sophoclean characters live up to the requirement to help friends and harm enemies, in effect describes characters as they take on the roles of 'friend' and 'enemy'—roles which are inherently relational—at different points.

family.²⁴ The social roles which characters perform within a play can be determined not only by occupation and status, but also by familial relationships, and individual characters may play various roles within the social structure of the drama. In *Antigone*, therefore, Creon has obligations both to the city as ruler of Thebes and to his family as Antigone's uncle and Haemon's father, while Haemon, in turn, has slightly different roles as subject and as son.

As it is in real life, the relationship between roles and identity in Greek tragedy is variable; all characters in Sophocles play social roles within their plays, but the amount of emphasis placed on the performance of these roles varies from character to character and sometimes from scene to scene. In the introduction to his commentary on *Antigone*, Griffith suggests that, rather than exhibiting individual personalities, the figures in the play 'embody and articulate the most typical and generalized *characteristics* of their precisely defined social roles'.²⁵ According to this view, all of Antigone's actions are motivated by her joint status as unmarried woman and loyal sister; perhaps more importantly, however Antigone behaves, she will be judged by the audience according to her performance of her social roles. At the same time, while Antigone and many other Sophoclean characters justify their actions in terms of role performance, others suggest that it is possible to place the wrong kind of emphasis on a given role. Thus when Electra explains her constant mourning as her duty to Agamemnon, the chorus remind her that Agamemnon's other children do not seem to be obsessed with filial piety the same way that Electra is (*El.* 153-163).²⁶

The question of how Electra ought to fulfil her role as her father's daughter—a question which is of crucial importance for the assessment of Electra's character, both by

²⁴ Yoon 2012:4 notes the tendency to refer to anonymous servants in Greek tragedy in terms of the named characters to whom they are most closely connected.

²⁵ Griffith 1999:37.

²⁶ Winnington-Ingram 1980:336; Blundell 1989:179.

the audience and by other figures in the play—illustrates the complex system of interactions which are triggered by social role playing in Sophoclean tragedy. Although all Sophoclean characters have roles to perform within the world of the play, they do not always perform those roles as they might be expected to, either by the audience or by other characters in the play. Given the sometimes conflicting demands imposed by social roles, many tragic figures comment on their own success or failure as performers of roles; while Electra holds herself to an idiosyncratic ideal of daughterly loyalty, Deianeira judges herself according to her own ideas of appropriate wifely behaviour, and Ajax laments his own status as a failed hero.²⁷ The audience, meanwhile, brings to the play their own expectations for appropriate role performance, and they too can therefore assess how well or poorly characters onstage live up to those expectations. As characters comment on the successes or failures of their role performance, the audience is encouraged to view the figures in a play in terms of their roles, and, as they do so, perhaps to revise their ideas about both character and role.

The social roles played by Sophoclean characters constitute one of many ways of situating characters both in the world of the play and in the minds of the audience, several of which might be described in terms of role performance; not only is role performance important to the portrayal and interpretation of type characters, but the mythological interactions which I discussed in the previous chapter can also be considered in terms of role playing—at various points, for example, Ajax can be seen as playing the opposing roles of Hector and Achilles.²⁸ In this chapter, however, I will be looking at a narrower

²⁷ Electra's conception of herself as daughter will be discussed more thoroughly in the following section. Kirkwood 1958:114-115 discusses the completeness of Deianeira's wifely devotion; Conacher 1997:24 refers to Deianeira's 'domestic virtue' as a motivating force in her actions; Patterson 2012:390 notes that, despite the focus on marriage throughout *Trachiniae*, the marriage between Deianeira and Heracles is 'unhappy and incomplete'. On the despair occasioned by Ajax's loss of status, see, e.g., Winnington-Ingram 1980:27; Cairns 2006:112.

²⁸ Schein 2012:428-429 discusses the fact that most Sophoclean heroes are both versions of epic characters and versions of contemporary Athenian figures.

subset of the roles performed by Sophoclean characters. Rather than focusing directly either on type characters, who are defined almost entirely in terms of their social roles, or on the large-scale role playing which occurs when Sophoclean characters are mapped onto mythological prototypes, I will be looking at the familial and political roles occupied by named Sophoclean characters within their plays. The tension between the familiarity of such roles to the audience and the idiosyncratic ways in which they are performed by tragic characters makes these otherwise ordinary social roles into a complex factor in Sophoclean characterization.

In the following sections of this chapter, I will explore several different patterns of role interaction which can be seen in the plays of Sophocles. Many interactions with roles take place at the level of interaction between individual characters; as characters interact with each other, their interaction illuminates their relationships with their respective social roles. At the same time, the audience brings their knowledge of social roles to bear on their interaction with the figures they see onstage. Since the presence of multiple characters with similar roles can highlight differences in role interpretation, I will first look at several instances where two or more characters play—or are meant to play—similar social roles within a play. I will then examine the ways in which encounters between characters of different social rank can reflect on the role performance of everyone involved. Finally, I will return briefly to the scene with Creon and Haemon with which I began the chapter, taking that scene as a model for the importance of roles in the presentation of Sophoclean character.

DOUBLING OF SOCIAL ROLES

All Sophoclean characters can, to a greater or lesser degree, be described in terms of their social roles within their plays, and these roles trigger expectations on the part of

both the audience and the characters of a play.²⁹ What it means to perform a given role properly, however, is not always clear, and many Sophoclean characters refuse in various ways to conform to the expectations imposed by their social roles.³⁰ Often, in fact, those characters who describe themselves most consistently in terms of their own roles are particularly anomalous in their performance of those roles; Electra throughout her play describes herself emphatically in terms of her filial relationship to Agamemnon, but all of her encounters with others in the first half of the play involve some suggestion that she has misjudged the requirements of that relationship. In particular, the gaps between how Electra is expected to behave and how she actually behaves as Agamemnon's daughter are highlighted by the presence of Chrysothemis, who performs the same social role as Electra, but in a very different way.³¹

Interactions such as that between Electra and Chrysothemis, in which two characters not only occupy the same or similar social roles, but also engage actively with the ways in which those roles ought to be performed, occur relatively frequently in Sophocles. A contrast similar in many ways to that in *Electra* is established in *Antigone* between Antigone and Ismene, and I will begin this section by examining the interactions between Electra, Antigone, and their respective sisters. Although different issues of role performance are raised in the interactions between the two pairs of sisters, the parallelism between their roles is relatively straightforward; after examining the tensions brought to light by these two clear cases of role doubling, I will go on to examine the interactions which take place between Oedipus and Creon in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* is consistently discussed in terms of his role performance, and I will be returning to Oedipus in the following section to discuss his interactions with those of markedly

²⁹ Griffith 1999:37.

³⁰ Knox 1964:15-17 discusses the frequent attempts of others to persuade Sophoclean heroes to yield to the requirements of their situation and behave like normal members of society.

³¹ Griffiths 2012:76-77.

lower rank.³² In the case of Oedipus and Creon, however, I will be looking at Creon as a figure who does not yet occupy the same role as Oedipus, but might have an interest in doing so in the future, and I will be suggesting that Oedipus' growing sense that Creon is trying to infringe upon his role as king sheds new light on Oedipus' interaction with his own kingship.

In *Electra*, family roles are important from the first lines of the prologue, in which the Tutor explains that, since saving Orestes after Agamemnon's murder, he has raised him τοσσόνδ' ἔξ ἡβης, πατρὶ τιμωρὸν φόνου (14).³³ Although the Tutor suggests a straightforward view of Orestes' familial duty, ideas about family loyalty gain a new dimension when Electra enters. As she sings about her grief, Electra describes her own role within the family; just as Orestes' identity was bound up in the revenge plot, Electra identifies herself first and foremost as her father's daughter. It soon becomes clear, however, that, as a child of Agamemnon who has lived out her life in the household of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, Electra's familial role has problematic aspects.³⁴ Electra connects her obligation to Agamemnon with Clytemnestra's role in his death and her own, albeit unwilling, connection to Clytemnestra; she calls upon her sleepless bed to bear witness,

ὅσα τὸν δύστηνον ἐμὸν θρηνηῶ
πατέρ', ὃν κατὰ μὲν βάρβαρον αἴαν
φοίνιος Ἄρης οὐκ ἐξένισεν,
μήτηρ δ' ἡμῆ χῶ κοινολεχῆς
Αἴγισθος ὅπως δρῦν ὑλοτόμοι
σχίζουσι κάρα φονίῳ πελέκει (94-99).

³² Oedipus is defined by his role in the long version of the play's title. Sommerstein 2010:14-15, arguing for the overall stability of ancient titles for tragedy, notes that the expanded titles *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus* are not recorded before the Hellenistic period and that the creation of those titles most likely occurred in connection with the book trade in order to distinguish the two plays from each other; it remains worth noting that, in distinguishing *Oedipus Tyrannus* from *Oedipus at Colonus*, a subtitle which reflects the hero's rank was chosen for the earlier play.

³³ Dunn 2012b:98 notes that this initial focus on the actions of Orestes and the Tutor raises the expectation that the revenge plot will move forward swiftly, as it does in *Choephoroe*, with Orestes at its centre.

³⁴ Blundell 1989:152-155 comments on the confusion of roles in the household at the start of the play.

The chorus, when they arrive, likewise address Electra as the daughter of a most terrible mother (121-122). These early references to Clytemnestra suggest that Electra's role in the household is a matter of choice—she had no choice in her parentage, but she has decided where her loyalties lie and she must decide how to be her father's daughter accordingly.

In the first part of the play, while she waits for Orestes' return, Electra's options for fulfilling her role as Agamemnon's daughter are limited; insofar as she suggests that constant mourning is both a matter of duty and the only possible occupation for her father's daughter, she does not yet speak of a version of filial duty that involves taking vengeance into her own hands.³⁵ All she can do, she suggests, is mourn for her father, and this state of constant mourning keeps her isolated from those around her; she laments to the dead Agamemnon,

κούδεις τούτων οἶκτος ἀπ' ἄλλης
ἢ ἡμοῦ φέρεται, σοῦ, πάτερ, οὕτως
αἰκῶς οἰκτρῶς τε θανόντος (100-102).

It gradually becomes clear, however, that some of Electra's isolation is a product of her own personal interpretation of her role; when she prays that Orestes will come home soon and relieve her of some of her burden (117-120), she ignores the existence of any other siblings. When Electra claims that a child who is forgetful of slaughtered parents must be *νήπιος* (145-146), the chorus reply by reminding her that her behaviour goes far beyond that of Chrysothemis and Iphianassa (155-158), whose obligations to Agamemnon are presumably the same as Electra's own.³⁶ Although Iphianassa is never mentioned again in the play, Chrysothemis becomes an important foil to Electra. Their interactions centre around issues of role performance as, over the course of the play, each sister argues that

³⁵ Foley 2001:148-149 argues that Electra's ongoing lamentation is itself a form of revenge against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

³⁶ Kells *ad* 154 ff. compares the chorus's reminder to the question asked of Hamlet by Gertrude, 'Why seems it so particular with thee?' (I.2.75).

the other has wrongly—or at the very least foolishly—interpreted their shared familial role.³⁷

Given her initial introduction by the chorus as a sister of Electra’s who has managed to move on from Agamemnon’s death, Chrysothemis’ loyalties are at issue as soon as she enters at the end of the discussion between Electra and the chorus about the possible return of Orestes. When they introduce Chrysothemis as τὴν σὴν ὄμαιμον, ἐκ πατρὸς ταύτοῦ φύσιν, | Χρυσόθεμιν, ἔκ τε μητρός (325-326), the chorus draw attention—as they did when they mentioned Chrysothemis as an example of restrained daughterly behaviour—to the fact that Chrysothemis and Electra ought to occupy the same position in their family.³⁸ This statement of the sisters’ shared role, however, comes immediately after a warning to Electra not to say anything further in the presence of Chrysothemis (324-325), and this warning, like their earlier comment on the extremity of Electra’s behaviour, suggests that Electra and her sister have in the past decided to fulfil their roles differently. The known disconnect between the sisters casts a slightly different light on the chorus’ introduction of Chrysothemis in terms of her parentage. Having drawn attention to the conflict inherent in Electra’s familial identity when they greeted her as Clytemnestra’s daughter, the chorus now suggest that Chrysothemis too must decide whether to act as Clytemnestra’s daughter or Agamemnon’s.³⁹

Throughout their first exchange, both Electra and Chrysothemis draw attention to the fact that their position is similar—or that it could be if they made the same choices. Although Chrysothemis stands by her own pragmatic choice, she nonetheless admits, καίτοι τὸ μὲν δίκαιον οὐχ ἦ ἄγω λέγω, | ἀλλ’ ἦ σὺ κρίνεις (338-339). Electra, in her response, picks up on the obligations to which she and Chrysothemis are subject as

³⁷ Finglass *ad* 157 notes that Chrysothemis and Iphianassa are mentioned as daughters of Agamemnon in *Iliad* 9, in which Electra and Iphigenia are not mentioned. Winnington-Ingram 1980:336 suggests that Iphianassa has ‘been introduced merely in order to make us think of Iphigenia’.

³⁸ Blundell 1989:157.

³⁹ Finglass *ad* 325-326.

Agamemnon's daughters, saying, δεινόν γέ σ' οὔσαν πατρὸς οὔ σὺ παῖς ἔφυς | κείνου λεληῆσθαι, τῆς δὲ τικτούσης μέλειν (341-342). According to Electra, Chrysothemis' decision to yield to those in power is a sign that she has treacherously abandoned her proper role, and as the scene continues, Electra explains what she thinks it means to be a loyal daughter to Agamemnon.⁴⁰ She accuses Chrysothemis of trying to teach her τοῖς φίλοις εἶναι κακῆν (395), and then claims that she would rather, if necessary, fall πατρὶ τιμωρούμενοι (399). Later, after warning her that it would be wrong to bring Clytemnestra's offerings to Agamemnon's tomb (432-434), Electra provides Chrysothemis with more specific instructions for how to be a good daughter to Agamemnon: instead of taking Clytemnestra's offerings, Chrysothemis ought first to bring humbler offerings from herself and Electra and then to pray for Agamemnon's help in avenging his own death (448-458).

Although the sisters grow closer together over the course of their first encounter, with Chrysothemis accepting Electra's advice about Clytemnestra's offerings, the enduring rifts in their perspectives on filial duty become clear after the supposed death of Agamemnon, when Electra suggests taking the revenge into their own hands.⁴¹ As Chrysothemis describes it, Electra's plan would constitute a twofold failure to perform her daughterly role. In the first place, she suggests that violent action is generally inappropriate to women, and therefore incompatible with being a good daughter (997-998). More importantly, the plan is doomed; although Chrysothemis' reference to gender hints at questions of propriety, her comment in 998 refers more directly to the practical

⁴⁰ Foley 2001:150-151.

⁴¹ On the tentative alliance between the sisters which develops over the course of the scene, see Kirkwood 1958:137-138, Winnington-Ingram 1980:239-240, Kitzinger 1991:310-311, Nooter 2011:408. Finglass *ad* 871-1057 notes that the second scene with Chrysothemis follows a trajectory opposite to the first, with the sisters growing increasingly hostile over the course of their encounter; see also Segal 1966:502-503. Foley 2001:160 comments on the way in which Orestes' supposed death changes Electra's calculations and notes that, in explaining her new plan, 'Electra...expects a recognition normally afforded to male heroes'. See also Goldhill 2012:242-243.

difficulties the sisters would face.⁴² Attempting revenge and failing would constitute a second failure of daughterly duty insofar as, by risking her own life and that of Chrysothemis, Electra would be threatening the continuation of Agamemnon's line, and Chrysothemis begs her sister,

πρὶν πανωλέθρους τὸ πᾶν
ἡμᾶς τ' ὀλέσθαι κάξερημῶσαι γένος,
κατάσχεσ ὀργήν (1009-1011).

Although Electra claimed that she and Chrysothemis could be the saviours of their family, Chrysothemis suggests that the opposite is the case. If she and Electra are willing to live prudently, yielding to those in power, the family may yet survive, but if they attempt to carry out Electra's plan for revenge, they will lose the little that they have left.⁴³ Unlike her sister, Chrysothemis suggests that they will fulfil their obligations best if they can preserve what is left of their family.

Although Chrysothemis has won little sympathy from critics—Kirkwood says that she 'can hardly be said to have any moral perception of her own', Woodard describes her outlook as 'feeble and rather ignoble', and Blundell comments on her lack of moral strength—she, even more than the chorus, draws attention to the troubling aspects of Electra's role performance.⁴⁴ The role which Electra imagines for herself, both in the first episode, when she declares herself willing to defy Aegisthus' wishes so as to die honouring her father (399), and after the false news of Orestes' death, when she suggests that she and Chrysothemis should take the revenge plot into their own hands, does not accord with Chrysothemis' idea of what it means to be a good daughter. Although Foley has argued persuasively from the existence of Balkan cultures in which women do take on traditionally masculine roles in family vendettas in the absence of eligible male relations

⁴² Blundell 1989:160 notes that Chrysothemis' insistence upon the impossibility of Electra's plans is more convincing here than in the previous scene with the sisters; Blundell asks, 'must justice be pursued however slight the chance of success?'

⁴³ Kitzinger 1991:320-322 argues that the possibility of death and failure is implicit in Electra's speech, and that it is in part her attempt to gloss over this possibility which causes her to fail to persuade Chrysothemis.

⁴⁴ Kirkwood 1958:138; Woodard 1965:199; Blundell 199:158.

that Electra's suggestion may not have sounded totally alien to an Athenian audience, Chrysothemis' arguments against Electra's plan represent an attempt to draw her sister back to a more traditional, and probably more comfortable, idea of dutiful daughterhood.⁴⁵

Throughout the play, Chrysothemis serves as a vivid reminder that Electra's behaviour is not the only option.⁴⁶ The sisters' different choices can be traced to their divergent interpretations of their shared familial role; although she initially acknowledges that Electra is, strictly speaking, right to continue her resistance, Chrysothemis explains her own willingness to cooperate not so much as a decision to ignore her duty as a decision to do the best she can under the current circumstances. Saving herself, Chrysothemis suggests, does not constitute a failure to perform her role; when Electra speaks of her willingness to die for her cause, Chrysothemis, claiming that Agamemnon would understand her prudence (400), suggests that Electra is not only self-destructive, but also fails in her main goal of honouring the dead. For Chrysothemis, the activities which she ought to perform in her role as Agamemnon's daughter are limited by the activities which she can perform in her parallel role as an unmarried woman in someone else's household, and she suggests that Electra is foolish not to view her own role in the same light. In Electra's interaction with her more cautious sister, the familial role which she has used to define herself becomes less clear, and Electra herself becomes harder to characterize simply as Agamemnon's loyal daughter.

As is often noted, Antigone and Ismene form a similar pair of unmarried sisters, one of whom chooses life—and possibly death—in heroic isolation, while the other chooses to adapt to the situation at hand.⁴⁷ Antigone and Ismene, however, are bound by a

⁴⁵ Foley 2001:161-164. Goldhill 2012:243-244, after commenting on Athenian discomfort with the idea of armed women, notes, 'For Chrysothemis, the two sisters can never live out the role of the two brothers' (244).

⁴⁶ Griffiths 2012:76-77.

⁴⁷ Easterling 1977:124 and Blundell 1989:158n.38 both note that Chrysothemis and Ismene are very different characters with similar dramatic functions; Kirkwood 1958:137-139 discusses the difference at

more complex web of familial obligations than that which binds Electra and Chrysothemis, and they therefore engage differently both with their roles and with each other. As Ismene points out in the prologue, the fates of the individual members of their family have been unusually closely connected since the time of Oedipus (49-60, an expansion of 14-15). Both sisters identify themselves in terms of their familial roles, starting with Antigone's address to Ismene as ἴω κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἰσμῆνης κάρα (1), and, as Antigone explains Creon's edict and her determination to bury Polyneices, she draws attention to the fact that she and Ismene ought to share the same role.⁴⁸ Although she emphasizes her own involvement when she tells her sister, τοιαῦτά φασι τὸν ἀγαθὸν Κρέοντα σοὶ | κάμοί, λέγω γὰρ κάμέ, κηρύξαντ' ἔχειν (31-32), Antigone suggests that she and Ismene have the same stake in Creon's decree.⁴⁹ As it becomes clear that Ismene may not be willing to help with the burial, Antigone interprets her hesitation as a failure of sisterly duty; when she says that she will bury τὸν γοῦν ἐμόν, καὶ τὸν σόν, ἦν σὺ μὴ θέλῃς, | ἀδελφόν· οὐ γὰρ δὴ προδοῦς' ἀλώσομαι (45-46), she suggests that Ismene is not acting as a true sister to Polyneices. Ismene, however, suggests that the requirements of the role which she shares with Antigone are not as clear-cut as they appear to her more decisive sister.

Whereas Antigone speaks about her role almost exclusively in terms of her obligations to Polyneices, Ismene draws attention to the other familial pressures to which she and Antigone ought to be subject. She and Antigone, Ismene observes, are both the last survivors of an unfortunate family and politically subject to Creon's rule, and, after recounting the troubles which destroyed their parents and their brothers, she urges

Antigone,

greater length, although I am sceptical of his claim that 'Chrysothemis is more girlish and less aware of the implications of what is going on than Ismene' (139). Goldhill 2012:242-245 looks at the differences between the two pairs of sisters in terms of their political roles.

⁴⁸ Foley 2001:173-174.

⁴⁹ Griffith *ad* 31-32 comments on Antigone's expansion on her own feelings about the decree.

νῦν δ' αὖ μόνα δὴ νῶ λειμμένα σκόπει
ὄσῳ κάκιστ' ὀλούμεθ', εἰ νόμου βίῃ
ψῆφον τυράννων ἢ κράτη παρέξιμεν (58-60).⁵⁰

This suggestion that she and her sister ought not to add to the woes already experienced by the rest of their family is, for Ismene, linked to the sense—similar to that expressed by Chrysothemis in response to Electra's plan—that resistance to Creon's edict would be both inappropriate for a pair of women (61-62) and unlikely to succeed in any event (63-64).⁵¹ Although Ismene says nothing about the possibility of marriage for herself or Antigone before her first reference to Antigone's betrothal to Haemon in the second episode (568), her suggestion that the sisters might be obligated to save themselves, followed shortly by her reminder, ἐννοεῖν χρὴ τοῦτο μὲν γυναιῖχ' ὅτι | ἔφουμεν (61-62), suggests a conception of filial duty according to which, as the surviving members of their immediate family, Oedipus' daughters ought to marry and bear children.⁵²

In her interactions with Antigone, Ismene pays attention to a different set of social pressures than those which Antigone acknowledges; Ismene refers to the complex demands of their family as a whole, while Antigone concentrates on her singular role as a loyal sister to Polyneices.⁵³ Throughout her efforts to persuade her sister, Ismene speaks about herself in conjunction with Antigone, asking Antigone to consider a set of circumstances that affect both sisters equally. In Ismene's view, she and Antigone still have the same place in their family and the city, and Ismene suggests that they both must balance the demands of multiple—possibly conflicting—roles. When Ismene, after her

⁵⁰ Brown *ad* 49-68 notes that Ismene's focus on survival does not suggest that she feels the family's misfortune any less strongly than Antigone does.

⁵¹ Sourvinou-Inwood 1989:140 argues that Ismene's warnings to her sister would have reminded an Athenian audience of the extent to which Antigone, in going against the edict of Creon, a man to whom she owes both civic and familial allegiance, has overstepped the bounds of acceptable female behaviour.

⁵² Foley 1993:111 notes that this aspect of Antigone's socially sanctioned role is further emphasized in her final lament, although Foley 1995:140 argues that the audience would have had multiple frameworks for judging Antigone's behaviour and that it is therefore unclear how they would have judged Antigone. Sourvinou-Inwood 1989:139-141 maintains that the audience would have seen Antigone as a dangerously transgressive woman.

⁵³ Bennett and Tyrrell 1990:446-447 note that, in describing her own actions as both noble and singular, Antigone appropriates *topoi* which were common in Athenian funeral oration.

comment, ἔπειτα δ' οὐνεκ' ἀρχόμεσθ' ἐκ κρεισσόνων | καὶ ταῦτ' ἀκούειν κᾶτι τῶνδ' ἀλγίονα (63-64), begins to refer to herself in the singular at line 65, the effect of this change is not so much to separate herself from Antigone as to demonstrate, in speaking about her own choice, a course of action which is also open to Antigone. Ismene acknowledges that it would be better for Polyneices to be buried—she expresses hope that τοὺς ὑπὸ χθονός will pardon her actions, not that she will be considered totally blameless (65-66)—but she argues that, under the circumstances, she and Antigone should prioritize their roles as dependent women and protect the family interests by keeping themselves alive.⁵⁴

When Ismene refuses to help with the burial, Antigone immediately draws a sharp distinction between herself and her sister, arguing that, while she has chosen to do her duty, Ismene has chosen to dishonour her brother and the gods (76-77). Ignoring Ismene's focus on the wider needs of the family, Antigone claims that from now on the sisters will perform conflicting roles, with Ismene looking after her own interests and Antigone ἀρέσκουσ' οἷς μάλιστα ἀδεῖν με χρή (89). Antigone's decision to reject Ismene, however, is not generally accepted; although their perspectives on the roles in question differ, both Ismene and Creon maintain that the two women share their roles as daughters of Oedipus and sisters of the fallen brothers. Creon suggests that, because they are ξύναιμος and therefore share a familial role, the sisters must have acted together (488-490), and Ismene tries to confirm his suspicion by claiming equal responsibility for the burial (536-537). When Antigone denies Ismene's claim, saying, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐάσει τοῦτό γ' ἡ δίκη σ', ἐπεὶ | οὔτ' ἠθέλησας οὔτ' ἐγὼ ἵκοινωσάμην (538-539), she suggests a different idea of role performance than that which Creon and Ismene have been

⁵⁴ Blundell 1989:111.

assuming.⁵⁵ For Creon and Ismene, roles are imposed from the outside, by means of birth or status, while for Antigone, roles are taken on when individuals choose to perform the duties associated with those roles. Since Ismene chose not to help with the burial, Antigone suggests that she no longer deserves the role of sister, either to Polyneices or to Antigone herself.

In this way, although Antigone, Electra, and their sisters perform roles that they were born into, Antigone and Electra emphasize the choices they have made in fulfilling those roles, and, in doing so, suggest that their sisters cannot be said to perform the same role at all. Both sets of sisters are paired from early in their respective plays, and their two pairings encourage the audience to think not only about the particular roles that the sisters are meant to play, but also about how characters acquire and manipulate their roles. Elsewhere in Sophocles, pairings of characters with the same or similar social roles often develop gradually or are merely suggested by the juxtaposition of characters of similar social status; in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Theseus and Creon, both of whom are implicitly contrasted with the king Oedipus once was, provide different models of civic authority, while, in *Philoctetes*, Odysseus and Philoctetes are juxtaposed as possible role models for Neoptolemus.⁵⁶ Just as Ismene and Chrysothemis provide their respective sisters with a natural context in which to discuss role performance, the less explicit pairings that occur in other plays encourage questions about what it means to take on a role. How such pairings develop, moreover, is important; in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, it is not so much the actual doubling of Oedipus and Creon which raises questions about how Oedipus interacts

⁵⁵ Winnington-Ingram 1980:134, on Antigone's denial of Ismene, notes, 'This kind of love—and this kind of death—Antigone rejects: coming at the wrong time and in the wrong way, they do not arise out of the complex of emotions by which she has herself been actuated—her feelings about the family, about burial, about death'.

⁵⁶ On rulership in *Oedipus at Colonus*, see, e.g., Easterling 1984a:41 on Theseus, Blundell 1993 on the civic structure of Athens, and Kelly 2009:110-118 on Theseus and Creon. On Odysseus and Philoctetes vying for Neoptolemus' loyalty, see, e.g., Nussbaum 1976, Winnington-Ingram 1980:281-289, Blundell 1989:184-220, Roisman 1997; Schein 2006 frames the competition in Homeric terms.

with his role as Oedipus' fury when he comes to believe that Creon is encroaching upon that role.

From the beginning of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus is identified in terms of his role as king, and his kingship is much discussed by characters, chorus, and critics.⁵⁷ His rank gives him certain responsibilities towards the city, and it also distinguishes him from those around him; when he first identifies himself as ὁ πᾶσι κλεινὸς Οἰδίπους καλούμενος (8), he separates himself from those to whom he is renowned.⁵⁸ As the play continues, however, it becomes less clear to what extent Oedipus really is alone in his civic role. In particular, Creon over the course of the play becomes a possible double for Oedipus.⁵⁹ The potential doubling between the two men comes in part from Oedipus' own suspicions, but Creon has a degree of civic power at the beginning of the play, and, as Oedipus' rule collapses in the aftermath of his realization of who he is and what he has done, Creon gradually takes on some of the authority Oedipus has lost. As Oedipus first grows convinced that Creon is trying to usurp the throne and later must come to terms with the loss of his own authority, his interactions with Creon draw attention both to how he fulfils his civic role and to what he thinks it means to rule a city. Over the course of the play, Oedipus, who is so often defined by others in terms of his kingship, negotiates the requirements of that role and defines himself through his own interaction with civic authority.

Oedipus' initial accusation of Creon and Creon's response are both shaped by their respective ideas about Oedipus' role in Thebes. In his accusation, Oedipus speculates that Creon must have thought him cowardly or foolish (536), inattentive or unable to defend

⁵⁷ On the immediate identification of Oedipus with his kingly status, see Knox 1957:53, Reinhardt 1979:95-96, Segal 2001:73, Beer 2012:97.

⁵⁸ Dawe *ad* 8 notes Oedipus' identification of himself in terms of status, but claims that it is not unusual for a person of his rank. Knox 1957:21 likewise calls Oedipus' description 'a boast that is merely a statement of fact'.

⁵⁹ Beer 2012:97 suggests that Creon poses a threat to Oedipus authority from the moment of his arrival from Delphi.

his own position (538-539)—in short, Creon must have thought him an ineffective king.⁶⁰ By questioning Creon’s expectations, Oedipus suggests that he is not that sort of king, and he argues further that kingship cannot be won by the means which he suspects Creon of employing, asking,

ἄρ’ οὐχὶ μῶρόν ἐστι τοῦ γχείρημά σου,
ἄνευ τε πλούτου καὶ φίλων τυραννίδα
θηρᾶν, ὃ πλήθει χρήμασιν θ’ ἀλίσκεται; (540-542).

In response, Creon contests not only Oedipus’ accusations, but also his conception of kingship. He begins with a series of questions about the power structure in Thebes, ending with, οὐκ οὐν ἰσοῦμαι σφῶν ἐγὼ δυοῖν τρίτος; (581). As the acknowledged equal of the king and queen—Oedipus suggests at 582 that Creon’s privileged position makes his betrayal even worse—Creon is in a position to remind Oedipus that his power is not so absolute as he suggested it was in his speech against Creon. According to Creon, moreover, the difference between Oedipus’ role and Creon’s is not so much a difference in power as it is a difference in level of worry; while Creon enjoys all the benefits of elevated public position, it is Oedipus, as king, who must be constantly on guard (584-591).⁶¹

Although Oedipus frames his comments about his own rule in terms of Creon’s potential usurpation, various ideas about kingship are also at stake, including both the relatively abstract question of what it means to rule and the more specific question of Oedipus’ performance as leader. Oedipus suggests that Creon will keep him from achieving his goals (618-621), but when he says, εἰ δ’ ἡσυχάζων προσμενῶ, τὰ τοῦδε μὲν | πεπραγμέν’ ἔσται, τὰ μὰ δ’ ἡμαρτημένα (620-621), he seems to be speaking of personal rather than public goals.⁶² As Oedipus grows increasingly determined to have Creon killed, Creon suggests that Oedipus’ concern for his own well-being may be a problematic trait in a king; when Oedipus claims to be sane as far as his own interests are

⁶⁰ Knox 1957:18 draws attention to the emphasis which Oedipus places on his own intelligence in this scene.

⁶¹ Segal 2001:84-85 notes that, given Creon’s role in Thebes, Oedipus’ suspicions are not entirely senseless.

⁶² Burian 2009:111 identifies in Oedipus a ‘complete confusion of his own interest with that of the state’.

concerned, Creon replies, ἀλλ' ἐξ ἴσου δεῖ κάμὸν (627). Oedipus' behaviour, as Creon presents it, poses a threat not just to Creon, but also to the well-being of the city; when Oedipus responds to a question about his judgment by saying that the city must be ruled (628), Creon answers first, οὗτοι κακῶς γ' ἄρχοντος (629), and then, κάμοι πόλεως μέτεστιν, οὐχὶ σοὶ μόνω (630).⁶³ Although Creon speaks here ostensibly as any citizen might, his criticism of Oedipus' rule gains force both from Oedipus' suggestion that Creon would like to rule for himself and from his own recent comments on the dangers inherent in kingship.

In the first half in the play, then, as Oedipus begins to fear that Creon might try to usurp his throne, the presence of Creon as a possible alternative to Oedipus encourages a level of heightened focus on Oedipus' interpretation and performance of his public role in Thebes. As Oedipus' role comes under increased scrutiny, his performance of that role seems to change; in the prologue, there is nothing to suggest that he is anything but a good king, motivated by a desire to do what is best for the people of Thebes.⁶⁴ As he worries about the perceived threat from Creon, however, Creon's warnings against autocratic behaviour become more and more apt; when Creon accuses him of folly, Oedipus replies, τὸ γοῦν ἐμόν (626), suggesting that his own interests take priority over all else. In the second stasimon, at the conclusion of the scene between Oedipus and Jocasta, the chorus comment, ὕβρις φυτεύει τύραννον (873), and their words are an apt description of the trajectory of Oedipus' rule.⁶⁵ Oedipus' ὕβρις, which was not an issue so long as he felt

⁶³ Segal 2001:85 notes Oedipus' movement towards the dangerous sort of tyranny over the course of the scene, drawing attention to the parallels between this exchange and that between Creon and Haemon in *Antigone*.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Reinhardt 1979:95-96, Easterling 1984a:44.

⁶⁵ I follow Lloyd-Jones and Wilson in keeping the nominative ὕβρις and an accusative τύραννον of the manuscripts, *contra* Dawe *ad* 873, who follows Blaydes in reading ὕβριν φυτεύει τυραννίς, arguing that the chorus are worried about the corrupting influence of power on Oedipus. Winnington-Ingram 1971:122, who reluctantly accepts Blaydes' emendation, suggests that the chorus can refer to Oedipus 'though they can hardly yet be regarding him as, in act, a hubristic ruler'. Carey 1986:176-177 argues that the chorus cannot have Oedipus in mind here.

his rule to be unchallenged, is rapidly making him into a very different sort of king than he was at the beginning of the play; although he tells Creon in their dispute, ἀρκτέον γ' ὄμως (628), in his subsequent interactions with the men who hold the key to his identity, ruling seems to be as much a matter of asserting his authority as a matter of taking care of the city.

Whereas much emphasis is placed in the prologue on Oedipus' kingship and what he must therefore do for the city of Thebes, emphasis shifts over the course of his disputes with Teiresias and Creon from the fact that Oedipus is king to what kind of king Oedipus is and should be. The public part of Oedipus' identity is bound up in his performance of the role of king, and therefore, even before the issue of Oedipus' birth comes to the forefront, the threat which Oedipus sees in Creon calls into question important aspects of Oedipus' identity.⁶⁶ Over the course of the conversations in which Oedipus becomes aware of his killing of Laius and of the incestuous nature of his marriage, it further becomes clear that his public identity as king cannot be separated from his private identity as his father's son and wife's—and mother's—husband; at the same time, it becomes clear that Oedipus can no longer play the role of king.⁶⁷ Into the resulting power vacuum steps Creon, whom the chorus describe as χώρας λέλειπται μοῦνος ἀντὶ σοῦ φύλαξ (1418), and, as he and Oedipus negotiate the roles which are left to them, the questions surrounding what it means to rule and be ruled which shaped their earlier interactions resurface and take on new dimensions.⁶⁸

In his first address to Creon after Creon enters at 1416, Oedipus, who has spent much of the play defending himself against a perceived threat from Creon, now places himself at Creon's mercy, describing Creon as ἄριστος ἐλθὼν πρὸς κάκιστον ἄνδρ'

⁶⁶ Beer 2012:94 discusses Oedipus' kingship in terms of 'the mask of Oedipus as the great ruler', an illusion which is destroyed over the course of the play.

⁶⁷ Liapis 2012:89.

⁶⁸ See Chapter 1 above (note 82) for my views on the authenticity of the final scene of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Segal 2001:115 notes the ambiguity surrounding who is really king in the final scene of the play.

ἐμέ (1433) and promising to speak in Creon's interest, and not his own (1434).⁶⁹ As the scene continues, however, Oedipus seems increasingly to chafe against his new inability to dictate his own fate.⁷⁰ When Creon tells him that he has grieved enough and now must go inside, Oedipus answers reluctantly, πειστέον, κεί μηδὲν ἤδύ (1516). After Creon urges Oedipus once again to obey, reminding him that all things have their proper time, Oedipus pushes back against Creon's authority, asking, οἴσθ' ἐφ' οἷς οὖν εἶμι (1517). By trying to name the conditions for his compliance, Oedipus implies that Creon, however much his power may have increased, still ultimately lacks the power to make Oedipus do anything against his will.⁷¹ Although Creon is willing to hear Oedipus' terms (1517), he refuses to make any promises (1520), and, when Oedipus finally asks that his daughters not be separated from him, Creon answers, πάντα μὴ βούλου κρατεῖν· | καὶ γὰρ ἀκράτησας οὐ σοὶ τῶ βίῳ ξυνέσπετο (1522-1523).⁷² As he reminds Oedipus that their respective roles have changed, Creon suggests in the same breath that Oedipus' power was never as stable as it appeared.

Throughout *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus and Creon never simultaneously play the same role in the city of Thebes. Even at the very end of the play, when rule over the city seems to pass to Creon, it is not clear that Creon's new role is exactly the same as the role which Oedipus has just vacated.⁷³ Nonetheless, as Oedipus moves closer to the discovery of his actions, Creon is increasingly presented not only as another prominent figure in the city but also as a potential alternative to Oedipus. Just as Antigone and Electra's performance of their social and familial roles is highlighted by the very different choices made by their respective sisters, Oedipus' personal interaction with his public position

⁶⁹ Burian 2009:107.

⁷⁰ Budelmann 2006:51 sees Oedipus trying to regain control of his future after the entrance of Creon.

⁷¹ Segal 2001:116 comments, 'Despite the reversal of roles, however, something fundamental in the two men remains unchanged'.

⁷² On the gaps between Oedipus' real authority and the authority which he thinks he still has, Taplin 1983:173 notes that, at the end of the play, 'Oedipus is free with imperatives, but they are not obeyed'.

⁷³ Segal 2001:115.

becomes somewhat clearer in the presence of Creon. Implicit in the threat to his own power which Oedipus sees in Creon is the idea that Creon might be a very different sort of king than Oedipus is, and, when Oedipus' rule finally collapses at the end of the play, Creon's immediate assumption of power draws attention to the ways in which Oedipus and his kingship have defined each other throughout the course of the tragedy.

ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN ROLES

When one character interacts with another who is performing essentially the same social role, the particular ways in which both characters interact with their common role can be thrown into relief, and these interactions can shape the audience's understanding both of the role in question and of the characters who play it. While the doubling of roles is one means of drawing attention to the ways in which characters perform their social roles, role theory also provides a framework for interpreting interactions between figures with different roles in a given situation, and interactions between Sophoclean characters of different social status can shed light on the ways in which those characters perform their roles. In some interactions between characters of different rank, all of the figures involved accept the existence of a power differential; in other interactions, however, characters are shown to be uncertain about how to behave towards a person of a different status or, more drastically, to question the importance of prescribed roles.⁷⁴ In the following section, I will look first at the encounter between Oedipus and the old servant of Laius and then at Neoptolemus' very different interactions with Odysseus and Philoctetes in order to see how differences in social standing can illuminate the ways in which different Sophoclean characters interact with the constraints imposed by social position.

⁷⁴ Griffith 2005 draws attention to the importance of different types of authority figures—and their interactions with those with less authority—throughout Greek tragedy.

Over the course of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus' kingship—and thus Oedipus himself—appears in several different lights: in the prologue he is a monarch trying to protect his people, while in subsequent scenes he tries to preserve his own power and, finally, to come to terms with what he has lost.⁷⁵ Although Creon reminds Oedipus that he and Jocasta essentially share the rule of Thebes with Oedipus (578-581), most of Oedipus' interactions are nonetheless with figures who are subordinate to him in one way or another. He treats these figures with varying degrees of respect, but his exalted status is always prominent, and his interactions with people of different rank therefore require the negotiation of shifting ideas about the rights and responsibilities associated with his kingship. Shortly before his final realization of his identity and his past deeds, Oedipus meets with the old servant of Laius who was both the only survivor of the incident in which Laius was killed and also, as Oedipus soon learns, the servant who once gave him as an infant to the man who brought him to Corinth where he was raised by Polybus and Merope. As he tries to extract the old man's story, Oedipus' behaviour and the servant's reactions to it are illustrative both of Oedipus' ideas about kingship and of his ability to act in accordance with those ideas.

By the time the servant enters, several of Oedipus' roles have been called into question—having earlier been told by Teiresias that he does not know who he is (414-415), Oedipus has been forced to confront the possibility that he is the killer of Laius, and, while examining that possibility, he has revisited the suspicion about his birth which was raised before he left Corinth.⁷⁶ These areas of uncertainty have implications for Oedipus'

⁷⁵ Knox 1957:53 comments, 'the motivation for many of [Oedipus'] decisive actions is to be found precisely in his attitude towards his political responsibility'. I would argue that this statement can also be reframed from the perspective of the audience, who are encouraged to interpret Oedipus' actions in terms of his performance of his public role.

⁷⁶ Segal 2001:83 comments on the way in which the scene with Teiresias 'prepare[s] us for Oedipus' growing anxieties later', noting that Oedipus himself will look back on the seer's words in the later scene with Jocasta; see also Edmunds 2000:59. Beer 2012:102 argues that Oedipus' identity really begins to unravel in the scene with Jocasta.

kingship, both outwardly in terms of whether or not he can continue to rule in Thebes and inwardly in terms of whether or not he can count himself a good king. As the chorus sing ὕβρις φυτεύει τύραννον in the second stasimon (873), warning against the dangers of arrogance, they tap into general uncertainties about kingship which are likely to have been shared by the play's Athenian audience.⁷⁷ The chorus, like most of the characters in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and, to a different extent, the audience, look at Oedipus' rule from the outside; they are not kings, but they have seen how kings may be tempted to behave. Although they do not say that kingship is necessarily evil, they do suggest that the consequences can be dangerous,

εἰ δέ τις ὑπέροπτα χερσὶν
ἢ λόγῳ πορεύεται,
Δίκας ἀφόβητος (883-884).⁷⁸

Oedipus' kingship, as I discussed in the previous section, is at this point heading on a dangerous trajectory, and the chorus suggest that some of the danger in which Oedipus finds himself is connected to the simple fact that he is king.

As Oedipus interacts with a succession of characters of lower rank over the course of the play, he grows increasingly vulnerable to accusations of the kind of arrogance which the chorus warned might be dangerous in a king; in particular, as his political position becomes less certain, Oedipus seems to become increasingly invested in maintaining the distinction between his rank and that of those around him.⁷⁹ In his

⁷⁷ The implications of the term τύραννος here and elsewhere in the play are difficult to identify with certainty; although the term τύραννος eventually took on negative connotations, it is unclear whether those connotations were the dominant ones at the time of Sophocles' writing. Winnington-Ingram 1971:126 (=1980:192) argues that τυραννίς in the play and in Greek tragedy in general is a neutral term for kingship; Knox 1979 argues that the play's insistent identification of Oedipus as τύραννος draws attention to his status as a king who was granted political power rather than inheriting it, but Knox also argues that Oedipus' behaviour as an absolute ruler suggests the negative aspects of the term. Carey 1986:176 acknowledges that many usages of τυραννίς in Greek tragedy are neutral, but marshals fifth-century examples of negative usages in order to argue persuasively that the use of the term in *Oedipus Tyrannus* can easily be negative, depending on its context.

⁷⁸ Carey 1986:177, following on from his claim that line 873 cannot refer, even obliquely, to Oedipus, argues that the warning in the second strophe is entirely generic.

⁷⁹ Easterling 1984a:44 notes that 'he is driven very near to behaving like a tyrant in the painful process of finding out the truth'.

encounter with the old servant of Laius, Oedipus makes their difference in status clear from the outset; his first words to the old man, οὔτος σύ, πρέσβυ, δεῦρό μοι φώνει βλέπων | ὅσ' ἄν σ' ἐρωτῶ. Λαΐου ποτ' ἦσθα σύ; (1121-1122), establish a power dynamic in which Oedipus will direct the conversation. When the old man answers with, ἦ, δοῦλος οὐκ ὠνητός, ἀλλ' οἴκοι τραφεῖς (1123), he refines the view of his subordinate role suggested by Oedipus' initial address, and, in the first part of the exchange which follows, he holds onto the degree of dignity claimed in his opening lines; he answers Oedipus' questions, but also asks questions of his own (1139), and he says nothing about Oedipus' superior rank.⁸⁰

When Oedipus re-enters the conversation at 1147, after an interval in which the Corinthian messenger reminds the old servant of Laius of their shared history, he rebukes the old man for trying to make the Corinthian be silent. Despite Oedipus' reprimand, the Corinthian drops out of the conversation, and the dialogue between Oedipus and the old servant becomes increasingly focused on what they believe to be their respective obligations. Oedipus' suggestion that the old man's words merit punishment serves as a reminder that Oedipus is in a position to inflict such punishment, and the servant, despite his earlier claim to a degree of autonomy, draws attention to Oedipus' superior authority when he asks, τί δ', ὧ φέριστε δεσποτῶν, ἀμαρτάνω; (1149).⁸¹ As the dialogue continues, Oedipus grows more menacing, threatening physical violence against the old man at 1154, 1158, and 1166. Over the same span of time, the old servant addresses Oedipus in terms of his rank more and more frequently; after first addressing Oedipus as φέριστε δεσποτῶν at 1149, the servant calls him δέσποθ' at 1165, ἄναξ at 1173, and δέσποθ' again at 1178. At the beginning of the play, the priest called upon Oedipus in the

⁸⁰ Payne 2000:406.

⁸¹ Knox 1957:97 suggests that Oedipus' threat of punishment has legal connotations; Payne 2000:407 sees an affirmation of social roles along with echoes of Athenian legal practice.

hope that he might help the people of Thebes (46-57), and Oedipus used his rank to explain his obligation to the city (258-268); now, Oedipus' kingship seems to be, both in his eyes and in the eyes of the old servant, mostly a licence to punish those who hesitate to obey him.

Although there is little to suggest that Oedipus' behaviour is entirely unacceptable for a man of his rank, his treatment of the old servant, which is highlighted by the servant's plea, μή δῆτα, πρὸς θεῶν, τὸν γέροντά μ' αἰκίστη (1153), for him not to harm an old man, suggests that Oedipus may not quite be fulfilling his kingly obligation to protect his people. This suggestion that Oedipus is an imperfect king in turn draws attention to the issues surrounding both his rule and the possibility of good kingship which have been raised so far; as he bullies the old servant into speaking, Oedipus seems to have succumbed in part to the thirst for power of which Creon accused him directly and against which the chorus warned in general terms.⁸² Starting with the supplication of Oedipus in the prologue, the audience have been primed by Oedipus' interactions with others to consider how he behaves in his public role as ruler of the city. Although the Athenian audience's feelings about monarchy—even in the mythical world of tragedy—were probably ambivalent, the prologue presented them with a king admired by his people and apparently doing his best to keep them from harm.⁸³ As the play continues, however, Oedipus' interactions with his subjects become increasingly tense, and the tension in these interactions reflects a parallel tension in Oedipus' perception of himself as king. By the time the old servant is pressured into telling Oedipus the truth about his birth, Oedipus is

⁸² Raaflaub 2012:484 suggests that the audience are encouraged to think about Oedipus as a political figure.

⁸³ For discussions of the uneasiness surrounding monarchy in Athenian drama, see Winnington-Ingram 1971, Knox 1979, Easterling 1984a, Carey 1986, Griffith 1998, and Seaford 2003, Raaflaub 2012. On Oedipus' care for the people of Thebes, see Knox 1957:23-25, Segal 2001:73-75.

behaving less like an exemplar of the possibility of good kingship and more like a warning against the risks associated with monarchical power.⁸⁴

The difference in rank between Oedipus and the old servant of Laius is a sharp one, and Oedipus' treatment of the servant highlights the fine line between the exercise of legitimate authority and the abuse of power. Matters are more complicated in the beginning of *Philoctetes*, where, although Odysseus is clearly in charge, his control over Neoptolemus seems to depend on age and experience and to some extent military rank rather than birth and social standing. This combination of age, experience, and rank does not quite add up to a set of clearly defined roles for the two men: although Odysseus successfully exploits his status as Neoptolemus' superior in order to convince Neoptolemus to go along with the deception plot, it is never entirely clear what formal role Neoptolemus plays in the Greek military enterprise.⁸⁵ Neoptolemus' noble birth, moreover, is a significant stumbling block, insofar as it both makes him reluctant to participate in the deception and also gives him some authority of his own.⁸⁶ The interactions between the two men in the prologue constitute a negotiation of their respective roles, with Odysseus angling for Neoptolemus' obedience while at the same time making sure that he treats Neoptolemus' with the respect to which Achilles' son might feel he is entitled. Later in the play, Neoptolemus' role becomes even more complicated, and both Odysseus and Philoctetes must figure out how to interact with a Neoptolemus who does not seem committed to any single social role.

As soon as the play begins, it becomes apparent that the respective roles of Odysseus and Neoptolemus are a possible source of tension. In his opening speech,

⁸⁴ Easterling 1984a:44.

⁸⁵ As is frequently noted, the presence of Neoptolemus in *Philoctetes* seems to be a Sophoclean addition to the myth (see, e.g., Reinhardt 1979:162-163, Woodruff 2012:127, Schein 2013:5-6, 23), which adds a degree of uncertainty to his formal role.

⁸⁶ Blundell 1989:185. Reinhardt 1979:163 notes that 'Neoptolemus, as his father's heir, is intent on victory' and that this desire for military renown conflicts with his desire to have nothing to do with the deception.

Odysseus addresses the younger man as κρατίστου πατρὸς Ἑλλήνων τραφεῖς | Ἀχιλλέως παῖ Νεοπτόλεμε (3-4), identifying him with a role which he will soon admit to be incompatible with the task at hand.⁸⁷ He then hints at his own relationship to the Greek cause by saying that he marooned Philoctetes ταχθεῖς τόδ' ἔρδειν τῶν ἀνασσόντων ὑπο (6). Although he is subordinate to the Atreidae, Odysseus nonetheless suggests that he is entitled by rank and superior experience to instruct Neoptolemus; before outlining the plan, he urges Neoptolemus to do what he is told, however unusual it may sound, ὡς ὑπηρέτης πάρει (53).⁸⁸ Neoptolemus' role as Odysseus' surrogate in the deception of Philoctetes, as Odysseus acknowledges, is contrary to his usual role as the son of Achilles, and Odysseus must work to convince Neoptolemus that the two roles can be reconciled. Although the deception plot will require Neoptolemus to say and do things that run contrary to his nature (79-80), Odysseus argues that the temporary disgrace of participating in the scheme will be outweighed by the lasting glory that will come from the sack of Troy. Even if the reputation which Odysseus predicts for Neoptolemus when he says, σοφός τ' ἂν αὐτὸς κάγαθὸς κεκλή' ἄμα (119), is not entirely Achillean, the achievement of glory through military exploits is suggested to be consistent with Neoptolemus' role as his father's son.⁸⁹

As he urges the younger man to accept a somewhat unsavoury present role in the interest of future glory, Odysseus manages never to identify himself in terms of a specific familial or military position.⁹⁰ While he encourages Neoptolemus to obey orders as a

⁸⁷ Schein *ad* 4 notes that 'the combination of proper name and patronymic is unusual in Soph., and limited to formal addresses and self-identifications'. Odysseus' address to Neoptolemus here is the only time anyone in the play addresses him by name; the addition of his patronymic, by which he will be addressed frequently over the course of the play (Il. 4, 50, 260, 540, 1237), suggests that his status as Achilles' son will be important.

⁸⁸ Blundell 1989:185.

⁸⁹ Winnington-Ingram 1980:283 and Blundell 1989:191-192 both comment on the Odyssean aspects of the reputation which Odysseus promises Neoptolemus. Roisman 1997:140-141 comments on Odysseus' exploitation of Neoptolemus' inherited values; on the disconnect between Neoptolemus' nature and the task at hand, see, e.g., Alt 1961:146-147, Nussbaum 1976:32-33, Hawkins 1999:338-339.

⁹⁰ For Odysseus' consistent focus on the future results of present actions, see Chapter 4 below.

means of forwarding his own interests, Odysseus says little about his own motivations and desires, presenting himself instead as part of a larger enterprise.⁹¹ His concerns are with ends rather than means; since he knows that he cannot himself succeed in capturing Philoctetes (74-76), he suggests that he is willing to give up to Neoptolemus the main part of the glory which is to be won from the success of the mission. At this point in the play, Odysseus' leadership is relatively understated, and, although he reminds Neoptolemus that the younger man's job is to assist as necessary (53), he presents himself more as Neoptolemus' mentor than as his commander.⁹² Odysseus' deliberately constructed role as mentor is clearest when he explains to Neoptolemus that, although he once was eager to rely on deeds rather than words, *νῦν δ' εἰς ἔλεγχον ἐξιῶν ὀρῶ βροτοῖς | τὴν γλῶσσαν, οὐχὶ τᾶργα, πάνθ' ἡγουμένην* (98-99). By drawing on his personal experience rather than dwelling on his official position, Odysseus can encourage Neoptolemus to obey without drawing unnecessary attention to the subordinate role which he must play in the process.

After Odysseus leaves Neoptolemus to play his part in the deception, Neoptolemus' role appears in a different light. Without Odysseus at his side, there is no one to emphasize Neoptolemus' status as a junior member of the Greek force; the chorus, although older than Neoptolemus, ask him for orders, addressing him in the *parodos* not only as *τέκνον* (141) and *παῖ* (201), but also as *δέσποτ'* (135) and *ἄναξ* (150).⁹³ In their first strophe, in fact, the chorus dwell on Neoptolemus' authority, first describing the wisdom that can be expected to reside with kings (139-140) and then adding, *σὲ δ', ᾧ*

⁹¹ Winnington-Ingram 1980:286 comments on Odysseus' lack of personal stake in anything except success.

⁹² Blundell 1989:190 describes Odysseus as 'taking advantage of Neoptolemus' youth and respect for authority'.

⁹³ Winnington-Ingram 1980:284 notes that Neoptolemus' interaction with the chorus 'brings out at once his youth and his responsibility'. Schein *ad* 135-218 comments on the chorus's respect for and obedience to Neoptolemus.

τέκνον, τόδ' ἐλήλυθεν | πᾶν κράτος ὠγύγιον (141-142).⁹⁴ This image of an authoritative Neoptolemus is reinforced by his interactions with Philoctetes; although Philoctetes too draws attention to Neoptolemus' youth, his reaction to Neoptolemus' parentage suggests that Achilles' son is automatically worthy of respect (242-243). Later, Philoctetes' supplication of Neoptolemus assumes a degree of power on the young man's part (468-506), and Neoptolemus, until shortly before he reveals the plot, seems to accept Philoctetes' respect as his due.⁹⁵ The authority which Neoptolemus assumes in the absence of Odysseus is to some extent part of the deception—in order to play the role which he has been assigned, Neoptolemus must put aside the role which he is accustomed to play in his interactions with Odysseus—but it nonetheless has important ramifications both for his character as it appears to Philoctetes and the audience and for his interactions with Odysseus after the revelation of the plot and the return of the bow.

The revelation of the plot forces Odysseus and Neoptolemus to redefine their roles in relation to each other. By going against the instructions which he was given in the prologue, Neoptolemus has rejected Odysseus' pragmatic approach to achieving fame and therefore implicitly rejected Odysseus himself as a mentor. Odysseus must adjust his behaviour towards Neoptolemus accordingly; when he reappears shortly after the revelation and manages—for a time—to keep Neoptolemus from returning the bow, he speaks differently about his own role than he did in the prologue. Although Odysseus claims, Ζεὺς ἐσθ', ἴν' εἰδῆς, Ζεὺς, ὁ τῆσδε γῆς κρατῶν, | Ζεὺς, ᾧ δέδοκται ταῦθ'· ὑπερετῶ δ' ἐγὼ (989-990), and refers to the overarching goals of the Greek expedition when he says that it is necessary for Philoctetes to come to Troy (997-998), he also leans more heavily on his own authority than he did before. When, after Philoctetes' accusation

⁹⁴ Kitzinger 2008:80.

⁹⁵ Roisman 1997:148-149 sees Philoctetes' pleas to Neoptolemus both as an acknowledgement of Neoptolemus' superior status and as a way of establishing a kind of familial bond in which Neoptolemus, in the role of a son, has an obligation to care for Philoctetes, in the role of an aging father.

that he is responsible for the theft of the bow, he says, ἐγώ, σάφ' ἴσθ', οὐκ ἄλλος· ὁμολογῶ τάδε (980), Odysseus draws attention to the extent to which he has dictated Neoptolemus' actions.⁹⁶ Shortly before he and Neoptolemus leave at the end of the scene, when Odysseus in his commanding role warns Neoptolemus not to look at Philoctetes, γενναῖός περ ὤν, | ἡμῶν ὅπως μὴ τὴν τύχην διαφθερεῖς (1068-1069), his dual reminder that Neoptolemus' fortunes are bound up in those of the army and that the outcome of the Greek plan ought to matter more than Neoptolemus' inherited tendencies calls to mind a version of the power dynamic which was established in the prologue.⁹⁷

In Odysseus' last two appearances, Odysseus and Neoptolemus speak more pointedly about the role which Neoptolemus has forsaken. Neoptolemus, when questioned by Odysseus, says that he erred, σοὶ πιθόμενος τῷ τε σύμπαντι στρατῷ (1226), drawing attention to his subordinate role in the deception. As he tries to convince Neoptolemus not to return the bow, Odysseus too focuses on Neoptolemus' place in the Greek hierarchy, although his emphasis, rather than absolving Neoptolemus of responsibility, serves to remind the young man of his duty to his leaders.⁹⁸ After reminding Neoptolemus that there is a force which will prevent him from going against orders (1241), Odysseus specifically identifies himself as Neoptolemus' superior when he explains that the restraining force is ξύμπας Ἀχαιῶν λαός, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἐγώ (1243); where Odysseus acted at the behest of the other Greek leaders in marooning Philoctetes (6), he now suggests that it is Neoptolemus' turn to do as he is told.⁹⁹ Over the course of the next scene, Odysseus suggests that both morality and pragmatism ought to keep Neoptolemus from abandoning the plan laid in the prologue and the role required by that

⁹⁶ Pucci *ad* 981-983 comments on Odysseus' assertion of his own power.

⁹⁷ Winnington-Ingram 1980:289 draws attention to the way in which Odysseus uses this warning to group himself and Neoptolemus.

⁹⁸ Blundell 1989:212.

⁹⁹ Schein *ad* 1243 suggests that the epic tone of Ἀχαιῶν λαός allows Odysseus to inflate his own status.

plan; he first asks Neoptolemus, καὶ πῶς δίκαιον, ἅ γ' ἔλαβες βουλαῖς ἐμαῖς, | πάλιν μεθεῖναι ταῦτα (1247-1248), and then, when this moral argument carries no weight, asks, στρατὸν δ' Ἀχαιῶν οὐ φοβῆ, πράσσω τὰδε (1250).¹⁰⁰ Immediately after Neoptolemus returns the bow to Philoctetes, Odysseus reappears and restates his threat to restore the hierarchy, saying, ἐγὼ δ' ἀπαυδῶ γ', ὡς θεοὶ ξυνίστορες, | ὑπὲρ τ' Ἀτρειδῶν τοῦ τε σύμπαντος στρατοῦ (1293-1294).

Although Odysseus attempts to treat Neoptolemus as if their roles have not changed materially since the beginning of the play, Neoptolemus' decisions to reveal the plot and return the bow constitute a refusal to play the part which he was assigned in the prologue. His new role is partially apparent while Odysseus is still offstage, but the real ramifications of his change in role only become clear in his interactions with Odysseus in the last scenes of the play. Whereas, in the prologue, the interaction between Odysseus and Neoptolemus was guided by a shared general understanding of their respective roles, even if those roles were never explicitly defined, Neoptolemus' rebellion makes their subsequent interactions unpredictable.¹⁰¹ In the play's final scenes, Neoptolemus still performs the role of Achilles' son; from the revelation of the deception onwards, however, he performs the version of that role which Odysseus advised against in the prologue. By ceasing to act as Odysseus' subordinate, moreover, Neoptolemus has challenged not only his own role, but also that of Odysseus: without Neoptolemus' cooperation, Odysseus is unable to fulfil the role which he set out to fulfil on behalf of the Greek army at Troy.¹⁰²

In both *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, interactions between characters with different social roles serve as a flashpoint for a range of different issues of character. In *Philoctetes*, what might be a clear distinction between Odysseus as a military commander

¹⁰⁰ Blundell 1989:212 comments on Odysseus' joint appeal to morality and fear.

¹⁰¹ Roisman 1997:160-161 comments on Neoptolemus oscillating loyalty to Odysseus and Philoctetes.

¹⁰² Falkner 1998:46-47 draws attention to the authority which Odysseus loses along with his ability to direct Neoptolemus' role performance.

and Neoptolemus as his subordinate is complicated both by Odysseus' refusal to define their respective roles in so many words and by the various pressures to which Neoptolemus is subject as Achilles' son; depending on how Neoptolemus interprets his familial role, he may or may not be capable of fulfilling his role within the Greek army as it is construed by Odysseus.¹⁰³ Once the deception plot has been set in motion, moreover, the distinction between the role which Neoptolemus played in the prologue and the role which he has been asked to assume for the purposes of deceiving Philoctetes blurs, although both his real and his fictive roles suggest that he ought not to be following Odysseus' orders.¹⁰⁴ Odysseus, at least in the prologue, is aware of the complexity of Neoptolemus' situation, and, as he tries to direct Neoptolemus' behaviour, he himself oscillates between different versions of his own role. As he shifts from commanding officer to mentor and back again, Odysseus attempts to construct a relationship with Neoptolemus in which the younger man will feel bound to participate in the deception, even against his judgment.¹⁰⁵

The social distinctions in *Oedipus Tyrannus* between Oedipus and those around him are, for the most part, somewhat clearer than those between Odysseus and Neoptolemus, but they still trigger a range of behaviours on Oedipus' part. Although Oedipus remains king throughout the scene with the old servant—just as Neoptolemus is never anything but the son of Achilles—his encounter with a social inferior at a moment when his status is already under threat causes him to show a side of his kingship that was not visible earlier in the play. A king's rule is measured in large part by the fate of his

¹⁰³ Nussbaum 1976:43-44 notes the conflicting ideas of goodness and nobility to which Neoptolemus is subjected over the course of the play, and which he must use to decide on the appropriate course of action. Schein 2006:137 notes that Philoctetes encourages Neoptolemus to live up to a particular version of Achilles.

¹⁰⁴ On the difficulties of separating Neoptolemus' real and fictive roles, see Calder 1971:158-159, Reinhardt 1979:171-172, Blundell 1989:195, Roberts 1989:170.

¹⁰⁵ Roisman 1997:136-136 suggests that the obligation which Neoptolemus is meant to feel is essentially familial, while Blundell 1989:185 focuses on its public, military aspects.

subjects, and the Oedipus who jumps quickly to the threat of force in his interactions with an old man with a history of loyal service to the royal family seems like a very different king than the king who told his subjects in the prologue that their suffering was his own.¹⁰⁶ In *Philoctetes*, Odysseus' shifts in self-presentation and Neoptolemus' changing reactions to Odysseus' authority raise questions about both about their individual characters and about appropriate leadership in general; in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, similarly, changes in Oedipus' approach to his own rule encourage the audience not only to consider whether or not Oedipus is a good king, but also to consider whether or not such a thing is possible.

CONCLUSION: CREON AND HAEMON REVISITED

In this chapter, I have looked at several different ways in which social roles shape the interactions between Sophoclean characters. Along with being shaped by the different social roles held by various characters, the interactions between characters actually help to define those roles; in *Electra*, for example, the concept of daughterhood is defined in large part by the interactions between Electra and the rest of her family, including Chrysothemis, who provides an alternative view of what it might mean to be a daughter of Agamemnon. The interpretation of roles, moreover, takes place both within and outside of the world of the play, and an audience may very well come to different conclusions about daughterly duty than either Chrysothemis or Electra does. Although characters often have clear ideas about their own roles and the obligations imposed by those roles, many onstage interactions are complicated by the fact that individual characters are playing—or can be interpreted as playing—multiple roles at the same time. When more than one role is at stake in a given interaction, both characters and audience must decide which role ought to take priority.

¹⁰⁶ Easterling 1984a:44.

In the encounter between Haemon and Creon with which I began this chapter, Haemon and Creon are defined by a relatively complex system of social roles, each of which carries with it certain expected beliefs and behaviours. The two men share one important role: they are both members of the ruling family of Thebes, and, as such, they ought to have some of the same interests at heart.¹⁰⁷ Within this basic framework of similarity, however, Creon and Haemon occupy a number of opposing roles. On the familial level, Creon is a father and Haemon is a son, whereas on the political level, Creon is king and Haemon is one of his subjects. None of their various roles are in dispute, but, over the course of their encounter, their argument about Antigone's fate crystallizes into a conflict about broader issues of kingship, filial piety, and which of their various obligations are most important.¹⁰⁸

The political situation in the Thebes of *Antigone* complicates the familial interaction between father and son. Although Creon's right to the throne seems to be generally accepted—Antigone refers to him in her first speech as a στρατηγός (8), but he is elsewhere called βασιλεύς (155) and, more commonly, ἄναξ (223, 278, 388, etc.)—his rule is still new, and much of what he says throughout the play is concerned with his understanding of the rights and obligations conferred upon him by his new political role.¹⁰⁹ For the members of Oedipus' family, perhaps even more than for the members of other ruling families, the political is also personal; Creon rose to power in Thebes after the death of his sister's sons, and his edict against the burial of Polyneices is broken not by an ordinary member of the citizen body, but by his own niece, who is also betrothed to his

¹⁰⁷ Haemon's opening comment, πάτερ, σός εἰμι (635), highlights the shared perspective which ought to come from their familial relationship. On the implications of this comment, see Blundell 1989:121-122 and Lardinois 2012:65, both of whom see it as a straightforward statement of loyalty, and also Griffith *ad* 635-638, who points out that Haemon's statement leaves room for interpretation.

¹⁰⁸ Griffith 1998:65.

¹⁰⁹ Knox 1964:84 describes Creon's opening speech as 'a sort of inaugural address'. Podlecki 1966a:360-363 discusses the gradual revelation of Creon's ideas about political power. Carter 2012:122 suggests that Antigone, inasmuch as she never refers to Creon as a king, questions his right to rule, but the other figures in the play seem to accept his position.

son.¹¹⁰ Although when Haemon says, *πάτερ, σός εἰμι* (635), he suggests that his first loyalty must be with his father, his personal role as Creon's son is also a political role as the king's son. It is in his public capacity as king's son that he begins to criticize his father's decision to punish Antigone, explaining that he is aware, as Creon cannot be, of the public support for Antigone's actions (690-695).

As their argument circles around the specific aspects of Antigone's case, it becomes apparent that Creon and Haemon hold different ideas about the importance of roles in structuring society. Creon's ideas about his several roles are, for the most part, strictly hierarchical, while Haemon argues for a degree of flexibility in the fulfilment of any role.¹¹¹ When Creon, for example, tries to argue that, as king, his opinion can overrule that of the city, Haemon responds, *πόλις γὰρ οὐκ ἔσθ' ἤτις ἀνδρός ἔσθ' ἐνός* (737), and goes on to suggest that Creon's idea of rule would work best in an empty city (739).¹¹² On a more personal level, although Haemon agrees in principle with Creon's idea that good children are those who defend their fathers' interests (643-644), he also suggests that Creon may not be fully aware of what is best for him (701-709). Although Haemon admits that the social roles which he and his father perform provide some initial guidance for how they ought to behave towards each other, he argues that the interactions between father and son and ruler and subject ought to be much more flexible than Creon is willing to admit.¹¹³ Creon is right to expect help from his son and his subjects, but Haemon suggests that such help may take an unexpected shape.

As the conflict between Creon and Haemon plays out onstage, it calls to mind other similar conflicts, both real and dramatic. An audience confronted with the angry

¹¹⁰ Blundell 1989:119-120 discusses Creon's repudiation of his blood-tie to Antigone as the natural conclusion to his insistence upon loyalty to the good of the city in his opening speech.

¹¹¹ Griffith 1998:67.

¹¹² Goldhill 2012:60 sees Haemon as appropriating and adapting his father's political language.

¹¹³ Blundell 1989:121 comments on Creon's 'failure to grasp the reciprocal nature of authentic *philia*' as a point of contrast with Haemon.

Creon sees not only Creon, but also a whole range of fathers and kings. Although Creon grows increasingly harsh and autocratic as the scene continues, Creon and Haemon both rely on ideas about authority and loyalty which are likely to resonate with the experiences of the audience.¹¹⁴ Neither Creon's position nor Haemon's is obviously correct on all counts, and the complexity of their particular interaction calls up more general questions of what it means to rule a city or what it means to be a good son.¹¹⁵ When Creon speaks about the good fortune of the unspecified man who has good children (641-644), the audience is encouraged to think not only about possible models for that fortunate man, but also about possible opposites—fathers whose children, one way or another, do not live up to their parents' expectations. Although nothing is said in this scene about Oedipus, it is entirely possible, given the Theban context of the play, that the audience will be inclined to think both about the father and son who preceded Creon on the throne and about the disastrous consequences of their conflict.

¹¹⁴ Griffith 2005:342.

¹¹⁵ Haemon is generally considered to have the stronger case throughout the scene (see, e.g., Blundell 1989:120-123, Griffith *ad* 726-765), but Goldhill 2012:62 is right to note that Haemon's moral high-ground is damaged by his increasing reliance on threats and insults as the scene continues.

CHAPTER 3 – INTERACTING WITH MEMORY: REMEMBERING THE SELF

When Deianeira, at the very beginning of *Trachiniae*, sets out to disprove the ancient proverb which states that one cannot judge a mortal life before it has come to a close, she looks to her own experiences in order to do so.¹ After claiming that she knows her own life to be unfortunate, she begins her explanation with a memory from her youth, saying, ‘While still living in the house of my father Oeneus in Pleuron I had a terrible fear of marriage, if ever any Aetolian woman did’ (6-8). From her current position as a mature woman and the wife of Heracles, she remembers not only her girlhood in Pleuron, but also her courtship by Achelous and Heracles and her subsequent life as a married woman. What Deianeira remembers and how she remembers it provide the audience with their first view of Deianeira’s character; along with allowing her to identify herself as the daughter of Oeneus and the wife of Heracles, Deianeira’s account provides some insight into her usual behaviour and patterns of mind.

As Deianeira remembers the past, she looks back not only on past events, but also on herself as she once was; although both Achelous and Heracles play important roles in her story, what Deianeira remembers is not so much their courtship of her, but her own emotional reactions to that courtship. The past which Deianeira remembers interacts with the present in complex ways; the grown woman who looks back on her youth is no longer the girl who once feared the courtship of Achelous, but she retains the ability to see the world through the eyes of her past self.² At the same time, it becomes apparent over the course of her first speech that Deianeira’s emotional view of the past is shaped by her current circumstances. Her past, as she remembers it, is marked by a continuous series of

¹ Deianeira’s particular interaction with this proverb, and with gnomic statements in general, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5 below.

² Kraus 1991:81 comments on the essential continuity of Deianeira’s experience.

fears which have continued up to the present day.³ This series of anxieties is the story of Deianeira's life, and, as she looks back on her past, her remembered emotions become part of her present identity.

Deianeira is not the only Sophoclean character to be shaped by her memories, nor is she the only character to remember the past through the filter of more recent experience. In every play, characters assemble their memories of themselves and their past interactions with others into personal narratives, and characters draw upon these narratives in order to make sense of current situations. In this chapter, therefore, I will be examining the various ways in which characters' memories of the past influence present constructions of identity. I will begin by looking at a few contemporary theories about the workings of memory and their possible application to Sophoclean tragedy, and I will go on to explore the importance of the construction and presentation of memory in the delineation of character in Sophocles.

INTERACTIONAL MEMORY

As it is understood today, memory consists of a variety of interactional processes. Individual memories rarely exist in a vacuum; the communication of memory to others is a crucial step in the processing of remembered events, and memories are therefore tied to the interaction between the rememberer and her audience.⁴ More generally, memory is a social phenomenon as well as an individual one; although individuals form their own memories from personal experience, they also partake in the collective memory of various groups. Just as groups are often defined in large part by collective memory or the sense of a shared past, membership in such a group can be an important facet of individual

³ Winnington-Ingram 1980:75; March 1987:66; Conacher 1997:23; Levett 2004:48.

⁴ Kirk 2005:3.

identity.⁵ Individual memories can highlight both similarities and differences between personal and collective experience and, in doing so, can allow people to define their own relationship to their social context.⁶ Collective memory provides a framework within which individuals can process their own experiences, but, since individual experience is subjectively perceived and remembered, personal memories can also impose a degree of separation between the individual and the group.

Although metaphors for memory often describe memories as permanent records of past events—the standard ancient metaphor of the wax tablet has, over time, been replaced by the photograph, the tape recorder, and the videotape—various studies have indicated that, however vividly they may be perceived, memories are not fixed.⁷ Instead of remaining unchanged over time, memories are constantly reconstructed through the processes of recollection and retelling. Every time we remember something, our new recollection, which can be influenced by more recently acquired knowledge, takes the place of the original memory.⁸ Memories that are revisited frequently change relatively slowly, although they are nonetheless gradually adjusted over time. If memories are not revisited and retold, however, they tend to fade, and accounts of an event which has not been recalled recently, since they require substantial reconstruction, tend to bear a weaker resemblance to the original event.⁹ As we form and reform memories of the past, we thus often adjust our memories in order to take into account our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.¹⁰ Throughout this process, the evolving memory can remain

⁵ Kirk 2004:4.

⁶ Favorini 2008:2 on the individual and social elements of memory.

⁷ Neisser 2009:80 on standard metaphors for memory.

⁸ Casey 2000:271-272; Foster 2009:14 comments on the importance of reconstruction in the process of retrieving a memory.

⁹ Neisser 2009:87-88.

¹⁰ Searleman and Herrmann 1994:250.

perfectly distinct; we recall each successively rewritten memory with confidence, unaware that our memory has changed.¹¹

Some of the flexibility of memory can be attributed to the connection between memory and emotion. Although the precise role of emotion in the production and subsequent retrieval of memory remains uncertain, it is generally agreed that memories are often highly emotionally charged. According to one model of the relationship between memory and emotion, stored memories remain tied to the emotional state in which they were formed, and can best be recalled when the rememberer is once again in a similar emotional state. The evidence for this kind of dependency, however, remains somewhat equivocal. Importantly, a much higher correlation has been shown when memories are themselves happy or sad than when memories have no emotional charge; neutral events that took place when a person was sad are not noticeably easier for that person to recall under sad conditions than under happy ones.¹² In light of this difficulty, memory researchers have moved towards a theory of mood congruence, which suggests that people are generally much more likely to recall memories that match their current emotional state.¹³ In Sophoclean terms, the unhappy Deianeira who spends her days waiting and worrying about her husband's safety is, when she looks back on her past, more likely to focus on unhappy events, suppressing any happy memories she may have of her early life.

Mood congruence, which is primarily a factor in the retrieval of memories, manifests itself in several ways. In its most basic form, it causes people to remember selectively according to their mood; when asked to recall incidents from their past, people who are depressed are likely both to remember sad incidents and to have difficulty calling to mind happy memories. Current emotional states, however, affect not only which events

¹¹ Casey 2000:20-21 comments on the general tendency not to think about the particular workings of memory; see also Neisser 2009:82.

¹² Baddeley 1990:392; Singer and Salovey 1993:136-137.

¹³ Baddeley 1990:391; Hertel 2004:193.

people remember, but also how they remember certain events.¹⁴ When neutral events—events which either had no particular emotional charge at the time or have both positive and negative elements—are remembered, they tend to be remembered with an emotional charge that matches the rememberer’s current mood. Depending on the emotional state in which it is remembered, the same event can be perceived as variously happy or sad.¹⁵ When this aspect of mood congruence is combined with the fact that memories get rewritten as they are recalled and retold, it becomes apparent that the emotional charge of a given memory can evolve over time. If a relatively neutral event is repeatedly recalled under unhappy present circumstances, the memory of that once neutral event will gradually come to be aligned with those unhappy circumstances, and the original event will come to be seen as an unhappy event. Thus in the case of Deianeira, her memory of the arrival of Heracles as a rival to Achelous—in itself a relatively happy event—is coloured by her current emotional state such that it becomes an ominous precursor to further troubles.

The aspects of memory discussed above—its subjective nature, its flexibility over time, and its close connection to emotion—all depend on interactions between rememberers and aspects of their past and present context. These interactions combine to play an important role in people’s ability to develop coherent personal narratives. Studies of subjects being interviewed about their personal history have demonstrated that people tend to organize their memories of past events in such a way as to give their own lives a unified narrative structure.¹⁶ In recounting a past event, a speaker will typically try to describe the event as it appeared to her when it first took place. This remembered perception of the event, however, interacts with subsequent changes in perspective, and

¹⁴ Singer and Salovey 1993:122.

¹⁵ Baddeley 1990:391.

¹⁶ McKechnie and Körner 2009:67-68. Kraus 1991:76 comments, ‘Telling a story is one way of making a judgment about the meaning of experience.’

narrators often qualify their remembered perceptions, commenting on the things which they came to understand only after the event had already happened.¹⁷ This kind of self-reflexive memory is important to the construction of identity in personal narratives; speakers define themselves not only in terms of what they have experienced, but also in terms of their ability to make sense of their experiences after the fact.¹⁸ Such an ability—or inability, as the case may be—to reflect on their own memories becomes particularly important for the many Sophoclean characters—among them Deianeira, Philoctetes, and Electra—whose perception of the past is dominated by the memory of a few key events to which they return repeatedly in thinking about their present circumstances.

In drama, the interactional nature of memory becomes even more complex. On the one hand, there is a similarity between drama and memory in that plays, which are acted out over a period of time, can function like memory in their ability to produce a structured representation of a sequence of events.¹⁹ When memory is represented onstage, moreover, it interacts with the generic status of drama; performing a play requires an act of memory on the part of the actors, and, as Sullivan notes, ‘for playwrights to emphasize memory and forgetting is for them to reflect upon the conditions of dramatic representation’.²⁰ While these metatheatrical connections between drama and memory lead to interactions between the action represented onstage and the generic expectations of the audience, the performance of memory also allows both characters and audience to interact with events which take place outside the timeframe of the play itself, and it is this aspect of dramatic memory on which I will primarily focus. Narratives of remembered events give the audience access to parts of the story which are not played out on stage, but this access is selective, filtered as it is through the perspectives of characters and chorus. As they

¹⁷ King 2000:1-2.

¹⁸ King 2000:2.

¹⁹ Favorini 2008:2.

²⁰ Sullivan 2005:5. Favorini 2008:2-3 likewise comments on the connection between theatre and memory.

process not only the events that take place over the course of the play but also those which have already taken place as of the beginning of the play, characters can often be seen to be grappling with their own memories.

As memory has grown increasingly important to theories of psychology, dramatic criticism has grown proportionally concerned with the presentation of the memory on stage. In particular, much has been written about the importance of memory in early modern drama; many of Shakespeare's plays are full of admonitions to remember and accounts of the remembered past. Characters in Shakespeare are acknowledged both to have particular ways of viewing the past and to have an interest in shaping the memories of others. Along with illustrating the thought processes of individual characters, the act of remembrance in early modern drama is seen to have a social element; characters interact with the world around them through the things they remember and forget.²¹ Studies of memory in early modern drama have acknowledged the complex interactions triggered by the performance of memory onstage, but considerably less attention has been paid to the importance of memory in Greek tragedy. Although several studies have identified links between myth and social memory in tragedy, moreover, little has been said about the complex role of memory in the construction of individual character.²²

SOPHOCLEAN MEMORY AND GREEK THOUGHT

Memory figures prominently in various aspects of Greek thought, particularly those related to the production of poetry and to history. Hesiod, for example, identifies the

²¹ On memory in early modern drama, see, e.g., Sullivan 2005, Tribble 2009 on *The Tempest*, Favorini 2009:24 on Hamlet as a memory play, and Wilder 2010 on the metatheatrical elements of memory in Shakespeare.

²² Gould 1999 discusses the general importance of the tragic chorus as a repository of shared memories, and Christophorou's 2009 DPhil thesis examines the connection between Euripidean tragedy and Athenian collective memory, while Grethlein 2010 looks at collective memory in Aeschylus' *Persians*. Although Hutchinson 1999 notes the tendencies of individual characters to look forward and backward in time, he does not specifically speak about memory.

Muses as the daughters of Memory (*Th.* 53-55), while Herodotus, having announced in his first sentence that he has embarked upon the writing of the *Histories* lest the great deeds of the Greeks and the barbarians should become ἀκλέα, often refers to elements of his own task in terms of the creation of μνήμη.²³ Simonides' lasting fame as the inventor of mnemonics and Plato's claim that all knowledge is a form of recollection offer further proof of the importance attached to memory in ancient Greece.²⁴ The concept of memory implied by these examples, however, differs somewhat from that of memory as it is discussed today. In contemporary thought, the word memory covers a variety of cognitive processes that can range from the deeply subjective to the purely objective; we can remember objectively that a certain event took place, but we can also, subjectively, remember that event as having had a certain effect or emotional charge.²⁵ Everything from the personal experience of a life-changing event to a list of tasks to the date of a distant historical incident can be discussed in terms of memory. At least in earlier periods, however, the Greek words for memory and remembering refer most commonly to the objective end of the range of current meanings for memory; μνήμη, like κλέος, exists regardless of human perception.

When memory is discussed in the context of Greek poetry or rhetoric, it is most often important insofar as it facilitates the correct retrieval and ordering of information. When a poet invokes the Muses, the daughters of a deified Memory, he calls upon them not so much to provide him with artistic inspiration as to give him access to authoritative information about his subject.²⁶ In many cases, the Muses are called upon to remember

²³ Herodotus refers to the creation of μνήμη at 1.15, 1.184, 1.193, 2.102, 4.16, 5.74, 6.20, and 6.55. His initial statement about ensuring κλέος picks up on Homeric ideas about the κλέα ἀνδρῶν as a subject of song (see, e.g., *Il.* 9.189).

²⁴ On memory in the ancient world, see Yates 1966, Shrimpton and Gillis 1997, Small 1997, Mackey (ed.) 2007, and Grethlein 2010. Plato discusses recollection most famously in the *Meno*; the Simonides story is told in Cicero, *de orat.* 2.86.351-353.

²⁵ Casey 2000: ch. 3.

²⁶ Jensen 1980:80; Thomas 1992:115.

the subject of a poem or to help the poet remind his audience about the subject; as preservers of memory, the Muses ensure that subject's fame will not die out.²⁷ Thus the poet of the *Iliad* famously reinvokes the Muse at the beginning of the catalogue of ships, saying that he would never be able to name all the leaders of the Greek expedition, εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο | θυγατέρες μνησαίαθ' ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθον (*Il.* 2.491-492). In *Nemean* 1, the Pindaric speaker claims that the Muse loves to remember great contests (*Nem.* 1. 11-12), while in *Olympian* 6, after describing Aeneas as ἄγγελος ὀρθός, | ἠῦκόμων σκυτάλα Μοισᾶν, he orders the chorus leader to remind his audience of Syracuse and Ortygia (*Ol.* 6.90-92). Poetic memory is suggested to be for the most part a matter of objective truth, and the support of the Muses renders individual interpretation unnecessary.

Memory, in the guise of the officials called *mnemones* who were attached to courts, also played a role in Greek legal practice. There is some debate about what these official rememberers were meant to remember, and their duties seem to have changed over time; Aristotle mentions *mnemones* as officials responsible for maintaining a record of legal transactions (*Politics* 1321b34-40), while the *mnemones* in Hellenistic inscriptions appear simply to be scribes.²⁸ Earlier *mnemones*, however, seem to have been responsible for remembering—although not necessarily writing down—various aspects of legal cases. Thomas argues that the *mnemones* were meant to remember the details of past court proceedings, while Carawan suggests that, as witnesses, the *mnemones* were responsible for identifying the people and properties involved in past disputes.²⁹ Whatever it was that they remembered, the *mnemones* were granted considerable authority; a fifth-century decree from Halicarnassus, known as 'The Lygdamis Decree', states, 'whatever the

²⁷ Detienne 1996:48.

²⁸ Thomas 1995:67.

²⁹ Thomas 1995:67-68; Carawan 2007:172-173.

mnemones know shall prevail' (20-21).³⁰ The authority of the *mnemones*, it seems, rested in their status as accurate rememberers tasked with providing impartial testimony about the matters at hand.³¹

The conception of both Muses and *mnemones* as purveyors of accurate remembered information suggests an ancient Greek tendency to associate memory words with the more objective and strictly factual aspects of memory. To a certain degree, the tragedies of Sophocles reflect this general tendency; when the old servant of Laius in *Oedipus Tyrannus* says that he does not recognize the Corinthian messenger, οὐχ ὥστε γ' εἰπεῖν ἐν τάχει μνήμης ὕπο (1131), he seems to speak of his memory as an essentially independent force which might be able to supply him with information.³² At the same time, even when characters suggest that their memories are a matter of objective fact, the things which they claim to remember are filtered through personal biases. When, near the end of *Ajax*, Agamemnon urges Odysseus, μέμνησ' ὁποῖω φωτὶ τὴν χάριν δίδωσ (1354), he suggests that the facts of the case will speak against Ajax. When Odysseus replies, ὄδ' ἐχθρὸς ἀνὴρ, ἀλλὰ γενναῖός ποτ' ἦν (1355), he too speaks of Ajax's character as a matter of objective truth; unlike Agamemnon, however, Odysseus takes into account not only his own undeniably hostile prior relations with Ajax, which, while they made Ajax ἐχθρὸς, were also a matter of personal perception, but also the equally undeniable fact that Ajax was, for all his faults, γενναῖος.³³ In Odysseus' memory of Ajax, the personal animosity which he once felt towards the dead hero interacts with his awareness of Ajax's nobility and his own sense that, now that Ajax has fallen, hatred is no longer appropriate (1347).

³⁰ The Lygdamis Decree is published as Meiggs and Lewis no. 32 and discussed at Meiggs and Lewis 1969:71-72, where the *mnemones* are said to be connected to property disputes. The translation of lines 20-21 is taken from Carawan 2007:163-164.

³¹ Carawan 2007:173.

³² Jebb *ad* 1131 comments on ὕπο as indicating the prompting force of the old servant's memory.

³³ Finglass *ad* 1355.

Words for memory and forgetting occur thirty-three times in Sophocles, but these direct references comprise only a relatively small portion of the remembering that is done by Sophoclean characters; whenever a character speaks about her own past experiences, she is necessarily engaged in an act of recollection. These recollections are rarely limited to the objective recall of information; instead, when characters in Sophocles speak about the past, their memories trigger a complex network of interactions. On the one hand, memories of the past interact with characters' current knowledge of themselves and their situations insofar as what characters say about their past experiences often depends on subsequent changes in perspective. As they speak about past experiences in order to make sense of present circumstances, moreover, characters construct their own versions of the past, and these subjectively remembered pasts often highlight important differences in perspective between individuals. In remembering the past, characters not only situate themselves within a broader mythological storyline, but also establish themselves as individuals with identifiable ways of interacting with the world.

Although the remembered past plays an important role throughout much of Sophocles, different characters in Sophocles interact with their memories in different ways. In the sections that follow, I will examine the importance of memory for four Sophoclean characters, all of whom display a tendency to live in their own versions of the past. After looking at the various ways in which Deianeira, Philoctetes, the elderly Oedipus, and Electra interact with and are shaped by their memories, I will return to the general concept of interactional memory outlined above in order to discuss the importance of memory in the shaping of Sophoclean characters as figures who interact not only with each other but also with their own ideas about the world.

DEIANEIRA REMEMBERS

From the very beginning of *Trachiniae*, Deianeira's memories play an important role in the construction of her character. Deianeira is the play's first speaker, and, as she begins to describe her current situation, she turns immediately to her memory of the events which preceded her exile in Trachis as Heracles' wife. By the time the play begins, the most important interactions in Deianeira's life are all a matter of memory, and her memories of Achelous and Heracles and Nessus populate the first half of the play.³⁴ All of the characters in Deianeira's memory, however, are defined in terms of their effects on Deianeira herself. As Deianeira looks back on herself as she once was, her remembered self interacts with characters and events in the past as well as with the world as she sees it now. Deianeira continues to reflect upon the past throughout the play, but her reliance on the past shifts with her current circumstances; as her memories change, so too does the version of herself which Deianeira presents to the audience and those around her.

Throughout her prologue speech, Deianeira focuses as much on her emotional state at successive stages in her history as she does on the actual events of her past. After citing the ancient proverb according to which it is impossible to judge mortal life before it is over, Deianeira immediately claims that she knows her own life to be marked by misfortune. In the lines that follow, it becomes clear that Deianeira measures good and bad fortune largely in emotional terms, and that fear is her dominant emotion.³⁵ Her first example of her misfortune is the *νυμφείων ὄτλον | ἄλγιστον* which she felt while still living in her father's house (7-8), and, after describing Achelous, the specific cause of her fear, she comments, *δύστηνος ἀεὶ κατθανεῖν ἐπηυχόμεν, | πρὶν τῆσδε κοίτης ἐμπελασθῆναί ποτε* (16-17). When her story reaches the arrival of Heracles, Deianeira

³⁴ On Deianeira's status as a woman past her prime, which becomes increasingly important over the course of the play, see Winnington-Ingram 1980:80, 86 and Segal 1981:74.

³⁵ For the importance of fear to Deianeira's worldview, see Winnington-Ingram 1980:75; Easterling *ad* 6-35; March 1987:66; Conacher 1997:23; Levett 2004:48.

first lists her own reaction and then goes on to explain the reason for her gladness (18-19). Her gladness, however, is swiftly replaced by more anxiety, and, rather than offering an account of the fight between her suitors, she describes her own emotional state as she sat and waited for news, struck with fear lest her beauty should be a source of misfortune (24-25).³⁶

Deianeira introduces the story of her past as a way to support her present belief in the misery of her own life, and the past experiences which she narrates therefore lead seamlessly into her present existence.³⁷ Although her marriage to Heracles relieved her immediate fear of having to marry Achelous, it marked the beginning of a new series of repetitive and undifferentiated fears, and these fears are her main impression of what it means to be married to Heracles.³⁸ As she describes her married life, she returns several times to the serial nature of her troubles; after saying, ἀεί τιν' ἐκ φόβου φόβον τρέφω, | κείνου προκηραίνουσα (28-29), she immediately goes on to add, νύξ γὰρ εἰσάγει | καὶ νύξ ἀπωθεῖ διαδεγμένη πόνον (29-30). Deianeira switches for the most part into the present tense after telling about the conclusion of the fight, but, except for her passing reference to her children, she describes no changes brought about by her marriage. As she awaits Heracles' return from his most recent labour, Deianeira is still subject to the same sort of paralytic fear with which she responded to the fight between her suitors.³⁹

The interaction between Deianeira's current and remembered emotions goes both ways; even as she describes her present as continuous with her past, Deianeira also views her past experiences through the filter of her current anxieties, and the difficulties which she has faced since her marriage cast a shadow on her account of her early life. When she qualifies her statement that Zeus brought the fight between Achelous and Heracles to a

³⁶ Kraus 1991:79-81 sees Deianeira as drawing attention to her own distance from the events of her life.

³⁷ Kraus 1991:79; Carawan 2000:191 claims that Deianeira 'uses her narratives of the past to dispose of puzzling events at hand'.

³⁸ Conacher 1997:23; Hutchinson 1999:48-49 discusses the imperfective nature of Deianeira's fears.

³⁹ Lawrence 1978:290; Heiden 1989:28.

good conclusion with εἰ δὴ καλῶς (27), she contrasts her current doubt with the joy that she felt when Heracles first arrived. Although Heracles' arrival initially seemed like the solution to Deianeira's fears, now, with the benefit of hindsight, Deianeira questions whether or not she really gained anything when she was saved from marriage to Achelous.⁴⁰ Had Deianeira's story ended with the defeat of Achelous, her initial terror would have supported the proverb with which her speech began—Deianeira's eventual release from her fears, that is, would have gone to show that fear of Achelous was not reason enough to consider her whole life miserable. Once Deianeira explains what she has suffered since her marriage to Heracles, however, the fear which she once felt, as the first in a lifelong series of misfortunes, does indeed support her claim that the proverb can be disproved.

Although Achelous and Heracles figure prominently in Deianeira's prologue speech, she seems to have little to do with them—she hopes to avoid marriage to Achelous, watches the fight from afar, and now sees Heracles only rarely. When she describes her most recent parting from Heracles, however, it becomes clear that Deianeira's remembered interactions with others are filtered through her current perceptions. Although Deianeira prefaces her account with a description of the emotional state which she claims to share with every married woman, πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἢ τέκνων φοβουμένη (150), Deianeira's memories of Heracles' departure seem to focus primarily on Heracles' behaviour at the time and on what that behaviour suggested about his perception of the situation. As he departed, Heracles left Deianeira with a tablet, the contents of which, she says, he had never before brought himself (ἔτλη, 158) to explain. Deianeira speaks about Heracles' decision to abandon his previous reticence about the tablet in terms of a change in his mental state; when he departed for previous labours, she

⁴⁰ Kraus 1991:81.

says, ὥς τι δράσων εἶρπε κού θανούμενος (160).⁴¹ This apparent change in attitude is related to the prophecy contained on the tablet; knowing that after fifteen months he is fated either to die or τοῦθ' ὑπεκδραμόντα τοῦ χρόνου τέλος | τὸ λοιπὸν ἤδη ζῆν ἀλυπήτω βίω (167-168), Heracles this last time told Deianeira what to do in the event of his death.⁴²

Even as Deianeira appears to offer some insight into his thoughts, however, the remembered Heracles interacts with Deianeira's present fears. When she compares Heracles' latest departure, ὥς ἔτ' οὐκ ὤν (161), with his earlier departures, she describes Heracles not as he might describe himself, but as he appeared to her at the time or, even more likely, as he now appears to her in hindsight. Now that the time specified by Heracles has elapsed without any news, the possibility of his return is looking increasingly slim, and it is from this perspective that Deianeira recalls his parting advice.⁴³ When Heracles left, he listed his death after fifteen months as only one possibility; from Deianeira's current perspective, however, his instructions about the division of his property seem like the actions of a man who really is as good as dead. Just as Deianeira claimed in the prologue to be already certain of her own misery, Heracles, in her memories, is doomed even before the end of his life. When Deianeira returns to her present fears at the end of her speech, she returns to a present that is active in her memories of the past.

Although Deianeira reassures Lichas by telling him that Heracles has loved other women before (459-460), the introduction of Iole into her home seems to be a unique event in Deianeira's experience of marriage.⁴⁴ Throughout the prologue and the beginning of the first episode, Deianeira has looked back on a continuous past which both shapes and

⁴¹ Easterling *ad* 158.

⁴² Bowman 1999:341.

⁴³ Kraus 1991:83 suggests that Deianeira's recollection of Heracles' parting words is triggered by the information about his current whereabouts which she has recently received from Hyllus.

⁴⁴ Carawan 2000:203-204.

is shaped by her perception of her present circumstances. Now, as it becomes clear that Heracles' latest infatuation is about to destroy the usual patterns of her life, Deianeira's interaction with her remembered past changes accordingly, and she begins to speak about a single event which has no parallel elsewhere in her experience. She twice describes receiving the charm from the dying Nessus, first telling the story as she explains her plan to send the robe to Heracles and then revisiting the incident after seeing the effect of the poison on the tuft of wool.⁴⁵ As her understanding of her present circumstances changes, Deianeira focuses on different aspects of the past encounter, offering contrasting perspectives on both the centaur's motivation and her own involvement. Although the event itself remains vividly present to her mind, what she remembers about it changes along with the needs of the moment, and two slightly different Deianeiras emerge from her changing memories.

Deianeira begins her first story of the encounter with Nessus by announcing her intention to tell the chorus about the means of release which she has at hand (553-554). Coming at the end of an account of her growing distress, this introductory claim is surprisingly confident, and much of the rest of Deianeira's account is similarly definite.⁴⁶ As she begins her story, she narrows in on the precise moment of her encounter with Nessus; having first described the charm as a *παλαιὸν δῶρον* (555), she then explains that she received it *παῖς ἔτ' οὔσα* (557), when she first left her father's house as the wife of Heracles (562-563).⁴⁷ However unwillingly, Deianeira figures differently in the story of her encounter with Nessus than she has in her previous narratives; although she remains passive insofar as she must be rescued by Heracles, heeding the centaur's instructions and collecting the poison requires a kind of decisive action which she has not demonstrated

⁴⁵ Bowman 1999:342 notes the piecemeal delivery of the story of Nessus, but does not comment on the differences between Deianeira's two accounts.

⁴⁶ Kraus 1991:88-89 comments on Deianeira's emphasis on the finality of various aspects of this story.

⁴⁷ The emphatic location of the encounter with Nessus in Deianeira's distant past is noted by Easterling *ad* 555-8, Kraus 1991:88, Bowman 1999:345.

previously.⁴⁸ Even though Deianeira says little at this point about Nessus' instructions, the fact of their existence implies, as nothing else in the play has previously implied, that she is in a position to influence her own fate. When Deianeira tells the chorus,

τοῦτ' ἐννοήσασ', ὦ φίλοι, δόμοις γὰρ ἦν
κείνου θανόντος ἐγκεκλημένον καλῶς,
χιτῶνα τόνδ' ἔβαψα, προσβαλοῦσ' ὅσα
ζῶν κείνος εἶπε (578-581),

she looks back on a past in which she was not entirely helpless, and the memory of this past allows her to move forward with her new plan.

When she returns to the same incident in the following episode, Deianeira's perspective has changed. Her new account of receiving the charm is interwoven with her description of an event from the much more recent past—the effect of the poison on the tuft of wool—and what Deianeira has just seen shapes what she now says about her encounter with the centaur. Even as she grows increasingly certain of what she has done, Deianeira's latest version of the encounter with Nessus emphasizes her passivity. After promising the chorus that she will expand upon her initial story of the disintegration of the wool, ὡς δ' εἰδῆς ἅπαν (678), she spends much of the next fifteen lines explaining how closely she followed the centaur's instructions for the use of the charm.⁴⁹ She follows her claim to have retained the instructions as faithfully as if they were inscribed on bronze with the summary, καί μοι τάδ' ἦν πρόρρητα καὶ τοιαῦτ' ἔδρων (684),⁵⁰ and she concludes her report of the instructions (685-687) with another statement of how carefully she has followed the centaur's orders, κἄδρων τοιαῦτα (688). Along with suggesting that she is not entirely responsible for the outcome of her actions, Deianeira's insistence

⁴⁸ Hall 2009:85 comments on Deianeira's general inability to take autonomous action.

⁴⁹ Bowman 1999:343-344 suggests that Deianeira endows Nessus' instructions with a kind of oracular authority.

⁵⁰ I follow Jebb and Easterling in keeping this line, against Lloyd-Jones and Wilson, who think that it 'interrupt[s] the flow of the narrative' (1990:165), on the grounds that the line's emphasis on Deianeira's dependence on and obedience to her instructions fits well with her narrative strategy elsewhere in the play.

on the care with which she preserved and followed the centaur's instructions establishes a sense of continuity between her current situation and her long-ago encounter with Nessus.

After her extended description of the disintegration of the wool, Deianeira returns to the subject of Nessus, this time in a more reflective mode.⁵¹ Having earlier recounted the instructions given by the centaur, πονῶν | πλευρὰν πικρᾶ γλωχῖνι (680-681), and her own obedience to those instructions, Deianeira now finally pauses to wonder why the dying centaur should have wished to do her a favour (707-708). When Deianeira first mentioned her encounter with Nessus, she supported her story with a verbatim account of some of his dying words (569-577).⁵² As she returns to her memory of the incident, however, Deianeira no longer takes those words at face value, and, instead of recounting what the centaur said, she speculates about what he must have been thinking when he said it. Revising her earlier interpretation of the incident, Deianeira comments, οὐκ ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ τὸν βαλόντ' ἀποφθίσει | χρῆζων ἔθειλέ μ' (709-710). Now that she knows that what she thought was a love-charm is in fact a poison, Deianeira must revise her memory of the moment when she received the blood of the dying centaur.⁵³ Her revised memory forces her to think differently about her present actions; although the encounter with Nessus is long past, it is the Deianeira of the present—the Deianeira who has spent years fearing for Heracles' safety—who has been fatally deceived by the centaur's words.

Deianeira's rethinking of her encounter with Nessus fills her last extended speech; after finishing her account, she speaks only nine more lines before finally leaving the stage. In her last words to the chorus, Deianeira rejects their attempts to comfort her, saying, τοιαῦτά τ' ἄν λέξειεν οὐχ ὁ τοῦ κακοῦ | κοινωνός, ἀλλ' ᾧ μηδὲν ἔστ' οἴκοι βαρύ (729-730). As she cuts herself off from the chorus, Deianeira also sums up her own

⁵¹ *contra* Heiden 2012:133-134, who argues that Deianeira jumps from one certainty to another without questioning her own beliefs.

⁵² Lawrence 1978:297; Kraus 1991:88.

⁵³ Kraus 1991:90.

past experience, echoing her initial assessment of her life as *δυστυχῆ τε καὶ βαρύν* (5). In between these two assessments of her life, much of what Deianeira has said has been concerned with the past. Even as she relies on past experiences in order to explain her present anxieties, she remembers a past which matches her current circumstances. It is through interacting with what she once did and who she once was that Deianeira can best express who she is now and what may happen to her in the future.

PHILOCTETES REMEMBERS

At the beginning of their respective plays, both Deianeira and Philoctetes have lived for some time in states of largely undifferentiated unhappiness, and, in their memories, they both focus on the monotony of their existence and the continuity of their emotional states. At the same time, Philoctetes' memory is importantly different from Deianeira's, and the differences between their memories result not only in different stories of suffering, but also in different ways of drawing on memory under trying present circumstances. While Deianeira's misfortune pervades all of her remembered past, Philoctetes' misery has a definite starting point; since the vast majority of his misery over the past ten years has been a result of his abandonment on Lemnos, Philoctetes returns over and over again to the moment of his abandonment in his reflections on his own unhappiness.⁵⁴ Depending on the circumstances under which Philoctetes remembers it, however, his abandonment figures differently in the overall trajectory of his life as he expresses it to others.

Unlike Deianeira's prologue speech, Philoctetes' first account of his past has a stated addressee; although the Nurse is probably onstage throughout Deianeira's first

⁵⁴ Schein 2013:27-28 notes that the recollection of his treatment at the hands of the Greeks is, along with his disease, one of the key realities of Philoctetes' existence, and that these realities are equally painful.

speech, Deianeira never acknowledges her presence.⁵⁵ Philoctetes, on the other hand, begins to speak about his past in response to specific cues from Neoptolemus, and the story of Philoctetes' abandonment is an important part of the early stages of the interaction between the two men.⁵⁶ After having been deprived of most human contact for the past ten years, in fact, Philoctetes interacts with Neoptolemus largely through the filter of his memories. He begins his story in the present, lamenting the obscurity that makes explanation necessary (255-256), and only then goes on to identify himself.⁵⁷ The present moment—in which Philoctetes is solitary, disease-ridden, and mocked by his former comrades (257-258)—is connected to two different aspects of his past, both of which he explains to Neoptolemus. At first, he looks to the time before he came to Lemnos, suggesting that, even if the Greek leaders remember him mostly because of the suffering which they have inflicted upon him, Neoptolemus ought to have heard about him for reasons that have nothing to do with his abandonment. Before he was left to rot on Lemnos, it mattered that Philoctetes was the son of Poias and that he had been given the bow of Heracles, and Philoctetes draws upon his sense of what Neoptolemus ought to recall about him when he finally introduces himself (261-263).⁵⁸

As things stand now, however, both Philoctetes' memory of his heroic past and his sense of who he is now are contaminated by his memory of what has happened to him more recently, and he follows his statement of his parentage by identifying himself as the one whom the Atreidae and Odysseus cast out with only his disease for company (263-267). This second reference to his mistreatment seems to prompt him to recall the circumstances of his abandonment more vividly than he did in his initial lament, and, as he explains how he ended up alone on Lemnos, he presents his personal history as a series of

⁵⁵ Easterling *ad* 1-48.

⁵⁶ Knox 1964:128 and Winnington-Ingram 1980:291 comment on Neoptolemus' stated ignorance as a trigger for Philoctetes' story.

⁵⁷ Schmidt 1973:70 comments on the importance of Philoctetes' sense of himself as forgotten.

⁵⁸ Roberts 1989:168.

interactions with the leaders of the Greek expedition.⁵⁹ Moving back in time from the point when he was wronged by the Greeks, he now puts his story in context, explaining that he had come to Lemnos from Chryse with the rest of the fleet. As he describes the actual moment of his abandonment, Philoctetes speculates again about the thoughts of his former allies, saying that, ἄσμενοί (271), they left him behind when they saw that he had fallen asleep on the shore. Philoctetes, having been abandoned in his sleep, can have no real idea of the attitude of the Greeks as they departed, but over the years he has come to view the Greek leaders as completely antithetical to himself, and as he remembers the misery caused by their actions, he assumes that they carried out those actions with glee.⁶⁰

Over the course of his account, Philoctetes moves from the recollection of what was done to him to the recollection of his own reaction when he discovered what had happened. Although his disease plays a prominent role in his story, Philoctetes' account of his misery goes beyond the physical misfortune which is visible to Neoptolemus.⁶¹ Philoctetes' focus on his own mental processes allows him to encourage Neoptolemus to see life on Lemnos through his eyes; he expresses the horror of his abandonment by asking Neoptolemus to imagine how he felt when he first awoke, ποῖ' ἐκδακρῦσαι, ποῖ' ἀποιμῶξαι κακά (278). In the following lines, Philoctetes describes his gradual perception of his situation: first he saw that the fleet had departed (279-280), then he saw that there was no one to help him (280-282), and finally,

πάντα δὲ σκοπῶν
 ἠύρισκον οὐδὲν πλὴν ἀνιᾶσθαι παρόν,
 τούτου δὲ πολλὴν εὐμάρειαν (282-284).⁶²

His abandonment and his reaction to finding himself alone on the island are the only distinct events of his story, which stretches over his entire time on Lemnos; his days are

⁵⁹ Blundell 1989: 94 notes the importance of Philoctetes' changing relationship with his former allies.

⁶⁰ Pucci *ad* 271-5.

⁶¹ *contra* Inoue 1979:223, who claims that 'his words merely substantiate what Neoptolemus has already witnessed'.

⁶² Schein *ad* 282-283 notes that Philoctetes describes his realization of his abandonment in terms of 'repeated, unending action'.

undifferentiated except by the occasional arrival of sailors, and even these arrivals do not stand out from one another because they always end the same way, with Philoctetes still alone on Lemnos, brooding about his abandonment.⁶³ As Neoptolemus meets Philoctetes for the first time, he must interact not only with the hero who stands before him, eager for contact with the Greek world, but also with the hero who has become resigned to the successive disappointments of the last ten years.

Philoctetes' initial telling of his abandonment is highly repetitive; in the ten lines in which he describes the way he was left on Lemnos, he uses a high concentration of words describing his own solitude and the departure of the Greeks (ἐρήμιον, 265 and 269; ἔχοντ', 269 and 273; λιπόντες, 273).⁶⁴ This network of repetition suggests that the memory of his abandonment is one to which Philoctetes has returned many times and that, in telling his story to Neoptolemus, Philoctetes is using the same words with which he has told the same story to himself over the course of his years alone on Lemnos. As the play continues, the grip of this one story on Philoctetes' imagination becomes even clearer; although Philoctetes refers obliquely to other past episodes in his questions about the fate of various members of the Greek army, his abandonment on Lemnos is the only story about his own past which he relates at any length and the only story to which he returns on multiple occasions. From his first telling of the story until he learns that Neoptolemus has been in league with Odysseus, in fact, much of what Philoctetes says to Neoptolemus interacts with his memory of being abandoned by men who used to be his allies.

Just as he defines himself partially through the memory of what was once done to him, Philoctetes defines his new interaction with Neoptolemus partially in opposition to

⁶³ Roberts 1989:168-169 notes the lack of distinguishing features in Philoctetes' account of his time on Lemnos.

⁶⁴ Pucci *ad* 271-5 comments on the verbal repetition in Philoctetes' story.

his past interactions with the Greek leaders. In his first plea to Neoptolemus, when he asks,

μη λίπης μ' οὔτω μόνον,
ἐρῆμον ἐν κακοῖσι τοῖσδ' οἷοις ὄρᾳς
ὅσοισί τ' ἐξήκουσας ἐνναίοντά με (470-472),

Philoctetes returns to the same words with which he first described his abandonment on

Lemnos.⁶⁵ Similarly, in the scene with the False Merchant, Philoctetes' insistence that he could not possibly be persuaded to help Odysseus serves both as a reminder of the wrongs committed in the past by the Greeks (622-625, 628-632) and as a suggestion of how Neoptolemus ought to behave under the present circumstances.⁶⁶ In these condensed references to his initial story of his abandonment, which take place while he is still establishing his relationship with Neoptolemus, Philoctetes focuses on himself as a victim with little control over the events of his past. By invoking this particular remembered version of himself, Philoctetes draws attention both to his own need for Neoptolemus' help and to Neoptolemus' chance to prove himself nobler than Odysseus and the Atreidae.

As his present relationship with Neoptolemus is thrown into confusion by the revelation of the deception plot, however, Philoctetes' interaction with his memories of his own past seems to change as well. In the presence of Odysseus, Philoctetes draws even more attention to what was once done and said by the Greek leaders. Some elements remain the same; in an echo of his initial narrative, Philoctetes describes himself as γελώμενος πρὸς σοῦ τε καὶ τῶν Ἀτρέως | διπλῶν στρατηγῶν (1023-1024).⁶⁷ As he moves further into the past, though, he supplements his first account. Now that he is openly competing with Odysseus for the loyalty of Neoptolemus, whom he has just described as ἀνάξιον μὲν σοῦ, κατάξιον δ' ἐμοῦ (1009), Philoctetes brings to light a

⁶⁵ As well as echoing his own earlier words, Philoctetes' appeal to Neoptolemus at this point is reminiscent of Odysseus' tactics in the prologue, on which see Winnington-Ingram 1980:285 and Blundell 1989:199.

⁶⁶ Garvie 1972:217 claims that it is in the False Merchant scene that the real extent of Philoctetes' bitterness against the Greeks becomes clear.

⁶⁷ Schein *ad* 1023-1024 comments on the weight attached by tragic heroes to the laughter of enemies.

new aspect of Odysseus' history: where Philoctetes joined the fleet willingly, bringing seven ships, Odysseus had to be compelled to fight (1025-1027).⁶⁸ As he tells about his abandonment this time around, he highlights the pervasive dishonesty of the Greek leaders, reminding Odysseus,

ἐμέ δὲ τὸν πανάθλιον
ἐκόντα πλεύσανθ' ἑπτὰ ναυσὶ ναυβάτην
ἄτιμον ἔβαλον, ὡς σὺ φῆς, κείνοι δὲ σέ (1026-1028),

and challenging the pretext for his abandonment (1031-1034).⁶⁹ In his first interactions

with Neoptolemus, when he was overjoyed just to hear the sound of Greek (234),

Philoctetes focused on the desolation which Neoptolemus might bring to an end. Now, having seen his hopes destroyed by the recent actions of Odysseus, Philoctetes remembers new details about his past interactions with Odysseus.

As Philoctetes reacts first to the revelation of the plot and then to Neoptolemus' return of the bow and subsequent attempts to convince him to come willingly to Troy, his memories of his abandonment and years of solitude start to interact with his new understanding of the immediate past. When Neoptolemus suggests that he has Philoctetes' best interests at heart, Philoctetes, who is having trouble putting aside the memory of Neoptolemus' betrayal, reminds him, καὶ τὰ πρὶν γὰρ ἐκ λόγων | καλῶν κακῶς ἔπραξα, σοῖς πεισθεὶς λόγοις (1268-1269).⁷⁰ Even after Neoptolemus has proven his good faith by returning the bow, Philoctetes struggles against his memories; although he claims that his continued reluctance is not based on τᾶλγος τῶν παρελθόντων (1358), this claim follows a series of questions about how he could possibly coexist with the Greek leaders, who, he says, μ' ἀπώλεσαν (1356).⁷¹ As Philoctetes earlier defined himself in terms of what was done to him in the past (263-267),

⁶⁸ Roberts 1989:172.

⁶⁹ Reinhardt 1979:186; Hesk 2001:191-192.

⁷⁰ Minadeo 1993:104; Blundell 1989:214 notes that Neoptolemus 'has by now exhausted his persuasive capital'.

⁷¹ Winnington-Ingram 1980:296-297.

he now defines the Greek leaders in terms of the past actions which stand out most prominently in his memory. Odysseus and the Atreidae will always be for Philoctetes primarily the cause of his ten years alone on Lemnos, and his memory of their past behaviour shapes his imagination of his own likely future at Troy; unable to forget his past sufferings, Philoctetes now assumes that the future will follow similar patterns (1359-1361).⁷²

Philoctetes, like Deianeira, has had a long time to consider the events of his past, and Philoctetes' memory, like Deianeira's, interacts with his perception of his current circumstances. As of the beginning of the play, Philoctetes' present situation can be traced to a single past event, and that one event, in different ways, forms the basis for much of what he says throughout the play about himself and the Greek leaders. When Neoptolemus and his men arrive, Philoctetes interacts with this sudden incursion of the outside world through the filter of his own memories, measuring the young man against the other Greeks he used to know. Over the course of the play, however, Philoctetes' memory seems to evolve; after an initial focus on his own perceptions of and reactions to being abandoned, Philoctetes increasingly speaks about the past in terms of the actions of the Greek leaders and the implications of their past actions for his own future behaviour.

OEDIPUS REMEMBERS FROM COLONUS

Although they ascribe different levels of agency to themselves at various points, both Philoctetes and Deianeira are shaped by memories of a past over which they had, at best, limited control. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus' relationship to his past is somewhat more complicated. Although both the killing of Laius and Oedipus' marriage to Jocasta imply a degree of active participation, as Oedipus over the course of the play

⁷² Kyriakou 2012:157 comments on Philoctetes' reliance on the past to predict the future.

revisits both these events and his subsequent expulsion from Thebes, he seems to remember a past in which he was an essentially innocent victim of circumstance. This view of Oedipus' past, however, is not the most obvious one, and he therefore spends much of the play trying to bring others around to his opinion.⁷³ His accounts of the past therefore blend memory and rhetoric; as his circumstances and audience change, he draws attention to certain aspects of his past and elides others, using his selective version of the events at Thebes to guide his present and future interactions with Theseus and the people of Colonus.

Unlike Deianeira, Oedipus does not reminisce about his past without prompting, and, unlike Philoctetes, Oedipus does not immediately turn to his remembered past when called upon to identify himself. Nevertheless, as becomes clear when the chorus press him to speak of his origins, Oedipus' identity is impossible to separate from his past experiences and actions, and he tends to describe himself in terms which interact with his memories of the past.⁷⁴ Moreover, his interactions with his memories—how he looks at his past and how his view of the past changes over time—shape his interactions with other people over the course of the play. When, after much questioning, Oedipus finally begins to identify himself by asking, *Λαΐου ἴσῃτε τι*— (220), he assumes rightly that this reference to his parentage will be enough to acquaint the chorus with the rest of his story. Oedipus' perception of the key events of his life, however, differs from the version of his story that has made its way to Colonus, and he immediately sets about trying to correct the chorus' impression. In doing so, he draws attention to what he knew and thought at various stages; his several arguments that he cannot be blamed for killing Laius and

⁷³ Winnington-Ingram 1980:261; Markantonatos 2002:29-30.

⁷⁴ On Oedipus' attempts to delay identifying himself, see Blundell 1989:230 and Guidorizzi *ad* 207.

marrying Jocasta depend on his portrayal of himself as simultaneously acting without knowledge and being acted upon by others.⁷⁵

Oedipus' first extended narrative reveals some of the complexity of his usual interactions with memory. When he addresses the Eumenides after the departure of the Athenian Stranger, Oedipus looks back not on the events which will dominate subsequent discussions of the past but on his receipt of the oracle of Apollo many years before.⁷⁶ As he remembers receiving the prophecy, he reflects also on the process which led him to Colonus; when Oedipus says that he now knows that he was not led to the grove by an unreliable omen (96-98), his new knowledge prompts him to revise his understanding of the process by which he arrived at the grove of the Eumenides, starting with the oracle itself. He refers only in passing to the time between his receipt of the oracle and his arrival at Colonus, first mentioning the many evils which he was destined to suffer according to the prophecy (87), and later describing himself as ἀεὶ | μόχθοις λατρεύων τοῖς ὑπερτάτοις βροτῶν (104-105). He ends his account of the past with an appeal to the Eumenides; although Oedipus may remember himself as always enslaved by grievous troubles, he asks that the Eumenides look to his future. He closes his speech with the comment, οὐ γὰρ δὴ τό γ' ἀρχαῖον δέμας (110), suggesting that whatever troubles the past may hold, a line must be drawn between Oedipus as he once was and Oedipus as he is now.⁷⁷

Oedipus' particular interactions with his own memory are illuminated throughout the play by his selective narration of his past; even when he is forced to speak about his personal experiences, Oedipus pays attention only to a limited segment of his own history. With the exception of his account of the oracle, Oedipus speaks about only three incidents

⁷⁵ Knox 1964:150, 158; Winnington-Ingram 1980:261.

⁷⁶ Burian 1974:411. Winnington-Ingram 1980:214 suggests that Oedipus' memory of the oracle is triggered by finding out that he is now in the grove of the Eumenides, while Bushnell 1988:91 observes that Oedipus' recognition of the grove's importance does not mean that he understands how the oracle will be fulfilled.

⁷⁷ Knox 1964:149 suggests that Oedipus' comment at 110 looks forward to the end of his life.

in his life before the beginning of the play—his killing of his father, his marriage to his mother, and his expulsion from Thebes. The rest of his history is almost entirely elided; although Oedipus refers once to having done some service to Thebes (539-541), he does so only by way of explaining his marriage to the queen.⁷⁸ As Oedipus is periodically reminded of or questioned about the events which led to his expulsion from Thebes, however, he gives several different accounts of the three major events of his life.⁷⁹ While the basic framework of each event remains the same in successive accounts, a number of details change on further recollection under changing present circumstances; in his first account of his expulsion, he says that his initial wish was to be stoned to death (434-435), while in his account to Creon he says only that he wished at first to be exiled (766).⁸⁰ Perhaps more strikingly, he shifts the blame for his expulsion between accounts; whereas his sons were the initial target of his rage, he later places all of the blame on Creon and ignores the role of Eteocles and Polyneices, only to blame Polyneices again when he arrives asking for his father's support.

Oedipus' accounts of his personal history are for the most part accounts of the behaviour of others and the effect of that behaviour on Oedipus himself. His tendency to remember primarily the agency of those around him first becomes apparent when he tells the chorus, *νῦν δ' οὐδὲν εἰδῶς ἰκόμην ἴν' ἰκόμην, | ὑφ' ὧν δ' ἔπασχον, εἰδότεων ἀπωλλύμην* (273-274). As he hears about the present actions of his family, moreover, Oedipus several times revises his perspective on his past interactions with them. When Ismene says of her brothers, *εἴσ' οὐπὲρ εἰσι· δεινὰ τὰν κείνοις τανῶν* (336), Oedipus derides their idleness but expresses no particular anger (337-343).⁸¹ As Oedipus learns

⁷⁸ Markantonatos 2002:32 acknowledges that 'some story elements are left unspecified', but otherwise maintains that 'Oedipus presents the full backstory'.

⁷⁹ Hesk 2012:187.

⁸⁰ Kelly 2009:63.

⁸¹ Easterling 1967:3-4, however, notes that the contrast between Oedipus' sons and daughters in this speech lays the groundwork for subsequent attacks against Eteocles and Polyneices.

about their present quarrel, however, Eteocles and Polyneices grow increasingly culpable in his memory (429-430, 441-444). When Creon arrives, Oedipus' memory of his expulsion seems to shift again, and he tells Creon that when he wished to remain at home, τὸτ' ἐξεώθεις κάξιέβαλλες (770). This focus on Creon's actions is short-lived; by the time Polyneices appears and makes his own case for Oedipus' support, the threat from Creon has been neutralized and Oedipus can once again focus his anger upon his sons.⁸² His present rage colours his views of both past and future, and, rejecting Polyneices' statements of pity, he says, ἐμοὶ μὲν οἰστέα | τὰδ' ἕωσπερ ἄν ζῶ, σοῦ φονέως μεμνημένῳ (1360-1361). While his opinions have so far been somewhat flexible, Oedipus suggests that this final judgment of Polyneices will be permanent; as Oedipus now recalls, Polyneices has always been guilty and will always be remembered as such.

The counterpoint to Oedipus' focus on the actions of others is his memory of himself as both passive and unwitting in the events which preceded his expulsion from Thebes. In Oedipus' memories of his past, ignorance and involuntary action go together; in his successive speeches of defence, Oedipus suggests not only that he did not know what he was doing, but also that he had no choice.⁸³ In his first justification, Oedipus urges the chorus not to fear his pollution, ἐπεὶ τὰ γ' ἔργα με | πεπονθότ' ἴσθι μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα (266-267), going on to explain that he did what he did without knowing what he was doing (273). When he is subsequently questioned by the chorus, Oedipus draws further attention to his ignorance, saying that the city bound him in marriage οὐδὲν ἴδριν (525) and concluding his defence of the patricide with αἰδρις ἐς τόδ' ἦλθον (548). In his second speech to Creon, Oedipus likewise says that he acted ἄκων (962-964), both

⁸² Easterling 1967:9n.1 suggests that this shift in blame is a matter of Oedipus' emotional response rather than a misrepresentation of the facts. Kelly 2009:125 similarly describes the inconsistencies between Oedipus' accounts as the necessary consequences of 'absolute self-belief'.

⁸³ Knox 1964:158.

in marrying Jocasta and in killing Laius.⁸⁴ At the same time, his remembered ignorance and powerlessness stand in contrast to his repeated claim to hold privileged knowledge of another sort; it is shortly after first mentioning his ignorance of his own deeds that Oedipus promises some benefit to the city, telling the chorus that when the local leader arrives, τότ' εἰσακούων πάντ' ἐπιστήσῃ (290). As he implicitly contrasts his present knowledge with his past ignorance, Oedipus suggests that he is not now as he remembers himself to have been.

However much Oedipus may argue that he cannot be held responsible for the patricide and incest, his involvement in both certainly once preyed upon his mind, and his periodic reworkings of the two events suggest that he has not yet fully established the terms of his own innocence. In both of his extended accounts of his expulsion, Oedipus describes his violent initial reaction to the discovery of his own deeds in terms of mental or emotional disorder, first saying that when he first learned what he had done ἔξει θυμός (434), and later describing himself to Creon as τοῖσιν οἰκείοις κακοῖς | νοσοῦνθ' (765-766).⁸⁵ This initial rage abated while he was still living in Thebes, and, after some unspecified length of time, he wished to be allowed to remain at home in seclusion rather than being stoned or driven into exile (768-769). He describes his change of heart to Ismene as a matter of both healing and learning, explaining that he was driven out of the city only

χρόνω δ', ὅτ' ἤδη πᾶς ὁ μόχθος ἦν πέπων,
 κάμάνθανον τὸν θυμὸν ἐκδραμόντα μοι
 μείζω κολαστὴν τῶν πρὶν ἡμαρτημένων (437-439).⁸⁶

How he thinks about the patricide and the incest at the moment of either of these tellings is not made explicit, but his expression of his change of mind as a matter of learning (438)

⁸⁴ Kelly 2009:57-58 discusses the difficulties of Oedipus' identification of himself as ἄκων.

⁸⁵ Guidorizzi *ad* 766 comments on the importance of the medical metaphor in Oedipus' account; *ad* 434, Guidorizzi notes that Oedipus' description of his seething θυμός distances him from his violent initial reaction.

⁸⁶ Jebb *ad* 437 comments on the medical implications of πέπων.

suggests that he now sees his later, milder position as the one which he ought to have held all along.⁸⁷ As Oedipus explains his prior thoughts and actions to successive audiences, his perspective on his own guilt shifts as he interacts with the remembered past.

Although Oedipus spends much of the first half of the play trying to avoid speaking about his past, he nonetheless interacts throughout the play with his memories of the events which preceded his arrival at Colonus. Oedipus himself is shaped by his past experiences, as is clear from his opening speech to Antigone, and, moreover, his unique perspective on the Theban past shapes his interaction with everyone else in the play. Most of those who encounter Oedipus are far more eager than he is to bring up the events of his past, and, as Oedipus reacts to their questions, he looks back on his own experiences and draws upon his memories in support of his own interpretation of past events. As he tries first to convince the chorus not to shun him for his past deeds and then to discredit Creon and Polyneices, Oedipus' defends his memories of the past, often drawing a sharp distinction between his own experience and that of those around him. Over the course of the play, Oedipus' memories grow rhetorically more and more important, and, as they do, it also becomes increasingly clear that they are not static; as he hears more and more about the current situation at Thebes, Oedipus gradually determines which aspects of his past have most bearing on his present and future role at Colonus, and his memory shifts accordingly.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Winnington-Ingram 1980:256.

⁸⁸ Kelly 2009:64 comments on the importance of 'context and rhetoric' in Oedipus' accounts of the past. Hesk 2012:187 notes that no one in the play draws attention to the inconsistencies in Oedipus' narrations.

ELECTRA REMEMBERS

Of all the characters in Sophocles, Electra is most openly concerned with the fact of her memory.⁸⁹ Like Antigone, Electra describes herself as being duty-bound to give appropriate honours to a dead member of her family; unlike Antigone, who can carry out the physical burial of Polyneices, however, Electra's ability to honour her father is confined to her ability to preserve his memory in a household ruled by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.⁹⁰ As she carries out her prolonged mourning for her father while awaiting the return of Orestes, Electra looks back on the killing of Agamemnon and the moment when she sent the young Orestes into exile. She expresses the retention of her memory as both conscious and deliberate and, as she explains over the course of the play, it defines the terms of her interaction with other members of her household. Perhaps more importantly, Electra, even more than the aged Oedipus, actively suggests throughout her play that she is who she is in large part because of what she remembers and those around her do not.

Electra speaks less about her actual memories than about her refusal to forget, and it is this refusal to forget which, in her view, makes her a good daughter to her murdered father. In her first lament, Electra claims that no one else grieves for Agamemnon, but that she will never cease from mourning his death (100-109).⁹¹ When the chorus try to convince her to moderate her grief, Electra begins to speak about her mourning as a lack of forgetting; in response to the chorus' insistence that she is destroying herself needlessly (140-141), Electra replies, νήπιος ὃς τῶν οἰκτρῶς | οἰχομένων γονέων ἐπιλάθεται (145-146). This general criticism gains specific force in the following strophe; when the chorus look forward hopefully to the arrival of Orestes, Electra says, ὁ δὲ λάθεται | ὦν

⁸⁹ Of the thirty-three instances of words for memory and forgetting in the extant plays of Sophocles, twelve occur in *Electra*, of which eight are spoken by Electra herself (146, 168, 342, 346, 933, 1126, 1247, 1287).

⁹⁰ Foley 2001:148 identifies Electra's lamentation as a way of avenging Agamemnon's death while she waits for Orestes to take action.

⁹¹ Nooter 2011:403 comments on the power of Electra's ongoing lamentation, noting that 'Electra's voice alone has the power to maintain the past as a threatening present'.

τ' ἔπαθ' ὦν τ' ἐδάη (168-169), taking Orestes' absence as a sign that he has forgotten the family troubles. She launches a similar, and somewhat better grounded, accusation against Chrysothemis in the next episode. When Chrysothemis urges Electra to learn θυμῷ ματαίῳ μὴ χαρίζεσθαι κενά (331), Electra takes her plea for moderation as a sign that she has forgotten Agamemnon, saying, δεινὸν γέ σ' οὔσαν πατρὸς οὔ σὺ παῖς ἔφυς | κείνου λελῆσθαι, τῆς δὲ τικτούσης μέλειν (341-342). A few lines later she suggests that Chrysothemis must choose, ἢ φρονεῖν κακῶς, | ἢ τῶν φίλων φρονοῦσα μὴ μνήμην ἔχειν (345-346). Chrysothemis' primary failing, as Electra presents it, is that, faced with a choice, she has chosen to forget.⁹²

Electra's memory, which she sees as so important in distinguishing her from the rest of her family, is nevertheless somewhat selective. Like Philoctetes, Electra reduces her past to what she sees as its most important elements; in her first solo lament and the *kommos* that follows, the only event that Electra describes with any detail is the death of Agamemnon.⁹³ To this event she returns several times, first comparing the noble death which he did not have at Troy with his miserable death at the hands of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (95-99), and then, in the *kommos*, describing the effect of Agamemnon's death on the subsequent course of her own life, claiming that, when they killed Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus τὸν ἐμὸν εἶλον βίον | πρόδοτον (207-208). It is not until her confrontation with Clytemnestra that Electra speaks about any other specific past event, offering a rival story of the motivation behind the sacrifice of Iphigenia in response to Clytemnestra's justification of her killing of Agamemnon.⁹⁴

In her *agon* with her mother, Electra looks back on events which she did not witness, and she interacts differently with those events than she has with other memories

⁹² Alexanderson 1966:82.

⁹³ Solmsen 1967:19; Kitzinger 1991:305.

⁹⁴ Blundell 1989:167 notes that 'neither [Electra] nor her mother disputes the facts' of what happened at Aulis.

earlier in the play. When, after suggesting that Clytemnestra ought to ask Artemis why she held the fleet at Aulis (563-564), Electra says, ἢ ἄρ' ἔγωγε φράσω· κείνης γὰρ οὐ θέμις μαθεῖν (565), she presents her account as an acceptable alternative to the explanation which might be supplied by Artemis, implying in the process that she has information which Clytemnestra either lacks or has chosen to ignore.⁹⁵ She qualifies her account with ὡς ἐγὼ κλύω (566); although this comment to some extent distances Electra from her own story and might therefore cast doubt on the validity of her account, it also allows Electra to suggest that the story she remembers is the generally accepted one.⁹⁶ After her initial admission that her information is only second-hand, Electra grows increasingly authoritative in her speech; when she says, οὐ γὰρ ἦν λύσις | ἄλλη στρατῶ πρὸς οἶκον οὐδ' εἰς Ἴλιον (573-574), claiming that Iphigenia was not sacrificed for Menelaus' sake (576), she does not seem to allow for the possibility that her view of the situation might be incomplete. By the time she agrees to use Clytemnestra's version of the story as a test case for the morality of the killing of Agamemnon (577-594), Electra has already established to her own satisfaction the weakness of her mother's account.

Along with her vivid memories of the killing of Agamemnon and her second-hand memory of the events at Aulis, Electra remembers Orestes. When she speaks about her absent brother, Electra's memories of Orestes interact with her hope that he will someday return from exile and avenge Agamemnon's murder.⁹⁷ From the first time the chorus mention Orestes in the *kommos* (159-164), Electra contrasts her own state of constant memory with Orestes' supposed forgetfulness of his own—and Electra's—familial misfortunes. Before the arrival of the Tutor bearing the false report of Orestes' death, however, Electra does not mention any specific memories of Orestes, focusing instead on

⁹⁵ Segal 1966:537 comments on the presumption of Electra's claim to speak for Artemis.

⁹⁶ Kells 1973:126-127 and Winnington-Ingram 1980:220 see Electra as distancing herself from her account. Finglass *ad* 566-576, however, comments, 'It is not the κλύω, but the ἐγὼ, that is stressed'. Kitzinger 1991:315 notes that Electra tells the traditional version of the story.

⁹⁷ Seale 1982:59 refers to Electra's 'obsessive longing for Orestes'.

his present forgetfulness and his continually delayed return.⁹⁸ In the account of Clytemnestra's hostility that follows the *kommos*, Electra provides a little more detail about how she thinks of her absent brother than she did in the *kommos*, but she still says little about Orestes himself. Instead, Electra looks back on her own role in saving Orestes through the reported speech of Clytemnestra; Electra imagines Clytemnestra remembering Orestes' departure and demanding of Electra, οὐ σὸν τόδ' ἐστὶ τοῦργον, ἥτις ἐκ χερῶν | κλέψασ' Ὀρέστην τῶν ἐμῶν ὑπεξέθου; (296-297). At this stage in the play, when all of her hopes rest on the possible return of Orestes, Electra's memory of her brother and his departure is inseparable from the threat he now poses to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

Electra's memories of Orestes are thrown into sharper relief when she hears that he has been killed. Electra receives the urn that is supposed to contain Orestes' ashes after asking the disguised Orestes to give it to her ὅπως ἐμαυτὴν καὶ γένος τὸ πᾶν ὁμοῦ | ξὺν τῆδε κλαύσω κάποδύρωμαι σποδῶ (1121-1122), and, as she mourns over the urn, she looks back over the entire history of her relationship with Orestes. In the first lines of her lament, Electra addresses the urn as ὦ φιλτάτου μνημεῖον ἀνθρώπων ἐμοὶ | ψυχῆς Ὀρέστου λοιπόν (1126-1127). Although the urn is not what Electra thinks it is, it nonetheless triggers memories of Orestes; as a μνημεῖον, the urn is a tangible reminder not just of Orestes himself, but also, it seems, of Electra's feelings about her brother and, in particular, the hopes she had pinned on his return.⁹⁹ As she receives the urn, she remembers Orestes as she last saw him; comparing the urn she now holds to the boy she once sent away, Electra describes Orestes briefly as he was on that day, saying that he was λαμπρός when she sent him from the house (1130). Orestes' remembered brightness matches the hopes which have centred around him in Electra's mind, and what she

⁹⁸ Schein 1982:72 takes Electra's general comment about those who forget their parents to be a reference to Orestes' more specific forgetfulness.

⁹⁹ Seale 1982:69; Nooter 2011:410-411.

remembers of him now is probably less indicative of how Orestes really was when he was sent into exile than it is of how he appeared to Electra at the time, and, more importantly, as he has appeared in her memory over the intervening years.¹⁰⁰

Electra's recollection of sending Orestes away now also interacts with her newly acquired knowledge of his death; as she recalls her parting from Orestes, Electra remembers the expectations which she held on that day; when she comments, ὥς <σ'> ἀπ' ἐλπίδων | οὐχ ὦνπερ ἐξέπεμπον εἰσεδεξάμην (1127-1128), she looks back on herself looking forward into a future which she now believes to be impossible.¹⁰¹ Alongside her memory of Orestes' departure she presents a hypothetical scenario illustrating what might have happened if Orestes had died before she managed to send him away to safety (1131-1135). Then, she explains, Orestes would at least have been able to share in his father's death, rather than dying alone, ἐκτὸς οἴκων κάπῃ γῆς ἄλλης φυγᾶς | κακῶς ἀπώλου, σῆς κασιγνήτης δίχρα (1136-1137). She shifts from this distant imagined past—which she knows to be false—in which Orestes was killed along with Agamemnon, to a more immediate imagined past—which she believes to be true—in which strangers provided Orestes with the funeral rites which Electra ought to have carried out (1138-1142). For Electra, the scenario which should have happened but did not and the scenario which ought not to have happened but did nonetheless are equally vivid; since his departure, Orestes has existed entirely in the realm of the hypothetical. Now that she has learned of her brother's death, she has to adjust her memories to allow for an end of his story in which he never returns.

After imagining the distant funeral rites of Orestes, Electra once again looks back to his childhood, this time in greater detail. As she does so, she focuses on her own daily

¹⁰⁰ Segal 1966:492 and Nooter 2011:41 n.43 both note that Electra, in describing Orestes as λαμπρός, describes him as he described himself in the prologue (66).

¹⁰¹ Ringer 1998:188 comments on the connection between Electra's memory and the destruction of her hopes.

interactions with her brother, commenting both on how she cared for Orestes and on how he responded to her care.¹⁰² Her description of Orestes' childhood, like her account of sending him into exile, is foregrounded in the knowledge that he will never return; she first mentions her care for Orestes in lamenting that all her care was in vain.¹⁰³ From the position of her present grief, Electra remembers an ideal relationship with her brother; not only was Electra's care given freely, πόνω γλυκεῖ (1145), but Orestes repaid her kindness with equal affection. When Electra says, οὔτε γάρ ποτε | μητρὸς σύ γ' ἦσθα μᾶλλον ἢ κάμοῦ φίλος (1145-1146), however, her comment has a bitter edge, reflecting the deeper conflict between Electra and her mother that has filled the years since Agamemnon's death and Orestes' departure.¹⁰⁴ When she goes on to remind the dead Orestes, οὔθ' οἱ κατ' οἶκον ἦσαν ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τροφός, | ἐγὼ δ' ἀδελφῆ σοὶ προσηδῶμην αἰεὶ (1147-1148), moreover, she seems to suggest an obligation on her brother's part, which must now remain unfulfilled. For years, Orestes has been Electra's only hope; now that she believes him to be dead, she remembers a relationship in which the young Orestes was as dependent on her care as she has been until recently on the hope of his return.

Electra, looking back on the childhood of Orestes, recalls a relationship with her brother that was first interrupted by Orestes' exile and has now been destroyed by the news of his death. Although it is impossible to gauge the accuracy of her recollection, she describes a relationship with her brother which might have been normal under other circumstances; as she remembers the past and imagines hypothetical alternatives, she highlights the strangeness and misery of her current existence. When Orestes reveals his identity, his sudden presence interacts both with Electra's memory of him and with her

¹⁰² Nooter 2011:411 notes Electra's focus on her own actions in her account of Orestes' past.

¹⁰³ Solmsen 1967:53; Finglass *ad* 1126-70 notes 'all that her rescue of the child has achieved is to ensure that Orestes did not receive funerary rites at her hands'.

¹⁰⁴ Segal 1966:517.

recent conviction that her past hopes were in vain. As Electra rejoices and Orestes tries to contain her joy and move forward with the revenge, a clear disconnect between the siblings' experience appears.¹⁰⁵ When Orestes warns Electra that women too can be warlike, she replies that he has reminded her of her sorrow, which is ἀνέφελον...οὔποτε καταλύσιμον, | οὐδέ ποτε λησόμενον (1246-1249). He cuts off her reminiscence, telling her that he knows what she means, ἀλλ' ὅταν παρουσία | φράζῃ, τότε ἔργων τῶνδε μεμνησθαι χρεῶν (1251-1252).¹⁰⁶ Electra, however, remains stuck in the years which have elapsed since she last saw Orestes, and the lyric dialogue closes with her comment,

προϋφάνης δὲ
φιλτάταν ἔχων πρόσοψιν,
ᾧς ἐγὼ οὐδ' ἂν ἐν κακοῖς λαθοίμαν (1285-1287).

After years of preserving the memory of Agamemnon, Electra must now remind Orestes of her years of remembrance.

As the play moves towards its conclusion, Electra's past—both the death of Agamemnon and its aftermath—fades somewhat from prominence. Her memory surfaces briefly when, after being reintroduced to the Tutor, she launches into an account of the role he has played over the course of her life (1354-1360). The Tutor, however, cuts off her desire to reminisce much like Orestes did, saying,

ἀρκεῖν δοκεῖ μοι· τοὺς γὰρ ἐν μέσῳ λόγους—
πολλὰ κυκλοῦνται νύκτες ἡμέραι τ' ἴσαι,
αἶ ταῦτά σοι δείξουσιν, Ἡλέκτρα, σαφῆ (1364-1366).¹⁰⁷

From this point onwards, Electra's role diminishes, and as the responsibility for avenging Agamemnon's death passes to Orestes, Electra's preservation of the past ceases to matter as much as it did before Orestes' return. Although Electra still cannot and will not forget the past, as becomes apparent when she reminds Clytemnestra, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐκ σέθεν |

¹⁰⁵ Winnington-Ingram 1980:229-230; Kitzinger 1999:323-324.

¹⁰⁶ Segal 1966:517 notes that while the reunion with Orestes reminds Electra of what she has suffered while waiting for him to return, Orestes himself 'recalls her to the *kaka* in which they both live' in the present.

¹⁰⁷ Segal 1966: 14-515 notes that the Tutor is harsher than Orestes was.

ᾠκτίρεθ' οὔτος οὐδ' ὁ γεννήσας πατήρ (1411-1412), her reminders now, if anything, delay the completion of the revenge plot.¹⁰⁸ In the final scenes of the play, Electra's tendency to interact primarily with the remembered past and to remind others insistently of that past interferes with her ability to interact with an Orestes who is present not only in her memories, but also in the flesh.

CONCLUSION: MEMORY AND THE DELINEATION OF SOPHOCLEAN CHARACTERS

The four characters discussed above all, to some extent, live in their memories; at the start of their respective plays, all have been shaped by traumatic past events, and, as their plays progress, they all revisit the memories of those events and communicate those memories to others. In speaking about their personal histories, they all provide context for their present actions and situate themselves in relation to other figures in their respective plays. Within this basic framework of similarity, however, these four characters—like other characters in Sophocles—interact with their memories in importantly different ways; not only do they remember different pasts, but they also focus on different elements of their pasts and express those elements differently. Deianeira dwells more on her past emotions than many other Sophoclean figures, while the aged Oedipus is unusual in the extent to which he deploys his memory in an explicitly rhetorical fashion.¹⁰⁹ Philoctetes is defined not only by his prior interactions with the Greeks but also, and more importantly, by the way he remembers and speaks about that interaction ten years down the line, while Electra uses her memories of the past to separate herself from the more forgetful members of her family.

¹⁰⁸ On Electra's role in the murder of Clytemnestra, Kitzinger 1991:326 comments, 'Elektra's words fill Orestes' silence, but in doing so distract from, rather than complete, our experience of the murder'.

¹⁰⁹ See Connacher 1997:23-24 on Deianeira's remembered emotions; Halliwell 1997:139-140 and Hesk 2012:187 on Oedipus' rhetoric.

Memories of past events influence the ways in which characters interact with each other in the present, and, in some cases, past memories place limitations on these present interactions. Many characters use their understanding of the past as a way to distinguish themselves from others; as he looks back on the past glories of his time at Troy, for example, Ajax remembers himself as having once been a hero such as the Trojan landscape will never see again (421-426), and his memory of his past glory supports his belief that he has more recently been treated unjustly.¹¹⁰ When the chorus in *Trachiniae* try to soothe Deianeira's fears about the effect of the poison (723-724), she separates herself from them on the grounds of her personal experience, telling them that advice such as theirs could only be given by someone who has never known trouble (729-730). Similarly, after Theseus tries to reassure Oedipus about the possibility that men will come to Colonus in search of him, Oedipus implicitly calls upon his own experience when he tries to rebuke Theseus, saying, οὐκ οἶσθ' ἀπειλάς— (656).¹¹¹ Oedipus' experience has given him a unique perspective, and, over the course of the play, he draws upon his memories of past events as well as his more recent claim to prophetic insight in order to prove his authority over a series of both friendly and hostile figures. No matter how earnestly others may try to change his opinions, Oedipus' remembered experiences—like those of Ajax and Deianeira—keep him from interacting with those around him on a completely even footing.

Even characters who have experienced the same past events remember those events differently. Subjective memories of the past are often a source of tension in present interactions, particularly when differences in memory result in one character challenging another's account of an event. These conflicts of memory often concern questions of

¹¹⁰ Winnington-Ingram 1980:14-15, commenting on the tradition that Ajax was the second best of the Greeks at Troy, after Achilles, suggests that Ajax's memory of his past glory is unlikely to be shared. Finglass *ad* 421-426 likewise notes, 'Ajax speaks of himself in terms which no one apart from him could accept'.

¹¹¹ Kelly 2009:112 comments on Theseus' efforts to defend his own knowledge and experience in this scene.

justification and motivation; when Philoctetes points out the flaws in the pretext for his abandonment put forward by the Greek leaders (1028), the fact of Philoctetes' abandonment is not up for debate, but the blameworthiness of his former comrades is. In a similar vein, when, near the end of *Ajax*, Odysseus is asked whether he remembers what kind of man Ajax was, his response, ὄδ' ἐχθρὸς ἀνὴρ, ἀλλὰ γενναῖός ποτ' ἦν (1355), is not something that Agamemnon can challenge on a factual level.¹¹² Even when facts are not at stake, however, clashes of memory can have serious implications; when Electra challenges Clytemnestra's justification for killing Agamemnon, their conflicting views underpin the central problem of Electra's existence in her mother's household.¹¹³ In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus' disagreement with Creon about the responsibility for the patricide and incest is similarly far-reaching, even though Creon's rival account is implied rather than stated in full.¹¹⁴ Just as shared memories can be an indicator of present sympathy, an inability to agree about past events is often a sign of a more general breakdown in communication.

Closely connected to the subjective aspect of Sophoclean memory is the fact that, in remembering past events, characters often focus on their own past perceptions of those events. When Oedipus remembers the events leading up to his expulsion from Thebes, he twice describes the progression of his own desires after the patricide and incest came to light; when he explains his current resentment against Creon, he focuses on the fact that, although Creon could have given him what he wanted long ago, Creon's supposed aid has now come too late, now that Oedipus' feelings have changed, and ὄτ' οὐδὲν ἡ χάρις χάριν φέροι (*OC* 779).¹¹⁵ Philoctetes' memory of his abandonment is similarly focused

¹¹² Blundell 1989:98 notes that Odysseus here expresses the superiority of his understanding of 'the distinctions... between enmity and nobility' over that of Agamemnon; see also Finglass *ad* 1355.

¹¹³ Blundell 1989:151-152, 167.

¹¹⁴ Halliwell 1997:139 suggests that the rival accounts demonstrate 'that Oedipus has a narrative to tell *where Creon had none at all*' (Halliwell's emphasis).

¹¹⁵ Burian 1974:219.

on his own perception; after stating the objective truth that he was abandoned on the shores of Lemnos by the leaders of the Greek fleet, he looks back on his realization that he had been left behind (276-284).¹¹⁶ Philoctetes' memory of how it felt to wake up on Lemnos, focusing on ποῖ' ἐκδακρῦσαι, ποῖ' ἀποιμῶξαι κακά (278), is more emotional than either of Oedipus' accounts of his past desires, but their accounts are similar in the extent to which they focus on the way things appeared at a particular moment in the past. Perhaps more importantly, both Philoctetes and Oedipus speak about their past perceptions not in moments of casual reminiscence, but in order to gain ground in their present interactions with other characters.

Characters' present circumstances often interact with their memories of the past, with the result that interpretations of past events may depend at least in part on the mental state in which characters reflect on the past. This is particularly true when characters focus on their own perception of past events or when past events have a strong emotional charge; when Oedipus refers to his initial desire to be exiled in terms of disease (765-766), his harsh assessment of his past desire reflects his present anger at Creon for trying to bring him back to Thebes against his will. Although Deianeira remembers a continuous emotional state stretching from her girlhood to the present, her interpretation of the past at the beginning of *Trachiniae* is related to her current fear for Heracles' safety. Not only does her personal history of fear and unhappiness suggest that life is generally unhappy, but also, at the same time, her current anxiety suggests that her past fears were more justified than they might have appeared.¹¹⁷ This interplay between Deianeira's memory and her perception of the present distinguishes her from other characters in the play, most notably Hyllus, who, ignorant of the prophecy about the end of Heracles' labours, explains

¹¹⁶ Schein *ad* 276-284; see also Blundell 1989:194.

¹¹⁷ Lawrence 1978:290; Kraus 1991:81.

that he had not worried about his father because Heracles had always in the past emerged from his labours unscathed (88-89).¹¹⁸

Memories of events often interact with new pieces of information acquired between a remembered event and its recollection or even between individual recollections of the same event. Sometimes memories seem to shift in accordance with the needs of a given moment, as when Philoctetes, having learned that the deception was orchestrated by Odysseus, adds new details about Odysseus' history of despicable behaviour to his second account of abandonment (1025-1028). Similarly, although his changing stories have a rhetorical impact, Oedipus' tendency in *Oedipus at Colonus* to blame his expulsion on whoever poses the most immediate present threat need not imply a deliberate reinterpretation of past events.¹¹⁹ Under other circumstances, however, characters are more active in revising their memories of past events. Electra, who has been remembering Orestes constantly since she sent him into exile, looks back on her parting from Orestes in a new light after hearing that he has been killed at Delphi.¹²⁰ When Electra says that she has received Orestes ἀπ' ἐλπίδων | οὐχ ὥνπερ ἐξέπεμπον (1127-1128), her new knowledge interacts with the hopes which have comforted her over the years, and she now remembers those hopes as delusions. Even more strikingly, when Deianeira revisits her encounter with Nessus after seeing the effect of the poison, she corrects her previous interpretation of the incident, explaining that she now understands—however belatedly—that she was deceived to think that the centaur could have meant her anything but harm (707-711).¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Easterling 1977:123 notes that Hyllus' attitude towards Heracles' continued absence is the intuitive one.

¹¹⁹ Easterling 1967:9 n.1; Kelly 2009:64 draws more attention to the rhetorical aspects of Oedipus successive accounts.

¹²⁰ Ringer 1998:188.

¹²¹ Kraus 1991:90-91.

As they reflect upon their past experiences, characters rely on their memories in order to construct coherent narratives of their lives.¹²² In constructing these personal narratives, characters interact not only with past events, but also with versions of themselves as they once were. At a few points, Philoctetes describes himself as he was before his abandonment, and the Philoctetes whom he describes, who once was given the bow of Heracles and later set out for Troy with seven ships, is a far cry from the embittered cripple who has spent the last ten years alone on Lemnos (261-263, 1027). This disconnect between his glorious past and his obscure present existence is a major part of Philoctetes' anger; if it had not been for Odysseus and the Atreidae, Philoctetes would still be identifiable as the hero who sailed with the fleet.¹²³ The contrast between Ajax as he is at the beginning of his play and Ajax as he remembers himself is equally stark. When he laments, οἴμοι γέλωτος (367), he suggests that he will be mocked not only for his recent madness, but also, more specifically, because his madness represents the wreck of his past glory. His disgrace, as he presents it, began well before his attack on the livestock; when he first came to Troy, Ajax built an identity for himself that was compatible with his father's prior deeds, and that identity was destroyed at a stroke when he was insulted by the Greek leaders.¹²⁴ Even in his disgraced state, however, Ajax, like Philoctetes, continues to measure himself against what he once was.

When Ajax and Philoctetes complain about their diminished heroic status, they suggest that changes in their identities have been forced upon them from without. Other characters, however, are willing to criticize their past selves on occasion; while the Deianeira who now fears that the tablet will bring her trouble closely resembles the Deianeira who once feared that her beauty would be a cause of harm (47-48; cf. 24-25), she later casts a critical eye on the naïveté which let her believe that the centaur's poison

¹²² Kraus 1991:76 comments on the importance of being able to impose narrative structure on events.

¹²³ Knox 1964:128 and Roberts 1989:168-169 discuss Philoctetes' outrage at his current obscurity.

¹²⁴ Winnington-Ingram 1980:27-28.

could be a harmless love charm. Similarly, in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus' relationship with his past self changes as he tells Jocasta about his past. When he begins to tell the story of his youth, he distances himself from the version of himself who figures in the early part of his story.¹²⁵ At several points, he questions his own past behaviour, first describing the event that eventually drove him from Corinth as θαυμάσαι μὲν ἀξία, | σπουδῆς γε μέντοι τῆς ἐμῆς οὐκ ἀξία (777-778), and later suggesting that the rumour which, even after reassurance from Polybus and Merope, ὅμως δ' | ἔκνιζέ μ' ἀεὶ (785-786) need not have bothered him as much as it did. Later in the same speech, however, much of Oedipus' critical distance disappears; when he says that he learned ἄλλα δ' ἀθλίω | καὶ δεινὰ καὶ δύστηνα (789-790), he describes the oracle as it appeared to him at the time and still appears to him many years later. By the time he describes the killing of Laius, Oedipus has shifted into the present tense, collapsing the distinction between who he is now and who he was before he came to Thebes.¹²⁶

As Sophoclean characters remember the events of the past and the mental and emotional states in which they experienced those past events, then, they interact with their memories in a variety of ways. On the one hand, characters—whether deliberately or not—shape their own memories, and many of the accounts of the past which are delivered throughout the plays can be seen to shift as characters look at prior events from new angles, as when Philoctetes describes his abandonment before and after learning about the deception. On the other hand, how characters remember the past can be indicative of underlying differences in personality; while Heracles, like Deianeira, speaks a number of times about his past experiences, he, unlike his wife, says almost nothing about his remembered emotions and comments on his past perceptions only when he explains his initial interpretation of the prophecy (1171). In this way, memories of the past can be

¹²⁵ Gregory 1995:141 sees Oedipus particularly distancing himself from Polybus and Merope.

¹²⁶ Segal 2001:90 comments on the vividness of Oedipus' narration of the killing.

important both in the development of individual characters and their interactions with each other. As Oedipus looks back on his expulsion from Thebes and tells his story to a series of different audiences, he refines both his position on his own past behaviour and his relationship with the various members of his family who have played a part in the events of his story. By the time he arrives at Colonus, Oedipus, like many other Sophoclean characters, is defined not only by his personal experiences, but also by the particular ways in which he remembers and formulates those experiences.

CHAPTER 4 – TEMPORAL INTERACTIONS: HABIT AND CHANGE

Ajax begins his so-called Deception Speech with the statement, ‘Long and measureless time brings forth all hidden things and hides them away once they have appeared’ (646-647). When Theseus asks the aged Oedipus how conflict could ever develop between Athens and Thebes, Oedipus replies in a similar vein, telling him, ‘Dearest child of Aegeus, only for the gods is there neither old age nor death; all-powerful time washes away all the rest’ (*OC* 607-609). These two comments about the power of time come from two very different Sophoclean heroes, both of whom have undergone drastic changes in fortune. Change, for Oedipus, can be either good or bad; as of the middle of *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus is a wandering beggar who was once a king and is now hoping for his fortunes to change once again so that he may obtain the protection of Theseus and, in turn, confer the protection of his tomb upon those who have received his supplication.¹ Ajax, on the other hand, has only one perspective on change; once one of the great heroes of the Greek army at Troy, he has now, in his madness, failed to revenge himself upon his former allies for the dishonour he suffered at their hands.

Although both Ajax and Oedipus speak eloquently about time as an unavoidable part of human existence, Sophoclean heroes are not, as a general rule, known for dealing well with the pressure to change, and their intractability is frequently discussed, not only by critics, but also by the other characters with whom they interact.² Antigone is criticized by Creon for her refusal to bend in the face of authority (*Ant.* 473-478)—much as Creon is later criticized by Haemon (712-717)—while Neoptolemus interprets Philoctetes’ refusal to go to Troy to be cured as a sign that he has grown savage in his years on Lemnos (*Phil.*

¹ Burian 1974:408 notes that Oedipus’ change from beggar to hero happens before the eyes of the audience.

² On the stubbornness of the Sophoclean hero, see most influentially Knox 1964, but also Whitman 1951 and Kirkwood 1958; Winnington-Ingram 1980 and Blundell 1989 both also address the issue of heroic intractability in various ways.

1321-1323).³ Even when characters admit to the need for change, moreover, their ways of reacting to this necessity vary considerably.⁴ Ajax himself, for example, has a particular reputation for rigidity, even for a Sophoclean hero; his refusal to yield is discussed in one way or another by every other figure in his tragedy, and one influential scholarly reading of his character suggests that Ajax, as the last of the traditional, Achillean heroes, has been rendered obsolete by the growing influence of persuasive speakers like Odysseus.⁵ His suicide, according to this view, constitutes a final refusal to adapt to a world in which even he would be forced in time to learn moderation.⁶

The problems faced by Sophoclean characters are often of long duration, moreover, and extended suffering often acts upon the minds of characters in important ways.⁷ In particular, as they try to balance the often conflicting demands placed upon them by their personal circumstances over an extended period of time, Sophoclean figures often develop idiosyncratic ways not only of interpreting those demands, but also of interacting with the passage of time.⁸ Individual ways of interacting with the passage of time can manifest themselves in both word and action; characters can over time become entrenched in certain habitual patterns of behaviour or thought, and, at the same time, characters can also be defined in part by how they see themselves moving through time.⁹ While some characters, like Odysseus in *Philoctetes*, move purposefully towards their goals, looking beyond present difficulties in the interest of future gains, other characters, like Ajax or like Heracles in *Trachiniae*, fight against the forward motion of time by

³ Griffith *ad* 712-718 comments on the differences in tone between the two passages in *Antigone*; Kyriakou 2012:150-151 and Schein 2013:26 comment on the savagery of Philoctetes' refusal to yield.

⁴ de Romilly 1968:103 comments on the fact that most of the characters who comment on the need for change over time have difficulty following their own advice.

⁵ See, e.g., Knox 1961:20-21; Rosenmeyer 1963:171-172. Winnington-Ingram 1980:19 argues that Ajax 'carries the implications of the heroic code to the extreme possible point, as no one in Homer, and perhaps no one in real life, ever did'.

⁶ Rosenmeyer 1963:176 argues that Ajax 'destroys himself in his heroic stand against time'. See also Golder 1990:21-22.

⁷ Hutchinson 1999:48 notes the frequent 'portrayal of imperfective suffering' in Sophoclean tragedy.

⁸ de Romilly 1968:111 comments that time in Sophocles is 'an internal and psychological experience'.

⁹ Hutchinson 1999:48.

remaining fixated on past events. Still others, like Deianeira and Philoctetes, exist in a kind of temporal limbo, in which they remain fixed in an undifferentiated present, from which they can only watch as time moves forward for the rest of the world.

The various kinds of temporal behaviour—their habits, their thought patterns, the personal trajectories along which they move through time—exhibited by Sophoclean characters constitute, on the one hand, interactions between characters and their perceptions of the passage of time; characters perceive themselves to be acted upon in various ways by the passage of time, and they resist, develop coping strategies, or yield accordingly.¹⁰ On the other hand, temporal behaviours also provide a locus for various kinds of interactions between characters. Most obviously, Sophoclean figures frequently describe each other—often, though not always critically—in terms of their typical or habitual behaviour. More generally, although characters rarely comment explicitly on this type of interaction, opposing temporal mindsets can indicate major differences in perspective between characters, and can, in turn, lead to difficulties—and sometimes total breakdowns—in communication between those characters. As characters with different temporal behaviours try to interact with each other, their often strained personal interactions shed light on the ways in which characters can be defined by their ways of interacting with the passage of time.

THINKING ABOUT TIME, IN AND OUT OF SOPHOCLES

Time in Greek literature can be handled in various ways; like many abstract nouns, sometimes ‘time’ is treated as a purely abstract concept, but often it is—at least to a degree—personified. In her study of the role of time in Greek tragedy, de Romilly argues

¹⁰ de Romilly 1968:87 argues that according to Sophocles’ worldview, ‘the misery of man comes from the mutability of things, and his greatness comes from the way in which he answers it’.

that the common tragic view of a personified time is emblematic of a development in Greek thought; although χρόνος is never the subject of a sentence in Homer, it receives a degree of personification in Pindar, where it is often the subject of verbs indicating movement.¹¹ While the Pindaric semi-personification of χρόνος as something that moves forward is retained in tragedy, tragic time can also be more vividly personified as something which lives with mortals and brings about change in their lives. It is to this personified time that the chorus in *Electra* refer when they say, χρόνος γὰρ εὐμαρῆς θεός (*El.* 178), and Oedipus mentions a similarly active, if less explicitly personified, time when he lists χῶ χρόνος ξυστῶν | μακρός as one of the things that has taught him endurance (*OC* 7-8). When they speak about the passage of time, tragic characters and choruses can be seen to engage in different ways with the status of time itself.

The extent to which χρόνος is personified has important implications for how people interact with time and its passage. A personified time, most importantly, is an active force; the deified time mentioned by the chorus in *Electra* does things to people, and people must respond accordingly.¹² The deification of time, however, is only partial; time is not, it seems, the kind of god one can pray to with any hope of intervention or appeasement.¹³ While this may seem an obvious point, it nonetheless matters in terms of human interactions with time: time can act upon people, and it does act upon all people, but people cannot act upon time. As Oedipus says to Theseus and as Ajax says to Tecmessa and the chorus, the passage of time is both unavoidable and, as far as mortals are concerned, even-handed. Human interactions with the passage of time must therefore

¹¹ de Romilly 1968:34-42. On time in Pindar, see also Gerber 1962 and Vivante 1972; Pavlou 2011 discusses the relationship between past and present in Pindar's cult songs.

¹² Rosenmeyer 1963:159 comments on time in tragedy as an active force.

¹³ de Romilly 1968:55, on tragic passages, including *El.* 179, which seem to be concerned with a deified time, notes, 'They give to time a semidivine status. They do not really suggest the image of a person, with a psychology of his own and features of his own'.

be a matter not of action but of reaction to changing circumstances of which mortals have no control.¹⁴

In this way, although Oedipus can credit time with having taught him good sense and the chorus can promise Electra that time will ease her present troubles, the potentially good effects of time are not the result of a specifically benign agenda, but are instead only one possible outcome of a general tendency of time to bring about change, both good and bad. In fact, when time is treated at length in Sophocles, in the speeches of Ajax and Oedipus, the focus is as much on the unavoidability of change as it is on the specific power of time in bringing about that change.¹⁵ Easterling notes that ‘time is a tragic force’ insofar as an awareness of the passage of time necessitates an awareness of ‘the inevitability of change and death’.¹⁶ Such a view of time—whether or not χρόνος is explicitly mentioned—underlies a number of Sophoclean comments about human fate, including the proverb with which Deianeira begins her prologue speech in *Trachiniae*. Deianeira, however, cites the proverb only to refute it in her own case, revealing an attitude towards fate and contingency which is not unusual among Sophoclean characters. However much Ajax, Oedipus, and most tragic choruses may acknowledge the inescapable power of time, Sophoclean heroes often seem to respond to the possibility of change by digging in their heels and insisting, one way or another, that their own case is different.¹⁷

Discussions of time in tragedy have for the most part either focused on the treatment of time in tragic narrative or made a broad distinction between time as it applies

¹⁴ Knox 1964:25-26 notes the frequency with which other Sophoclean figures express the hope that the heroes of their respective plays will learn over time to moderate their behaviour.

¹⁵ Heath 1987:185-186 on *Ajax* 646, followed by Finglass *ad* 646-647.

¹⁶ Easterling 2004:153.

¹⁷ Knox 1964:27 argues, ‘Time and its imperative of change are in fact precisely what the Sophoclean hero defies.’

to tragic heroes and time as it applies to the rest of the world.¹⁸ Faced with, on the one hand, the inevitability of change, and, on the other, a profound difficulty accepting that change, however, individual Sophoclean figures interact with the passage of time in different ways. The temporal behaviours which they display vary in their level of purpose; when Deianeira expresses doubt about the likelihood of change in her own life, for example, her scepticism does not imply an active resistance to progress. Although she has spent most of her life in a state of constant waiting and fearing, this suspension of her personal trajectory is, as she expresses it, something which she would change if she could.¹⁹ Other characters are more directly resistant to change, but their resistance too takes different forms. Electra's refusal to forget Agamemnon manifests itself in habitual action; both her continued mourning and her regular interactions with those around her are part of a general inability to move on. Ajax, on the other hand, responds to his changed status first by attempting to kill the Greek leaders and then by committing suicide—both actions which, if successful, can only be performed once. These different reactions are character points; although Deianeira, Electra, and Ajax might agree that, for the rest of the world, time continues without interruption, their responses in the face of change suggest very different interactions with the world at large.²⁰

Despite the fact that their notorious difficulty in coping with change is one of the traits which sets Sophoclean heroes apart from the rest of humanity, the behaviours which Sophoclean characters exhibit as they interact with the passage of time are often similar to behaviours exhibited by more ordinary people under analogous circumstances.²¹ Electra's

¹⁸ Goward 1999:21-37 discusses the specifically narrative aspects time in tragedy; Lowe 2000:164-169 discusses the flow of tragic time more generally. Knox 1961 and 1964, Rosenmeyer 1963, and Golder 1990 discuss slightly different versions of 'heroic time'.

¹⁹ Hutchinson 1999:51 notes that Deianeira's waiting and suffering are 'imposed on her by circumstance'.

²⁰ Rosenmeyer 1963:161-162 draws a distinction between 'the popular, the non-heroic perspective' on time and the perspective held by Ajax.

²¹ Easterling 2004:151 notes the tendency of drama to represent 'the patterns of behavior that are observed as normal and meaningful in a particular culture'.

habitual mourning of her father, as she describes it to her sister and the chorus, is in many ways similar to the kinds of compulsive behaviours and repetitive cycles of thought which can develop when people are trapped in certain situation for an extended period of time.²² Similarly, Deianeira's reluctance, after years of disappointed hopes, to consider taking decisive action to bring about change in her own life suggests a mental state which is common in people whose goals have been repeatedly frustrated.²³ Although the versions of these behaviours exhibited by most Sophoclean characters are extreme, and although the circumstances which inspire them are often outside the realm of normal human experience, the behaviours themselves are nonetheless likely to be familiar to the audience. This level of familiarity encourages speculation; as they see familiar behaviours played out onstage, and, in particular, as these behaviours are discussed by figures in the play, the audience are encouraged to consider the mental states which might lead to such behaviours and the personalities which might be most susceptible to them.

In this chapter, I will be looking at a number of different behaviours displayed by Sophoclean characters as they interact with the passage of time and at what those behaviours reveal about the characters who exhibit them. As I discuss Sophoclean characters in terms of their habitual actions and the trajectories along which they see themselves moving through time, I will be drawing upon some recent psychological research into such phenomena, not with a view towards diagnosing Sophoclean characters, but instead with a view towards drawing out the dimension which characters gain when the audience consider—as I suggest that they are encouraged to do—the reasons for their

²² On the link between context and habit formation, see Ouellette and Wood 1998:55; on the tendency of some people to become trapped in cycles of thinking about their own mental state, see Nolen-Hoeksema 1991:571, Teasdale and Barnard 1993:180-181.

²³ Gilbert 1992:374 and Keedwell 2000:65, 93 discuss the gradual development of feelings of hopelessness.

particular interactions with the passage of time.²⁴ After examining these types of temporal behaviour separately, as they occur across the tragedies of Sophocles, I will then go on to look at how multiple types of temporal behaviour and idiosyncratic attitudes towards the passage of time shape the key figures in *Electra* and influence the interactions between those figures. In the final section of this chapter, I will return briefly to the idea of resistance to change in order to consider what exactly change looks like when it happens to Sophoclean characters.

REPETITIVE ACTION AND INTERACTION

Many characters in Sophocles behave, or are expected to behave, in predictable ways. Their actions are predictable partially because they are the actions dictated by myth or appropriate to characters in a given social role—Heracles must perform his labours, Creon and Oedipus must rule over Thebes—but they are predictable also because they are shown or said to be repeated over time.²⁵ As of the beginnings of their respective plays, *Electra*, *Ajax*, and *Heracles* all have established patterns of behaviour, as becomes clear from comments made by other characters; when Tecmessa describes *Ajax*'s madness, she compares his recent actions to his normal behaviour, while the chorus, *Chrysothemis*, and *Clytemnestra* all comment on the duration and consistency of *Electra*'s mourning.²⁶ As characters speak about their own habits and those of others, it becomes increasingly clear that repeated actions are an important way for characters to situate themselves in their

²⁴ The interest in individual perceptions of time shown by Hutchinson 1999 has much in common with my approach here, but Hutchinson does not go into detail about what the temporal perspectives of Sophoclean characters tell the audience about those characters.

²⁵ On the limitations imposed by myth, see Chapter 1 above. Roberts 2005:140-141 notes the ability of tragic prologues to alert the audience to characteristic patterns of behaviour.

²⁶ Murnaghan 1989:180 notes that *Athena* and *Odysseus* also comment on *Ajax*'s departure from his usual patterns of behaviour. On the immediate focus on *Electra*'s ongoing behaviour, see Kitzinger 1990:305-306 and Hutchinson 1999:51-54.

dramatic context. What Sophoclean characters always do, that is, is a vital part of who they are.

In the non-dramatic world, habits develop in a variety of ways, and two aspects of habit-formation will be particularly relevant to my discussion of the habitual behaviours of Sophoclean characters. The first important aspect for my purposes is the tendency for habits to become automatic over time. In their early stages, habits are often intentional, inasmuch as many of the behaviours which eventually become habitual are initially repeated because they contribute—or are thought to contribute—to the achievement of various goals.²⁷ Once a habit has been firmly established, however, it becomes largely automatic; while a habit, such as getting up at a certain time in the morning, may start out as a consciously identified means to an end, such as getting to work on time, after a certain point one simply gets up at a consistent time because that is what one has done in the past.²⁸ Individuals, however, are not always aware of the extent to which their habits have become automatic; even when a habitual behaviour can be demonstrated to be almost completely automatic, people still tend to associate that behaviour with the goal which led to the habit.²⁹ When Electra says that she is mourning her father so as not to be one of the *νήπιαι* who forget their slain parents (145-146), it is also clear even this early in the play that she is mourning Agamemnon partially because mourning Agamemnon is what she has done for years.

The other relevant feature of habit-formation is the close connection between habitual behaviour and consistency of context. It is not just the repetition of a given action which leads to the formation of a habit, but also, more specifically, the repetition of that action in a given context.³⁰ A variety of different kinds of context can be associated with a

²⁷ Neal *et al* 2012:495 note the importance of goals in the initial formation of habits.

²⁸ Ouellette and Wood 1998:56.

²⁹ Neal *et al* 2012:495, 497.

³⁰ Ouellette and Wood 1998:55; Neal *et al* 2012:492.

behaviour that eventually becomes a habit; some habitual behaviours are typically repeated in the same physical location, while others are repeated with the same group of people or as part of the same sequence of actions.³¹ Over time, the typical context of the habit grows to be in itself sufficient to trigger the habitual behaviour. Related to this idea of a habit as a standardized response to a context is the idea of a ‘script’ which specifies the sequence of actions that typically take place within a stereotyped situation. Even though particular situations covered by a script may differ from each other in various ways, having an internalized script for situations of the same general type allows people to make sense of any given version of the situation.³² Both consistency of context and the recurrence of similar situations are part of the experience of many Sophoclean figures; as Philoctetes tells Neoptolemus about the sailors who have arrived occasionally during his years at Lemnos (305-313), his words suggest that he has an established pattern for reacting to the appearance of strangers.

In everyday life, we can become aware of people’s habits over an extended period of time; sometimes people speak about their own habits or those of others, but often we classify a behaviour as a habit only after seeing someone perform that behaviour repeatedly under similar circumstances. Greek tragedy represents only a short segment of its characters’ lives, and, as such, the audience’s awareness of characters’ habitual actions develops differently; most often, the audience become aware that a character is engaging in a habitual action because another character comments on the fact that the action is typical of the character who performed it.³³ Interactions between Sophoclean characters are shaped by the habitual actions of the characters involved, inasmuch as characters both frequently describe each other in terms of their habitual behaviour and also temper their

³¹ Wood and Neal 2007:844.

³² Schank and Abelson 1977:40-41.

³³ Aristotle (*Poetics* 1449b) comments that the events of a tragedy are typically limited to ‘one revolution of the sun’. Lowe 2000:164-165 comments on the limitations caused both by the restricted scope of tragic time and by the fact that tragic time ‘runs at a fixedly literal rate’ (164).

behaviour towards each other on the basis of their perceived habits. At the same time, characters interact with their own habitual behaviour when they speak about themselves in terms of what they always do, commenting both on the extent to which they choose their behaviour and the extent to which that behaviour is linked to their conceptions of their own identity.

In Sophocles, as in the non-dramatic world, being familiar with a character implies a degree of familiarity with that character's typical behaviours, and knowledge of the behaviours which a character has exhibited on a regular basis in the past often guides the interactions in which that character can be expected to be involved in the future.³⁴ In this way, the encounter between Creon and Teiresias in *Antigone* is shaped in large part by Creon's shifting assessments of the seer's typical behaviour; when Teiresias enters, Creon describes him as someone who has always been of service to the city in the past, but, as it becomes increasingly clear that Teiresias' current advice will go against Creon's inclinations, Creon revises his account of both the habitual behaviour of Teiresias and that of seers in general.³⁵ As soon as Teiresias offers a piece of advice which seems to be contrary to Creon's personal interests, that is, Creon integrates his current advice into a previously unmentioned habit of corruption and self-serving behaviour on the part of Teiresias.

In the first part of his encounter with Teiresias, Creon does not directly connect Teiresias' past behaviours with the seer's supposed habits, but he does seem to count his own previous interactions with Teiresias as proof that whatever Teiresias is about to say will be trustworthy. In this initial exchange, Creon focuses as much on his own past reactions to Teiresias as on Teiresias' actual behaviour; when Teiresias suggests that he

³⁴ Ouellette and Wood 1998:54 comment on the usefulness of knowing about someone's past behaviour for predicting that person's likely future behaviour.

³⁵ Blundell 1989:131 suggests that the audience are meant to see Creon's initial statement about Teiresias' past behaviour as true.

ought to listen (992), Creon replies with a comment about his own past acceptance of the seer's advice, οὐκ οὐν πάρος γε σῆς ἀπειστάτων φρενός (993).³⁶ The seer's reply and Creon's next line are both similarly focused on what Creon has gained from his past interactions with Teiresias; Teiresias tells Creon, τοιγὰρ δι' ὀρθῆς τήνδ' ἐναυκλήρεις πόλιν (994), and Creon admits that he can indeed bear witness to the benefits brought by Teiresias.³⁷ Neither Teiresias nor Creon offers any detail about their past interactions, but their imperfect verbs suggest a pattern in their past interactions.³⁸ This sense that the two men are accustomed to cooperating with each other on issues of great importance to the city provides the background for Creon's current decision to hear what Teiresias has to say.

As soon as Teiresias has reported on the sinister omens throughout the city (1001-1022) and urged Creon to allow the burial of the corpse (1029-1030), Creon begins to paint a very different picture of Teiresias' habitual behaviour. He begins by accusing Teiresias of trying to harm him in the present instance (1033-1035), but quickly moves on to claim that Teiresias' current prophecy is only the latest piece of unfavourable advice from the seer. After saying, elliptically, that he is being worked against by Teiresias and his prophecy (1034-1035), Creon continues, τῶν δ' ὑπαὶ γένους | ἐξημπόλημαι κάκπεφόρτισμαι πάλαι (1035-1036). As in the earlier exchange in which he was establishing Teiresias' credibility, Creon says nothing about the particular circumstances under which he has previously been betrayed by prophets; it is enough for him to claim that there is a precedent for what he sees as Teiresias' treacherous conduct. As Creon continues with his accusations against the seer, he begins to build Teiresias' actions into a

³⁶ Brown *ad* 993-995 comments, 'these lines emphasise that Creon is not habitually impious or sceptical'.

³⁷ Blundell 1989:131.

³⁸ Griffith *ad* 993-995 notes that 'the imperf. tenses imply long-term policy-making', but also notes that Teiresias' claim at 1058 'suggests a specific event', although it is unclear what that event might be. On the possibility that 995 refers to the story of the sacrifice of Megareus, Brown *ad* 993-995 remarks, 'one would not expect Creon to feel very grateful for advice leading to the death of his son'.

pattern of self-serving behaviour. Only at the beginning of the scene, Teiresias was someone with a history of acting for the good of the city, but Creon is now willing to cast him as a member of a group whose habitual behaviour serves no one's interests but their own, suggesting that Teiresias cannot now be anything but harmful.³⁹

Although Creon famously changes his mind over the course of the play, he does not acknowledge the possibility of such change before the moment when he gives in after the departure of Teiresias, and, in the scene with the seer, he displays a related desire to attribute consistent behaviour to others.⁴⁰ Creon assumes that Teiresias' current actions—whether good or bad—are part of a general pattern of behaviour, and he uses what he takes to be Teiresias' habitual behaviour in order to establish the seer's moral character.⁴¹ Creon's assessment of Teiresias' past behaviour changes violently over the course of the scene, and, although the audience expect that Teiresias' current prophecy will be proven right, the scene itself provides no information about the seer's reliability on previous occasions.⁴² On the matter of Teiresias' habitual behaviour in the city, it is Creon's words against those of Teiresias—and his own at the beginning of the scene. Although he provides no specific evidence for either of his assessments of the seer, Creon's interaction with Teiresias throughout the scene is dictated by what he identifies as Teiresias' usual habits; Creon is willing to hear advice offered by a Teiresias who is habitually beneficial to the city, but, once Creon decides that Teiresias is now and always has been corrupt, he tries to cut off all further interaction with the seer.

³⁹ Blundell 1989:131 comments on Creon's tendency immediately to assume the worst of whoever questions him, regardless of the questioner's rank.

⁴⁰ On Creon's changes of mind, see, e.g., Knox 1964: 72-75, Carter 2012:111-114; Roisman 1996:35 notes that Creon's changes of mind happen when his adversaries are offstage.

⁴¹ Winnington-Ingram 1980:126 notes that Creon accuses Teiresias of working for profit because self-interest is 'a level of motivation within his comprehension'.

⁴² Griffith *ad* 1033-1047 comments that 'in tragedy Teiresias will not err (any more than the Soothsayer in *Julius Caesar*, or the ghost of Hamlet Sr), and the man who shouts insults at him must be doomed'.

In *Ajax*, the habitual action of the hero likewise emerges through the assessments of others. Throughout the play, other characters speak about who Ajax is or was in terms of what he has always done. Both before and after Ajax's death, the hero's usual behaviour is a contentious issue; the initial enmity between Ajax and the Greek leaders is framed in terms of the behaviour that was typical of Ajax before the play began, and, after his death, the debate over his culpability hinges to some extent on the question of whether or not his attempt on the lives of Odysseus and the Atreidae aligns with his other contributions to the Greek cause at Troy.⁴³ As is the case with Teiresias' habitual behaviour in *Antigone*, Ajax's habits can be adapted for rhetorical purposes; Ajax's habitual behaviour, however, is described from a variety of different angles, and these different depictions of the hero's usual behaviour interact with each other in order to provide the audience with a complex perspective on Ajax's place among the Greeks.

Ajax begins with a focus on a single action which has recently been performed by Ajax—that is, the slaughter of the livestock which the hero believed to be the Greek leaders—and with the implications of that action for Ajax's character.⁴⁴ Ajax's view of his own situation in the army has recently changed—he has been denied the arms of Achilles and interprets this decision as a major blow to his status—but he nonetheless has an extensive prior history of interaction with the Greek leaders, which is debated extensively over the course of the play.⁴⁵ Those who support Ajax argue that his slaughter of the livestock was anomalous, while those who are against him try to integrate the attack on the livestock into an ongoing pattern of behaviour, arguing that, rather than representing a departure from his usual habits, the attack was the sort of thing one might

⁴³ See Rosenmeyer 1963:175 on Athena's role in acquainting the audience with Ajax's typical behaviour. Murnaghan 1989:171 discusses the perspectives on Ajax and his behaviour offered by others after his death.

⁴⁴ Reinhardt 1979:9 comments on the fact that *Ajax*, in beginning after the slaughter of the livestock, 'plunges right into the middle of the catastrophe, or its consequences'.

⁴⁵ Blundell 1989:69-70 comments on Ajax's understanding of his changed interactions with the Greeks.

expect from a figure like Ajax.⁴⁶ Both Ajax's friends and Ajax's enemies tend to speak about his habitual behaviour in general terms, with the hero's supporters suggesting that his history of noble deeds should outweigh his final deluded attack on his former allies, and with his enemies suggesting—as Creon does about Teiresias—that Ajax has been a danger to the Greek force all along.

The question of Ajax's usual behaviour first arises in the prologue, as Athena reminds Odysseus of his established enmity with Ajax, and it becomes more pressing in the *parodos* and the following scene with the chorus and Tecmessa.⁴⁷ Ajax's allies have good reason to draw a stark distinction between Ajax mad and Ajax sane; when the chorus comment,

οὔποτε γὰρ φρενόθεν γ' ἐπ' ἀριστερά,
παῖ Τελαμῶνος, ἔβας
τόσσον ἐν ποίμναις πίτνων (182-184),

they distance Ajax from his actions, and they later seem to ignore altogether the possibility that the Ajax they know could have done the deeds of which he is accused (196-199).⁴⁸ A little later, when Tecmessa first comes outside, the chorus grant her the authority to explain what has happened, saying οὐκ ἂν ἄιδρις ὑπέιποις (213). Although this comment may mean simply that Tecmessa is likely to have witnessed Ajax's recent behaviour, the chorus seem also to credit her with reliable knowledge of Ajax's usual character. In light of the rumours which are flying around the camp, Tecmessa's familiarity with Ajax's usual habits is important, and the chorus suggest that it is those who are nearest and dearest to Ajax who have the best chance of making sense of his more recent behaviour.

⁴⁶ Athena is to some extent an exception to this pattern, insofar as she points out Ajax's past good sense to Odysseus at 119-120, on which see Cairns 2006:101.

⁴⁷ Winnington-Ingram 1980:24 draws attention to the need for those around Ajax to understand his behaviour, and notes, 'Ajax's problem is a social problem, his situation is—or should be—social',

⁴⁸ Winnington-Ingram 1980:21-22. Burian 2012:73 suggests that the chorus 'acknowledge the truth of the rumour', even as they try to deny the possibility of Ajax's madness.

In Tecmessa's account, her interpretation of Ajax's actions is juxtaposed with what she has seen of his own growing awareness of what he is doing. On the one hand, the mad Ajax is not entirely unlike himself; Tecmessa says that, when asked where he might be going with his sword in the middle of the night, ὁ δ' εἶπε πρὸς με βαί', ἀεὶ δ' ὑμνούμενα (292), and urged her to be silent. Although Tecmessa may mean that Ajax replied with a commonplace expression, she also suggests that such words are more or less characteristic of Ajax, and her account of her own response—κἀγὼ μαθοῦσ' ἔληξ' (294)—likewise suggests that his behaviour was not unusual enough to merit much suspicion.⁴⁹ At the same time, when Tecmessa describes Ajax κακὰ δεινάζων ῥήμαθ', ἅ δαίμων | κούδεις ἀνδρῶν ἐδίδαξαν (243-244), she suggests that his mind has undergone some sort of drastic change. This sense that things are no longer normal grows more intense as she begins to describe Ajax's grief on realizing what he has done; he responds to her account, as she tells the chorus, with οἰμωγὰς λυγράς, | ἅς οὔποτ' αὐτοῦ πρόσθεν εἰσήκουσ' ἐγὼ (317-318).⁵⁰ She contrasts Ajax's new cries with his past habits; on all previous occasions, says Tecmessa, πρὸς γὰρ κακοῦ τε καὶ βαρυψύχου γόους | τοιούσδ' αἰεί ποτ' ἀνδρὸς ἐξηγεῖτ' ἔχειν (319-320), but would instead express his grief ἀψόφητος ὀξέων κωκυμάτων (321). Even beyond Ajax's deluded attack on the livestock, throughout which some of his typical behaviours remained, Ajax's departures from his usual speech patterns suggest to Tecmessa the damage done by his madness.⁵¹

Tecmessa and the chorus, whose wellbeing is tied up with Ajax's, focus on the extent to which Ajax's changed circumstances—both his loss of the arms and his

⁴⁹ Garvie *ad* 292-293; Finglass *ad* 292 comments, 'ὑμνέω implies frequent repetition (by people in general, and Ajax in particular)'.

⁵⁰ Finglass *ad* 317-318 comments on 'the ominous nature of unprecedented behaviour' and compares Tecmessa's description to Deianeira's remark at *Trach.* 157-158.

⁵¹ See Hesk 2003:56 on the importance of Ajax's 'relationship to human language and communication'.

delusion—have led him to abandon his former habitual actions.⁵² In the debate over Ajax’s body, on the other hand, his enemies present him as a character who habitually engaged in destructive behaviour. When he arrives, Menelaus focuses at first on the recent attempt on his life, explaining his initial claim that the Greeks found Ajax to be ἐχθίω Φρυγῶν (1054) with an account of the attack against the livestock (1055-1061). Later in the same speech, however, when Menelaus speaks about how Ajax was accustomed to behave before the attack, he tells Teucer, οὐ γὰρ ἔσθ’ ὄπου | λόγων ἀκοῦσαι ζῶν ποτ’ ἠθέλησ’ ἐμῶν (1069-1070). When Teucer asks whether Ajax was ever really Menelaus’ enemy, Menelaus replies, μισοῦντ’ ἐμίσει· καὶ οὐ τοῦτ’ ἠπίστασο (1134), presenting Ajax’s hatred as ongoing and habitual.⁵³ Agamemnon likewise highlights Ajax’s supposed history of hostile behaviour when he questions Odysseus’ willingness to support the burial.⁵⁴ A few lines after cautioning Odysseus, μέμνησ’ ὀποίω φωτὶ τὴν χάριν δίδως (1354), Agamemnon comments, τοιοῖδε μέντοι φῶτες οὐμπληκτοὶ βροτῶν (1358), suggesting that Ajax’s usual behaviour towards the Greeks—a key factor in determining what sort of man he was—was enough to qualify him as dangerously unstable.⁵⁵

Throughout the play, Ajax’s usual behaviour is used by others to support implicit or explicit claims about his personal qualities. Ajax’s allies and, eventually, Odysseus argue that his character ought to be defined by his previous courageous behaviour—when Agamemnon questions Ajax’s value to the army, Teucer replies with a catalogue of Ajax’s noble deeds (1273-1289)—and they draw attention to his more recent behaviour mostly

⁵² Burian 2012:73 draws attention both to the extent to which the chorus’s sense of themselves depends on Ajax and to the extent to which this dependence makes it difficult for them to accept his madness.

⁵³ Cairns 2006:116 notes that, while Menelaus can be assumed to be biased against Ajax, his assessment of Ajax’s past behaviour ‘none the less constitutes an accurate assessment of the latter’s disregard of his obligations to his fellow soldiers’.

⁵⁴ Finglass 2012:69.

⁵⁵ Finglass *ad* 1358 lays out the reasons that Agamemnon must be referring to Ajax and not Odysseus here.

insofar as it represents a departure from the norm.⁵⁶ The Atreidae, however, are eager to suggest both that Ajax's recent attack on the Greek leaders was entirely consistent with his previous behaviour and that the delusion which led to the attack was of a piece with Ajax's habitual lack of self-control.⁵⁷ Except for the recent attack against the Greek leaders and Teucer's list of his brother's exploits, neither Ajax's friends nor his enemies have much to say about specific incidents. Instead, they make broad statements about Ajax's typical actions, moving easily between statements about what he used to do and assessments about what he used to be.

Ajax's habitual actions are, with very few exceptions, the rhetorical property of other characters in the play; although Ajax makes a few references to his prior exploits, he does not for the most part generalize about how he always used to behave. Moreover, although Ajax's assessment of his past interactions with the rest of the Greek army is more or less consistent with the assessments of his allies, the audience do not see him exhibiting any of the habitual actions—either good or bad—with which he is credited, except perhaps when he appears in the prologue under Athena's delusion.⁵⁸ Some Sophoclean characters whose behaviour is a subject of frequent comment, however, speak extensively about their own usual behaviour, and when they do, their comments likewise serve a rhetorical purpose. In speaking about their own habits, characters can make various points both about their current circumstances and about how they can be expected to behave in the immediate future. In *Trachiniae*, Heracles' actions—both specific and habitual—are mentioned by various characters from the prologue onwards; the focus on Heracles before his arrival by other figures is in some ways similar to the nearly constant focus on the hero

⁵⁶ Murnaghan 1989:184 draws attention to the fact that the final, favourable judgement of Ajax looks back to him as he was before the play began.

⁵⁷ Blundell 1989:91 suggests that Menelaus' assessment of some of Ajax's faults is accurate, 'But the content of Menelaus' words is vitiated by their ugly authoritarian tone'.

⁵⁸ Ajax and his allies are focused on his past greatness, on which see, e.g., Winnington-Ingram 1980:14-15, but Cairns 2006:99 notes, 'It is a premise of Sophocles' *Ajax* that the eponymous character begins the play a loser'.

on the part of most other characters in *Ajax*.⁵⁹ When Heracles finally enters, he speaks as explicitly about his typical behaviour as anyone in the play so far, using his several accounts of his labours both to define his own character and to mourn his own downfall.

By the time Heracles is carried onstage, he is debilitated by the effects of the poisoned robe, and his usual actions are all things of the past. As he complains about his current suffering and blames Deianeira for his downfall, however, he still defines himself by his past deeds; Heracles is accustomed to being someone who performs certain kinds of actions, and he presents himself as the same person even now that his fortunes have shifted and he has lost the power to perform the great deeds which helped to form his identity.⁶⁰ When he begs for someone to put him out of his misery, he justifies his request as part of the debt of gratitude he is owed by the Greeks in general, calling those who are unwilling to come to his aid

Ἕλληνας πάντων ἀδικώτατοι ἄνδρες, οἷς δὴ
πολλὰ μὲν ἐν πόντῳ, κατὰ τε θρῆνα πάντα καθάρων,
ὠλεκόμαν ὁ τάλας (1011-1013).

As Heracles presents the matter, the number and variety of his services contributes to the debt of the Greeks; he deserves their help not because he helped them once, but because he made a habit of his heroic deeds.⁶¹

Later, as he rails against Deianeira, Heracles says more about what he used to do before he received the poisoned robe, but the sheer number of his labours remains an important element in his assessment both of his old prowess and of his current debased situation. Over the course of the speech that begins at 1046, Heracles at three different points comments on the many heroic deeds which he has performed to date (1048-1049,

⁵⁹ McCall 1972:144-145 and Kitzinger 2012:117 discuss the importance of the audience's anticipation of Heracles, as triggered by the speech of Deianeira and the chorus. See also Winnington-Ingram 1980:81-83 and Nooter 2012:63-66 on the ways in which the audience's perception of Heracles before his arrival is mediated through the accounts delivered by other characters.

⁶⁰ Reinhardt 1979:58 comments that Heracles 'is only able to measure the present by the standards of what his life up until that day had appeared to tell him makes sense'.

⁶¹ Heiden 1989:138.

1058-1061, 1089-1102).⁶² By cataloguing his labours repeatedly, Heracles focuses not so much on his specific tasks as on the fact that there were many of them; although he mentions individual labours, no single episode—except for what he identifies as his recent betrayal at the hands of Deianeira—stands out in his account. What matters to Heracles at this point is the fact that, after a lifetime of apparently uninterrupted heroic deeds, Heracles has now been forced to break with his past habits, and can only weep, καὶ τόδ' οὐδ' ἄν εἶς ποτε | τόνδ' ἄνδρα φαίη πρόσθ' ἰδεῖν δεδρακότα (1072-1073). Although he has in the past been accustomed to overcoming incredible challenges, he has now been unexpectedly (τυφλῆς ὑπ' ἄτης, 1104) destroyed by his own wife.

When he refers to his past habitual actions, Heracles builds up a version of his own character which goes beyond what is currently visible onstage.⁶³ As he interacts with the habits which defined him before his downfall, the debilitated Heracles portrays himself as someone accustomed to succeeding in his ventures and, in particular, beating anyone who might challenge him. Just as Tecmessa's account of Ajax's former control over his emotions highlighted the magnitude of his fall, Heracles' description of the man he used to be suggests that his destruction at Deianeira's hands is not just a physical matter.⁶⁴ Now that he has been defeated by a weaker adversary, Heracles has lost an important bit of his identity, insofar as his identity has up until now been wrapped up in his ability to perform heroic labours without fail and thus to interact with the world from a position of dominance.⁶⁵ Heracles' repeated and successful labours, like Ajax's restraint or Odysseus' history of adapting himself to his changing circumstances, constitute a pattern

⁶² Kitzinger 2012:118 comments on Heracles' tendency to make lists, arguing that 'the impulse behind the rhetoric is competitive'.

⁶³ The Heracles who is visible onstage is not entirely different from the Heracles whose actions have been recounted throughout the play; Winnington-Ingram 1980:83 rightly notes that the savagery of Heracles' desire to avenge himself on Deianeira is reminiscent of his earlier reported actions first against Iphitus and then against Lichas.

⁶⁴ Heracles' physical destruction is closely linked to his loss of heroic stature; on Heracles' address to his own limbs, Nooter 2012:76 comments, 'in taking apart his own body for evaluation and glorification, Heracles has also illustrated his undoing'.

⁶⁵ Reinhardt 1979:58 notes that Heracles' 'environment consists of his deeds'.

of behaviour that defines who he is, both as he sees himself and as he is perceived by those around him. Now that he is forced to break this pattern, he must also admit defeat, even before Hyllus has a chance to explain about the connection between the long-dead centaur and the poisoned robe.

TEMPORAL MINDSETS AND PERSONAL TRAJECTORIES

By developing and maintaining habitual behaviours, characters interact implicitly with the passage of time; as Ajax and Heracles spend years under circumstances which call for heroes of their magnitude, they gradually become accustomed to responding to those circumstances with great deeds—or with great arrogance, according to Ajax’s detractors.⁶⁶ Elsewhere in Sophocles, the interactions between characters and the passage of time play out in different ways. As they move through their lives, characters describe themselves as variously active or passive; some present themselves as actively in control of their own experience, while others describe themselves as constantly acted upon by a world which for the most part moves on without them.⁶⁷ This tension between active and passive, which is typically shown to develop over a matter of years, is related to the more general fact that Sophoclean characters move through time in different ways; some look forward to the future, while others find it difficult to escape the past or to look beyond an indefinite, unchanging present.⁶⁸ These different temporal perspectives, like the habitual actions of characters, help to define who they are, and, moreover, they help to shape the

⁶⁶ Murnaghan 1989:172 comments on the different modes which are available for evaluating Ajax and other heroic figures.

⁶⁷ The contrast between Heracles and Deianeira is often framed as a contrast between activity and passivity; on this contrast, see, e.g., McCall 1972:143-145 on Deianeira as she appears at the beginning of the play, and, more broadly, Kitzinger 2012 and Nooter: 2012:63-77.

⁶⁸ Hutchinson 1999:48; at 51-52 Hutchinson comments on the distinction between active and passive in comparing the imperfective states of Electra and Deianeira.

interactions not only between characters and the passage of time, but also between individual characters with different temporal perspectives.

Although there is no single psychological process which accounts for how people perceive themselves moving through time, the temporal mindsets—particularly those which imply a static and unchanging existence—of Sophoclean figures share some characteristics with identifiable psychological phenomena, and these phenomena can provide a useful framework for considering the movement of Sophoclean characters through time. The tendency to dwell upon their own unhappiness and its implications exhibited by Electra, Deianeira, and Philoctetes, for example, resembles the patterns of ruminative thought which are shown by some depressive patients. Most people can get temporarily stuck in ruminative states, but people vary both in their susceptibility to rumination and in their ability to escape from cycles of ruminative thought.⁶⁹ Dwelling on the state of their emotions does not tend to depress experimental subjects who are not already depressed, but ruminative responses to depression have been shown to lead to cycles in which depressive thoughts contribute to the maintenance of a depressed mood, which, in turn, encourages further rumination.⁷⁰ The identification of the exact psychological processes that lead to rumination has a cultural element, but both the fact that rumination is essentially an extreme version of a normal psychological process and its cyclical nature have important implications for Sophoclean characters. Although the chorus express some sympathy for Electra's mourning for her father, they find it difficult to see why she has taken it so far; Electra, in turn, as she comments on the repetitive nature of her behaviour, suggests that her ongoing mourning feeds her cycle of grief.

Connected to the idea of rumination, and also important to the ways in which Sophoclean characters speak about their movement through time, is the possibility of

⁶⁹ Nolen-Hoeksema 1991:571; Teasdale and Barnard 1993:203.

⁷⁰ Teasdale and Barnard 1993:180-181.

moving from a fixation on one particular idea or goal to a widespread sense of hopelessness. People who tend to ruminate also often credit certain goals with disproportionate importance in their overall assessments of their lives; when these goals turn out to be unattainable, people with a tendency to ruminate, rather than giving up or setting new goals, fixate on their own failure to attain the goals to which they have attached such importance.⁷¹ After an extended period of frustration and ruminative thinking, moreover, some people acquire a more general sense of hopelessness which covers not only the specific goals which have already been frustrated but also the possibility of achieving other, future goals. Although they may still be unable to consciously give up on the possibility of achieving their frustrated goals, and although they may still speak about eventually attaining those goals, people who have gradually acquired such a sense of helplessness often eventually stop exerting energy in other areas of their lives.⁷² Thus after years of waiting for Heracles and seeing no change in her life, it does not occur to Deianeira at the beginning of *Trachiniae* that there might be anything she could do, and she has to be reminded by the nurse to send Hyllus in search of news of his father. Although critics have frequently pointed to Deianeira's lack of agency, her hesitancy to act is a natural extension of the mental state in which she has persisted throughout her marriage.⁷³

Sophoclean characters, many of whom spend extended periods of time in situations which either repeat indefinitely or change very little, vary in their tendencies to view themselves as hopeless or as passive figures in their own life. Heracles, who has, prior to his receipt of the poisoned robe, had a lengthy history of successful labours, seems to view himself as an active participant in the events of his own life, and he draws attention to the

⁷¹ Teasdale and Barnard 1993:159, 196.

⁷² Gilbert 1992:374; Keedwell 2008:65, 93.

⁷³ On Deianeira's passivity, see, e.g., McCall 1972:143-145, Lawrence 1978:290; on the need for the nurse's prompting, see Hall 2009:85.

active role which he is accustomed to playing in his lament for his current, uncharacteristic helplessness.⁷⁴ His several lists of heroic deeds, in fact, focus almost entirely on the related facts that the tasks were completed and that he was the one who completed them.⁷⁵ When he begins his last and longest catalogue of labours with an extended address to his own body,

ὧ χέρεις χέρεις,
ὧ νῶτα καὶ στέρν', ὧ φίλοι βραχίονες,
ὑμεῖς ἐκεῖνοι δὴ καθέσταθ' (1089-1091),

the drawn-out list of body parts, ending with ὧ φίλοι βραχίονες, concentrates attention on Heracles' physical connection to the labours which he once performed.⁷⁶ The labours themselves, as he describes them, had no lasting effect on Heracles, and they function mostly as a context for the sense of invincibility which Heracles has recently lost.

Philoctetes, on the other hand, situates himself very differently in relation to the past experiences which dominate many of his speeches. Where Heracles portrays himself as an active force in his own past to such an extent that the events he describes fade from view, Philoctetes, touching only occasionally on the heroic deeds which preceded his abandonment, looks back for the most part on a past in which he is a passive victim.⁷⁷ Rather than concentrating on what he did in the past, Philoctetes focuses instead on what he felt when he realized what had been done to him. Philoctetes' past, as defined by his abandonment, has present consequences, but none of those consequences are in Philoctetes' control. He follows his initial description of what he found when he woke up alone on the island with the comment, ὁ μὲν χρόνος νυν διὰ χρόνου προὔβαινέ μοι (285), suggesting that the passage of time is something which, like his abandonment, has

⁷⁴ Reinhardt 1979:58-59; Heiden 1989:138-139 comments on Heracles' tendency to draw attention to the incongruity of his present sufferings.

⁷⁵ Kitzinger 2012:118.

⁷⁶ Easterling *ad* 1089-1090. See also Kitzinger 2012:119 and Nooter 2012:76.

⁷⁷ The fact that Philoctetes used to be active and must now be passive is a crucial part of his sense of grievance; on the interaction between his pitiable present state and his memory of his past glory, see Chapter 3 above.

happened to him with no involvement on his part.⁷⁸ By the time Neoptolemus arrives, Philoctetes' sense that he has been for years an essentially passive participant in his own life has grown into a more general feeling of hopelessness, and has no reason to expect Neoptolemus to be any different from the other occasional visitors to Lemnos.

The sense of helpless passivity which fills Philoctetes' account of his life on Lemnos has implications for the more obviously temporal aspects of his interaction with the world around him. Although Philoctetes' understanding of the world is shaped by constant reflection on past events, he lives out his life not so much in the past as in a kind of indefinite present, with little possibility of change; his interactions with his memories of past events constantly bring him back to the subject of his present circumstances.⁷⁹ This sense of suspension in an ongoing state with no apparent endpoint is relatively common amongst Sophoclean characters, and, at the beginning of *Trachiniae*, Deianeira exists in a similarly suspended state. Like Philoctetes, she explains her present circumstances in terms of the past events which made them possible; her understanding of her present circumstances interacts with her memories of her courtship and eventual marriage. Even as she traces her troubles to the time before her marriage, however, Deianeira's existence is not entirely backward looking.⁸⁰ In refuting the proverb with which she begins her first speech, Deianeira claims a degree of knowledge about her future: her life has been bad so far and will continue that way until its end.⁸¹ At the same time, the future which Deianeira fears is indistinct; speaking about her current fears for Heracles' safety, she says, *σχεδὸν δ' ἐπίσταμαί τι πῆμ' ἔχοντά νιν* (43), but she cannot explain what sort of πῆμα she thinks he must have suffered.

⁷⁸ Jebb *ad* 285 comments that it is time which moves in Philoctetes' description.

⁷⁹ O'Higgins 191:37 comments on the 'breakdown of barriers between past and present' in the play.

⁸⁰ Hutchinson 1999:48 comments, 'Deianeira's experience is not imperfective simply in its long duration; it is dominated by emotion towards a possible event in the future, by fear of her husband's death'.

⁸¹ Jebb *ad* 4 comments that Deianeira's refutation 'depends less on retrospect than on presentiment'.

Deianeira's existence, as she expresses it in her opening speech, is defined by a mixture of recollected past suffering and indefinite fears for the future. At the intersection between her past and her future is a present about which she has nothing specific to say; she spends night after night in continuous fears, but no specific night or day has any defining feature. Although she is capable of looking both forward and back, all she sees in either direction is more of the same. Her marriage to Heracles—one of the few specific events in her narrative—only marks the division between two different phases of worry, and, after years of continual anxiety, she seems incapable of imagining a future in which this anxiety will come to an end.⁸² Within this version of the present, in which nothing has changed in the past and nothing will change in the future, Deianeira is insulated both from all interaction with the outside world and from the change which is inherent in most human existence.⁸³ Until the Nurse suggests that she send one of her sons in search of news, it seems never to have occurred to her to take any action, even just to find out more about her own situation.⁸⁴ As the Nurse introduces her suggestion, she implies that, left to her own devices, Deianeira would remain indefinitely as the Nurse has seen her many times before, πανδάκρυτ' ὀδύρματα | τὴν Ἡράκλειον ἔξοδον γοωμένην (50-51).

The temporal suspension which marks the experience of characters like Deianeira and Philoctetes is, in fact, less a way of interacting with the passage of time than it is an inability to acknowledge and interact with the changes brought about by time. Characters who, accustomed to powerless inaction, remain in this kind of temporal limbo can be distinguished from other Sophoclean characters who acknowledge the need to move forward and thus interact with the passage of time in very different ways. Philoctetes' mindset, developed as it has been over the course of years of solitude, appears in contrast

⁸² Winnington-Ingram 1980:75-76 comments on how Deianeira's fears lead into each other.

⁸³ The lack of change in Deianeira's own life is particularly striking given that her fears, so far as they are specified, deal with instability; on Deianeira's fear of change, see Heiden 1989:27-29 and Kitzinger 2012:115.

⁸⁴ McCall 1972:143; Hall 2009:85.

to the temporal mindsets of Odysseus and Neoptolemus, both of whom, despite their different attitudes towards the task at hand, depict themselves in the prologue as men of action.⁸⁵ When Odysseus points out in his opening speech, ἀκμή γὰρ οὐ μακρῶν ἡμῖν λόγων (12), his comment both lends a sense of urgency to the scene and provides a piece of information about his current priorities. Odysseus' concern with the present moment returns in a slightly different guise later in the prologue, when he urges Neoptolemus,

νῦν δ' εἰς ἀναιδῆς ἡμέρας μέρος βραχὺ
δός μοι σεαυτόν, κἄτα τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον
κέκλησο πάντων εὐσεβέστατος βροτῶν (83-85).⁸⁶

This injunction is supported by a statement about the value of victory (81-82); for Odysseus, what happens now is of vital importance, but only insofar as it will lead to eventual success.⁸⁷

Whereas Odysseus consistently emphasizes future results, Neoptolemus' interaction with the passage of time seems to change along with his view of the deception. Although he is unmoved by Odysseus' comment about the brevity of the deception, he agrees to participate when he hears that present success will lead to an even greater future victory (111-120), thus seeming to adopt Odysseus' pragmatic temporal attitude.⁸⁸ Early in his dealings with Philoctetes, Neoptolemus continues to stress the need for prompt present action as a way of achieving goals, confirming his supposed determination to sail with the comment, καιρὸς γὰρ καλεῖ | πλοῦν μὴ ἔξ ἀπόπτου μᾶλλον ἢ ἔγγυθεν σκοπεῖν (466-467). As he moves progressively closer to the revelation of the plot, however, the significance of the present moment seems to change for Neoptolemus.

⁸⁵ Heath 1999:145-146 comments on Neoptolemus as a military man of action, who is quite happy to resort to force to achieve his ends; Nussbaum 1976:32-33 explains Odysseus' pragmatism as a matter of privileging states of affairs over the actions which bring them about; see also Podlecki 1966b:138, Kyriakou 2012:154.

⁸⁶ Schein *ad* 83 argues that Odysseus' reference to 'a brief part of a day' refers to the typical timescale of a tragedy and therefore draws attention to the metatheatrical elements of Odysseus' 'staging' of the deception; I believe that Odysseus' reference to the brief duration of the deception is mainly important insofar as it reveals his pragmatic desire to balance the needs of the present with Neoptolemus' scruples.

⁸⁷ Blundell 1989:187-188 comments on Odysseus' focus on future victory.

⁸⁸ As is frequently noted, Neoptolemus' interest in future glory allies him with his father Achilles; see, e.g., Podlecki 1966:137-138, Roisman 1997:140-141, Kyriakou 2012:154-155.

When the False Merchant tells him to watch what he is doing, Neoptolemus replies, σκοπῶ κἀγὼ πάλαι (589).⁸⁹ Later, as he expresses his sympathy for Philoctetes and hesitates before revealing the deception, Neoptolemus echoes this comment several times, claiming that he has been concerned about various aspects of the situation not just now, but πάλαι (806, 906, 913). Although Neoptolemus' present behaviour remains important, and although he still expresses an interest in the future, he increasingly speaks of his present and future as grounded in the immediate past. Over the course of the play, Neoptolemus' temporal mindset grows more complicated, and different temporal moments interact with each other in his assessment of what he ought to do.

The present, for Philoctetes, is an indefinite state, with a remembered beginning but no foreseeable end. Neoptolemus' present moment, on the other hand, is always connected to its past and future context. What he identifies as important at any given time is usually said to depend on something he has seen or heard in the preceding moments, and his present priorities are almost always tied to their likely future consequences. While Odysseus too is interested in the future results of present actions, Neoptolemus interacts with the possibility of a more complex future than that which figures in Odysseus' arguments. Whereas Odysseus claims that present success leads inevitably to a good reputation (117-119), Neoptolemus expresses the fear that victory may not in itself prevent dishonour, saying to Philoctetes, αἰσχρὸς φανοῦμαι· τοῦτ' ἀνιῶμαι πάλαι (906).⁹⁰ Neoptolemus does not yet appear αἰσχρὸς, but he sees that, depending on his present actions, such shame is a distinct future possibility. As Neoptolemus tries to decide what to

⁸⁹ Easterling 1997:170 notes that this comment can be read either as a plain statement that Neoptolemus is playing his part well, or as a suggestion that he is having qualms; his use of πάλαι perhaps looks back to his uncertainty in the prologue.

⁹⁰ Goldhill 2012:69 discusses the fact that, although Neoptolemus' use of πάλαι suggests that his doubts have developed gradually, it is not clear when he began to question his actions.

do, different possible futures—some dependent on the same present course of action—interact with each other and complicate the decision with which he is faced.⁹¹

Neoptolemus' tendency to think about the future in terms of its interaction with the past and the present is also typical of other Sophoclean characters who must decide how to act in the present moment. When she first tells Ismene about Creon's decree and hints at her resolve to bury Polyneices, Antigone admits that death will be the likely immediate result of her choice, but she also suggests that the prospect of this future result will not deter her. Like Neoptolemus, Antigone draws attention to how she will appear in the longer term, asserting, οὐ γὰρ δὴ προδοῦσ' ἀλώσομαι (46). When Ismene urges her sister to consider the past misfortunes of their family and act prudently in the present (49-60), Antigone turns decisively towards the more distant future.⁹² Having first explained that death will reunite her with her brother, she further explains her acceptance of death,

ἐπεὶ πλείων χρόνος
ὄν δεῖ μ' ἀρέσκειν τοῖς κάτω τῶν ἐνθάδε.
ἐκεῖ γὰρ αἰεὶ κείσομαι (74-76).

Faced with several possible futures, Antigone's interaction with them is selective, inasmuch as she looks past the risks of the immediate future in order to concentrate on an eternity in which her actions will be appreciated.⁹³ By choosing the future which best fits her goals, moreover, Antigone distinguishes her personal trajectory from that of her sister, who remains firmly rooted in the present and its immediate consequences.

Antigone's focus on the burial of her brother is, in its way, as single-minded as Heracles' focus on his past labours or Philoctetes' focus on the injustice he suffered at the hands of the Greeks. The object of Antigone's focus, however, is of a different sort than that of Heracles or Philoctetes, and Antigone therefore interacts differently with her

⁹¹ Blundell 1989:206 discusses Neoptolemus' efforts to avoid various distasteful outcomes.

⁹² Winnington-Ingram 1980:128 notes the different reactions of the two sisters to their shared familial past; Blundell 1989:111 calls attention to Ismene's use of past disaster to justify the need for prudence.

⁹³ Carter 2012:126 discusses Antigone's privileging of dead *philoï* over living ones and her resulting choice of an alternative future among the dead over the possibility of living out the rest of her natural life. See also Foley 2001:174 on Antigone's reasoning.

personal trajectory than Heracles and Philoctetes do with theirs. For one thing, Antigone is more focused on action than either Philoctetes or Heracles; although Heracles presents himself as an active force in his life, he is powerless by the time he arrives onstage, and Philoctetes' hatred is, by necessity, passive.⁹⁴ At the same time, while Heracles and Philoctetes have both had years to consider their own roles, Antigone's need to bury her brother is a recent development. When she speaks to Ismene in the prologue, the decree has been put forward ἀρτίως (8); Antigone announces her decision to bury her brother at line 43, and by the time the guard arrives in the middle of the following episode the burial has taken place. Although Antigone never speaks about the need to act swiftly, her behaviour puts her in the same temporal category as characters like Odysseus or Neoptolemus, who do what they can in the present to bring about a future of their own choosing.⁹⁵

As characters move through the real time of their respective plays, then, they also progress along temporal trajectories of their own, and their interactions with those personal trajectories are reflected in their interactions with those around them.⁹⁶ Insofar as not all characters respond in the same way to the same situations, temporal trajectories often emerge over the course of interactions between characters, and, moreover, characters' awareness of their own trajectories often manifests itself in attempts—conscious or not—to draw others along with them as they move through their lives.⁹⁷ Some characters keep pace with the action of the play and drive it—and other figures—further along; Antigone, having tried and failed to persuade Ismene to join her in her plans for future glory, rushes to bury her brother shortly after hearing that his burial has been

⁹⁴ Blundell 1989:112 comments, 'Antigone demands not affection but action, and that of the most extreme variety'.

⁹⁵ Carter 2012:114-115 comments on the concentration of Antigone's part and notes that she 'reaches her tragedy with ruthless determination' (114).

⁹⁶ See Lowe 2000:164-169 for a discussion of the amount of time which can pass on the tragic stage and the strategies by which tragedians can depict events which take place outside the temporal span of a play.

⁹⁷ de Romilly 1964:98 notes the effect of time on characters' awareness.

forbidden, while Odysseus warns Neoptolemus that he will send someone to check on the progress of the plot ἐάν μοι τοῦ χρόνου δοκῆτέ τι | κατασχολάζειν (125-126). Other characters, on the other hand, live in a state of suspension while the action of the play and the trajectories of other characters threaten to go on without them. Temporal trajectories are thus deeply rooted in the attitudes of the characters who move along them, but they can under some circumstances change over the course of a play, and, when they do, changes in trajectory can shed new light on the characters involved.

When he first appears in *Antigone*, Creon does not seem to be subject to a specific temporal standpoint. He begins his opening speech by looking back at the process by which he ended up on the throne, but he moves quickly from his summary of past events to a description of his own opinions about government and citizenship. These opinions, as Creon presents them, are not just of the present moment; of the man who stays silent out of fear, Creon says, κάκιστος εἶναι νῦν τε καὶ πάλαι δοκεῖ (181).⁹⁸ In a similar way, his injunction against the burial of Polyneices looks both forward and back. Before explaining the edict in full, he looks back in slightly more detail on the quarrel between the two brothers (194-202), and then he looks forward in time in order to promise punishment for the wicked and honour for ὅστις εὖνους τῆδε τῆ πόλει (209). Creon's initial temporal perspective, in other words, is both pragmatic and relatively unremarkable; he remembers the past without being dominated by it, and he plans for the future without losing track of his present situation.

Although Creon mentions both other individuals and the needs of the city in his opening speech, the temporal perspective which emerges from that speech does not

⁹⁸ Winnington-Ingram 1980:122-123 notes the efficiency with which Creon handles past events and goes on to discuss the fact that Creon has come to the throne, and therefore been put to the test of leadership, only late in life. Since he is new to the throne at the beginning of the play, he has had little opportunity to exercise his supposedly long-standing opinions.

depend on any personal interactions with others.⁹⁹ His subsequent interactions with Antigone and Haemon, however, shake both his authority and his temporal perspective, and, as his world collapses around him in the final scene of the play, his personal trajectory undergoes a drastic change. When he first appeared, Creon was accustomed to controlling not only his own future, but also the futures of those around him; in his first speech to Haemon, he comments on the future benefits brought by good offspring, saying that men hope to have dutiful children, ὡς καὶ τὸν ἐχθρὸν ἀνταμύνωνται κακοῖς, | καὶ τὸν φίλον τιμῶσιν ἐξ ἴσου πατρί (643-644).¹⁰⁰ Later, after he has witnessed the death of Haemon and heard of the death of Eurydice, Creon's personal trajectory grinds to a halt. Not only has he lost control of the events of his own life, but he has also, in losing Haemon, lost the possibility of successful posterity for which he once hoped. When the chorus respond to his prayer for death with the comment, μέλλοντα ταῦτα. τῶν προκειμένων τι χρῆ | πράσσειν. μέλει γὰρ τῶνδ' ὅτοισι χρῆ μέλειν (1334-1335), Creon responds only by reiterating his prayer. A few lines earlier, Creon described himself as τὸν οὐκ ὄντα μᾶλλον ἢ μηδένα (1325), and, whatever the chorus may advise, he now has no means of interacting with either present or future.¹⁰¹

The Creon who enters the house at the end of the *exodos* has, over the course of the play, ceased to be a decisive ruler and become, instead, a man who must be led inside, saying, οὐδ' ἔχω | πρὸς πρότερον ἴδω, πᾶ κλιθῶ (1341-1343).¹⁰² Creon's despairing uncertainty is not just an assessment of the present moment, but also an indication of a new way of interacting with the passage of time; as he rejects the chorus's attempts to console him, dwelling instead on the hopelessness of his situation, Creon enters a state of

⁹⁹ Blundell 1989:117-120 discusses Creon's attempt to devalue family ties in favour of the city as a whole; by cutting himself off from the realm of familial obligations, Creon can move forward with his plans for good governance without observing their effects in human terms.

¹⁰⁰ Griffith *ad* 839-880 notes that Creon's argument to Haemon is built in part around the assumption that 'sons are extensions of their fathers'; Haemon's future and Creon's are thus intertwined.

¹⁰¹ Griffith 1999:65.

¹⁰² Knox 1964:75 comments that there is nothing left of Creon at the end of the play.

temporal limbo similar to those in which Deianeira and Philoctetes live at the beginnings of their respective plays. Both Deianeira and Philoctetes, however, first appear only shortly before they emerge from their suspended states; Deianeira will soon take the action which leads to her eventual death, and Philoctetes, at the end of the play, will leave Lemnos for Troy—a future he could not have imagined when he first arrived onstage.¹⁰³ Creon's state at the end of *Antigone*, on the other hand, is only just beginning. Since Creon, although still alive, no longer has a future, his new state of helplessness can have no foreseeable endpoint.

The change in Creon's personal trajectory which occurs near the end of *Antigone* is emblematic of more general changes in his ability to interact successfully with the world around him. At the beginning and the end of the play, Creon interacts only minimally with the passage of time—first he has no particular temporal viewpoint, and later he actively tries to shut out the present and the future—and in both of these temporal states he is, for different reasons, cut off from his family and the rest of Thebes. Between these endpoints, however, he briefly opens himself to advice from the chorus and attempts to take action to change the coming course of events, and the swift forward motion which follows is very different from either his forward motion of the beginning of the play, which seemed to require little action on Creon's part, or his suspension of the end.¹⁰⁴ For Creon, as for many Sophoclean characters, the ability to move purposefully forward through time is an important indication of the ability to control the events of his life. As characters interact with their personal trajectories, taking stock of where they are going and what part they are playing in the events of their lives, the audience not only receive

¹⁰³ Hutchinson 1999:51 notes that Deianeira's death is reminiscent of the more active Heracles; Easterling 1978:30 observes that the audience know all along that Philoctetes will go to Troy, even when it seems impossible.

¹⁰⁴ Knox 1964:73-75 argues that Creon's acceptance of Teiresias' advice and his subsequent change of tack make him unlike all other Sophoclean heroes; I would argue that although Creon's change of mind is anomalous, other characters undergo similarly drastic changes of temporal trajectory.

new insight into the mindsets of the figures onstage, but also have a chance to see whether those mindsets can lead to success in the world of the play.

ELECTRA AND THE PASSAGE OF TIME

The various temporal behaviours which I have been discussing in this chapter are particularly important in *Electra*, in which Electra's idiosyncratic way of interacting with the passage of time is one of the main factors which set her apart from the other figures in her play. Since the death of Agamemnon, Electra has existed in a state of temporal limbo, and her refusal or inability to move forward is the subject of much discussion; throughout the first half of the play, other characters describe Electra in terms of her habitual actions, and the repetitive nature of her behaviour shapes all of her onstage interactions.¹⁰⁵ As she speaks to the chorus, Chrysothemis, and Clytemnestra early in the play, her single-minded focus forces them all to share temporarily in her suspended state. Perhaps more interestingly, the same stubborn refusal to change which makes Electra a thorn in the side of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus also puts her in a peculiar kind of conflict with Orestes and the Tutor, who arrive urging prompt and decisive action to avenge the murder of Agamemnon.¹⁰⁶

Whereas the suspended states in which Deianeira and Philoctetes live at the beginning of their respective plays are defined by ongoing inaction, Electra's temporal suspension is marked by repeated action.¹⁰⁷ In fact, whenever a person or group who has interacted with Electra in the years since her father's death enters while she is onstage, they comment immediately on the repetitive nature of her behaviour. The chorus ask in

¹⁰⁵ Foley 2001:148-149 observes that Electra 'freezes time | and blurs the division between day and night, past and present, with her endless lamentations'.

¹⁰⁶ Woodard 1966:125-126 notes Electra's alienation from the main revenge plot throughout most of the play, arguing that 'she lives out her own history while the men are making history in another sense' (126).

¹⁰⁷ In comparing Electra's waiting for Orestes to Deianeira's waiting for Heracles, Hutchinson 1999:51 notes that Electra's waiting 'is seen more emphatically as Electra's own choice'.

their first sentence why Electra is always (ἀεί, 122) crying out in mourning for her father, while Chrysothemis and Clytemnestra both say that Electra is outside mourning once again (αὔ, 328 and 516).¹⁰⁸ Electra too comments on her mourning as a series of repeated actions; in her first lament, delivered while she is alone onstage, she calls upon the light and air to remind them

ὥς μοι
πολλάς μὲν θρήνων ᾠδὰς,
πολλάς δ' ἀντήρεις ἦσθου
στέρνων πλαγὰς αἵμασσομένων,
ὅπότεν δνοφερὰ νύξ ὑπολειφθῆ (87-91).

The repetition of πολλάς in lines 88 and 89, followed shortly thereafter by ὅπότεν in 91 gives the sense that Electra's existence is characterized by an endless and unvarying sequence of acts of mourning.¹⁰⁹ The death of Agamemnon is the only clearly defined event which emerges from her lament, and it seems that all other events in Electra's life have been more or less indistinguishable.¹¹⁰

Although they agree that she is constantly repeating the same kind of actions, Electra and those around her speak differently about her habits, and it quickly becomes clear that her habitual mourning not only makes her intolerable to Clytemnestra, but also threatens to alienate her from those who might tend to be sympathetic.¹¹¹ Over the course of the *kommos*, the chorus challenge Electra's ongoing grief from a variety of different angles, reminding her that her mourning serves no purpose (137-144), that her other siblings have managed to move on (156-163), that justice will come eventually (174-184), and that her drastic behaviour is only making the situation worse (214-220). When Chrysothemis arrives, she too criticizes Electra's behaviour, commenting νῦν δ' ἐν κακοῖς

¹⁰⁸ Finglass *ad* 516-633 notes that the chorus's, Chrysothemis', and Clytemnestra's successive references to the ongoing nature of Electra's lamentation are increasingly critical and vehement.

¹⁰⁹ On the continuity of Electra's lamentation, Foley 2001:156 comments, 'What is ordinarily a temporary identification with the dead has become for Electra a living death'.

¹¹⁰ Schein 1982:73 describes Electra as 'not so much living in the past as keeping the past with her in the present'.

¹¹¹ Electra is shown to be aware of this risk; Winnington-Ingram 1980:223, Blundell 1989:170, and Foley 2001:149-150 discuss the shame which Electra tells the chorus she would feel if her behaviour should seem excessive to them (254-255).

μοι πλεῖν ὑφειμένη δοκεῖ, | καὶ μὴ δοκεῖν μὲν δρᾶν τι, πημαίνειν δὲ μὴ (335-336).

After Electra delivers a withering criticism of Chrysothemis' willingness to compromise, Chrysothemis responds by locating Electra's abuse in the broader temporal context of the sisters' interactions, explaining to the chorus, ἐγὼ μὲν, ὧ γυναιῖκες, ἠθάς εἰμί πως | τῶν τῆσδε μύθων (372-373). Every time she speaks to Electra, their differences are apparent, and this has been the case for a long time.

Electra's habitual behaviour limits her contact with those around her; all of her interactions early in the play reinforce what Electra is—as determined by what she does—and what the chorus, Chrysothemis, and Clytemnestra therefore are not. Despite this divide between Electra and the rest of her world, she displays a tendency to make those around her part of her state of temporal suspension. Although they try at first to persuade Electra to change her behaviour, the chorus at the end of the *kommos* tell her, εἰ δὲ μὴ καλῶς | λέγω, σὺ νικά· σοὶ γὰρ ἐψόμεσθ' ἅμα (252-253), in effect agreeing to join with her in her static mourning for Agamemnon.¹¹² Similarly, although Chrysothemis claims not to mind what Electra says, by the end of her first scene with her sister she has been persuaded to substitute her own and Electra's offerings for Clytemnestra's, and thus to some extent joins Electra in her disobedience.¹¹³ Even Clytemnestra is made to participate in Electra's repetitive behaviour; after Electra enacts a typical encounter with her mother for the chorus, recounting how Clytemnestra φωνοῦσα τοιάδ' ἐξονειδίξει κακά (288), Clytemnestra arrives and plays the role which she has already been assigned.¹¹⁴ Near the end of their confrontation, Electra comments, σὺ γὰρ ποεῖς | τοῦργον· τὰ δ' ἔργα τοὺς λόγους εὐρίσκεται (624-625); by holding her mother

¹¹² Kitzinger 1990:306; see also Foley 2001:149.

¹¹³ Nooter 2011:408 comments, 'In the first episode with Chrysothemis, Electra's potential for derailment of others' plans is made actual'.

¹¹⁴ Ringer 1998:144 discusses the established patterns of interaction between mother and daughter in terms of theatrical role playing.

responsible for her own ongoing mourning and hostile speech, she makes her part of the endless cycle in which she lives her life.

Electra's dual habits of remaining static and drawing those around her into her static state put her at odds with Orestes, who is throughout the play primarily concerned with the forward motion of the revenge plot.¹¹⁵ Orestes begins to be associated with urgency and forward motion in the prologue, and the conflict between his personal trajectory and that of Electra grows increasingly apparent over the course of the play, first when the forward momentum of the prologue halts with the entrance of Electra, and then, even more strikingly, during Electra's lament over the urn and the subsequent recognition scene. In the prologue, both Orestes and the Tutor are concerned with the need for action in the present moment. The Tutor closes his first speech by telling Orestes to act without delay, explaining, *ὡς ἐνταῦθ' ἔμμεν | ἴν' οὐκέτ' ὀκνεῖν καιρός, ἀλλ' ἔργων ἀκμή* (21-22); according to the account of Orestes' life which preceded this injunction, moreover, this present moment, the *ἔργων ἀκμή*, is a chance for Orestes to fulfil the purpose for which he was raised. It soon becomes clear that Orestes and the Tutor share this sense of urgency; after asking to be set right *εἰ μή τι καιροῦ τυγχάνω* (31), Orestes closes his speech with an even more explicit echo of the Tutor's injunction, *καιρός γάρ, ὅσπερ ἀνδράσιν | μέγιστος ἔργου παντός ἐστ' ἐπιστάτης* (75-76).¹¹⁶

Orestes leaves the stage a few lines after saying that it is now the moment to act, and there follow just over a thousand lines in which the play moves—or, more accurately, does not move—on Electra's personal trajectory before Orestes and Pylades re-enter with

¹¹⁵ Schein 1982:71 identifies the tension between the siblings' two strands of the plot as an organizing force in the tragedy.

¹¹⁶ Orestes' focus on the present moment in the prologue leads Alexanderson 1966:82 to describe him as 'energetic and uncomplicated'. Smith 1990:342 in a discussion of the uses of *καιρός* in the play, similarly comments, 'The *καιρός* of Orestes is clearly associated with the taking of justice, yet it is a justice with a pronounced antipathy to deliberation'.

the urn at 1097.¹¹⁷ Although Electra had, after hearing the Tutor's false news of Orestes' death, briefly developed plans to take her own revenge on Aegisthus, the apparent arrival of physical proof of Orestes' death brings her forward motion to a complete standstill. Her lament over the urn is, from a temporal perspective, an even more extreme form of the kind of static mourning in which she has been engaging since the death of Agamemnon; having several times over the course of the play expressed a determination to continue mourning until Orestes arrives to avenge their father's death, Electra now wishes for death herself. At the end of her speech over the urn, the only hope that Electra sees is that she may die and thus spend eternity with Orestes (1165-1167). So long as Orestes was still alive, she explains, ξὺν σοὶ μετέιχον τῶν ἴσων (1168), but now that he is dead, the only future which the siblings can share is death.

Orestes reveals his identity, then, just after Electra's personal trajectory, which has always been cyclical, has finally come to a complete halt. Although Orestes says that his understanding has been changed by the sight of Electra's misfortunes, ὅσ' οὐκ ἄρ' ἤδη τῶν ἐμῶν ἐγὼ κακῶν (1185), he maintains in his interactions with Electra in the recognition scene much of the forward momentum which he displayed in the prologue. Almost as soon as Electra begins to rejoice over Orestes' return, Orestes begins to urge her to control herself, answering her first lines of lyric with the iambic line, πάρεσμεν· ἀλλὰ σῖγ' ἔχουσα πρόσμενε (1236).¹¹⁸ Although Electra, as she expresses her joy, seems to be on the verge of entering an endless cycle of exultation to match her previous cycle of mourning, Orestes is still concerned with keeping the revenge plot moving, and he tells Electra, ὅταν παρουσία | φράζῃ, τότε ἔργων τῶνδε μεμνησθαι χρεῶν (1251-1252),

¹¹⁷ Kitzinger 1990:304-305 notes the contrast between the trajectory of the prologue and that introduced by the entrance of Electra.

¹¹⁸ Wright 2005a:188-189 argues that Orestes' repeated silencing of Electra suggests that Electra's joy, like her previous grief, goes beyond normal bounds.

and then, οὐ μὴ ᾿στι καιρὸς μὴ μακρὰν βούλου λέγειν (1259).¹¹⁹ In restraining Electra’s expressions of past suffering and current joy, Orestes tries to draw her closer to his own forward-looking worldview, according to which past and present matter only insofar as they lead to the future.¹²⁰

In contrast to her brother, Electra has since the death of Agamemnon lived in an undifferentiated present state, in which her repetitive actions in the present constitute an ongoing effort to preserve the memory of the past. As Orestes tries to keep Electra from dwelling on past events, his efforts to change his sister’s trajectory have implications not only for her interactions with the past, but also for her interactions with the present and the future. For all their focus on the demands of the present moment, Orestes and the Tutor say very little about Electra’s present role. When she tells Orestes that she would have tried to get revenge on her own, ἢ γὰρ ἄν καλῶς | ἔσωσ’ ἐμαυτήν, ἢ καλῶς ἀπωλόμην (1320-1321), Orestes ignores this piece of information altogether and tells Electra to be silent. Nothing in the recognition scene, moreover, suggests that Electra has an essential part to play in the revenge now that Orestes has finally returned. Electra’s main task, in fact, is to remain—at least outwardly—in the same suspended state which preceded Orestes’ arrival; after asking her to tell him how things stand in the house (1293-1295), Orestes warns Electra not to let Clytemnestra see her joy, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐπ’ ἄτη τῆ μάτην λελεγμένη | στέναζ’ (1298-1299).¹²¹ Even now that Orestes has returned, destroying one of the main reasons for Electra’s suspended state of mourning and waiting,

¹¹⁹ Schein 1982:76 comments on Orestes’ focus on efficiency in the recognition scene; Wright 2005a:191 comments on the temporal similarities between Electra’s lamentation and her joy.

¹²⁰ Hutchinson 1999:56 comments, ‘For Electra the decisive event has now occurred, and her life of waiting and misery is over; for Orestes, who naturally has a different perspective, the most decisive event has still to happen’.

¹²¹ Foley 2001:167 suggests that ‘Orestes is forced by Electra’s pain to offer his sister and the chorus a role, however limited, in what was initially an all male adventure’; Foley does not, though, draw attention to the fact that Electra’s limited role in the revenge involves the continuation of her past state of repetitive mourning.

it remains impossible for Electra to interact with her brother's version of the present moment.

Despite Orestes' emphasis on the need for forward motion, moreover, it is unclear what sort of future the revenge plot offers for Electra.¹²² On the one hand, the forward-moving trajectory towards which Orestes tries to draw Electra has little to do with the temporal behaviours which have defined her throughout the play. Except for her prediction of the glory which she and Chrysothemis would win if they were to kill Aegisthus, Electra herself has never spoken of what might follow the revenge which she desires.¹²³ In fact, while she has spoken frequently about her constant waiting, and she has consistently linked her desire for Orestes' return with her desire for revenge, most of her references to the future have ended with the arrival of Orestes. Perhaps more worryingly, although Orestes and the Tutor have throughout the play looked beyond the revenge itself to the eventual restoration of the household fortunes, it is not clear what role, if any, Electra will play in the restored household. Orestes' initial plans said nothing about any siblings, and, although he and the Tutor mention Electra's presence as a future speaker and listener (1251-1252, 1364-1366), their plans for her are indistinct at best. Having been urged throughout the play to restrain her mourning and move on, Electra is now left behind by the plot, encouraged to continue with her old habits as her brother moves toward a future in which she has no part to play.

When *Electra* ends, the plot is still moving forward; as is frequently noted, the play ends before the death of Aegisthus, and therefore with a sense that events are still in

¹²² Segal 1981:267 comments on the barrier between Electra and Orestes which becomes apparent after the recognition.

¹²³ Kitzinger 1990:320-322 suggests that, although it is Chrysothemis who insists on the probability of death, it is apparent from Electra's description of what will follow the sisters' revenge that she too really believes that death is the most likely outcome; according to this view, the glorious future which Electra imagines is only a fiction designed to persuade Chrysothemis, and not a reflection of Electra's real ambitions.

progress.¹²⁴ The play as a whole is now running on the trajectory which Orestes and the Tutor introduced in the prologue, and Electra, having been shut out of her brother's plans and lost her chance to establish a forward trajectory of her own, fades gradually from view over the course of the final scene. Electra's story is not over, but it will not progress any further.¹²⁵ The state of suspension in which Electra remains at the end of the play marks her ongoing separation even from those who are ostensibly on her side, and it puts her, finally, at odds with the overall plot of the play. At the end of the play, Agamemnon's death is finally being avenged, but the forward motion of revenge plot has already destroyed the temporally suspended Electra who has waited so long for it to be set in motion.

CONCLUSION: CHANGE COMES TO THE RELUCTANT

The ways in which Electra and other Sophoclean characters react—or refuse to react—to changes in the world around them are frequently noted not only by readers and audiences, but also by other characters. As they interact with the passage of time and fit together their conceptions of past, present, and future, individuals develop characteristic patterns of behaviour, and these habitual thoughts and actions are often associated, sometimes in contradictory ways, with wisdom, learning, and other mental states; prudent actions can be learned over time, but being able to change learned actions is usually taken as a sign of good sense.¹²⁶ In trying to persuade Neoptolemus to take part in the deception of Philoctetes, Odysseus explains that although he was once accustomed to relying on the strength of his hands, he has since learned that he can accomplish more with words and

¹²⁴ See, e.g., Easterling 2004:157, Goldhill:2012: 20-21.

¹²⁵ Schein 1982:78 comments, 'By the success of their scheme, Orestes and the Paedagogus have in a moment done away with Electra's very *raison d'être*'.

¹²⁶ Easterling 2004:160 discusses the importance of the uncertain connection between present and future in tragedy.

changed his ways accordingly (*Phil.* 96-99).¹²⁷ Although Oedipus says at the beginning of *Oedipus at Colonus* that he has learned endurance over time (*OC* 7-8), Creon later asks him, οὐδὲ τῷ χρόνῳ φύσας φανῆ | φρένας ποτ', ἀλλὰ λῦμα τῷ γήρᾳ τρέφῃ (804-805), accusing him of being unable to adapt to the passage of time.

When change does happen to Sophoclean characters, they often attempt to develop ways of coping with change which fit with their previously established patterns of behaviour. When, after the news of Orestes' death, Clytemnestra asks Electra, οὐκ οὐκ Ὀρέστης καὶ σὺ παύσετον τάδε; (795), Electra replies, πεπαύμεθ' ἡμεῖς, οὐχ ὅπως σὲ παύσομεν (796), and her answer reflects not only the desire to bring an end to Clytemnestra's arrogant behaviour which she mentions in the second half of the line, but also her own personal trajectory.¹²⁸ Waiting for Orestes has for years been one of Electra's constant activities as well as a way for her to maintain autonomy in a household dominated by her father's murderers, and the death of Orestes thus represents a potential turning-point in her life. When she hears of her brother's death, Electra considers two possible courses of action, both in different ways compatible with her previous habitual behaviour; first she resolves to continue mourning outside the house from this point onwards, welcoming the possibility that her actions may lead to death (817-822), and then she proposes that she and Chrysothemis should make a desperate attempt on Aegisthus' life.¹²⁹ Although Electra's plan to take the revenge into her own hands represents a departure from her static state, Chrysothemis recognizes the plan as essentially consistent with Electra's long-standing and, in Chrysothemis' view, irrational refusal to yield (992-

¹²⁷ Roisman 1997:130 comments on Odysseus' portrayal of his stance as the wiser and more mature choice.

¹²⁸ Segal 1981:262 suggests that Clytemnestra's question shows her to be still trapped in an 'atmosphere of timelessness [which] reflects that inner world of guilt and anxiety in which she is caught, a world insensible to the inflections of time and change'; this atmosphere of timelessness, Segal notes, is a function of Clytemnestra's regular interactions with Electra and the threat of Orestes' arrival.

¹²⁹ Foley 2001:160 comments on the way in which Orestes' supposed death changes Electra's calculations.

994); now that her waiting has ended, Electra has diverted her resistance into another channel.

Both of Electra's resolutions in the aftermath of Orestes' supposed death are typical of attempts made by other Sophoclean characters to maintain some degree of control over their personal trajectories as they try to interact with changes over which they have no control. Throughout the first half of the play, Ajax, like Electra, has been described by others in terms of what he usually does, and he fiercely resists the suggestion that he ought to change his behaviour. Only fifty lines before he begins to speak about the inevitability of change, in fact, he tells Tecmessa, μῶρά μοι δοκεῖς φρονεῖν, | εἰ τοῦμόν ἦθος ἄρτι παιδεύειν νοεῖς (594-595). By this point in the play, however, Ajax's status in the Greek army has already been destroyed, and he has already rejected several possible courses of action (460-470); his denial of the possibility of personal change is thus similar to Electra's initial determination to continue mourning even now that her last hope is gone.¹³⁰ For Ajax, as for Electra, a decisive change has already taken place, and he attempts to convince Tecmessa that, although his pattern of heroic behaviour has come to an end, his changed behaviour does not amount to a change in his identity.

Ajax's usual behaviour, however, represents a personal trajectory that is very different than Electra's; Ajax the military hero is used to taking matters into his own hands and moving forward to achieve his own goals. From the moment when he realizes what he has done in trying to attack the Greek leaders until the beginning of the deception speech, however, Ajax is essentially static, already living a life which has changed beyond recognition. Tecmessa may not be able to change him, but circumstances beyond his control are doing their best to do so, and Ajax's warning to Tecmessa is also a warning to the rest of the world around him. At the beginning of the deception speech, he

¹³⁰ Blundell 1989:85 comments on the irony of Ajax's insistence at this point that he cannot be changed.

acknowledges the inevitability of change only to resist it in his own life; although his suicide represents a definitive end for his personal trajectory, it is also a way for him to take his fate into his own hands and, for the last time, to move forward as he always has in the past.¹³¹

¹³¹ Murnaghan 1989:185 notes that the change in trajectory caused by Ajax's suicide 'underscore[s] the way the play's success in achieving formal closure comes at the expense of the hero's life'.

CHAPTER 5 – GNOMIC INTERACTIONS: GENERALIZING CHARACTER

Near the end of *Ajax*, at the conclusion of their dispute over Ajax's right to burial, Menelaus and Teucer exchange a curious set of fables. 'I once saw a man', says Menelaus, 'who was bold in speech, urging his sailors to sail through a winter storm, but when he was stuck in the worst of the storm, you could no longer hear his voice, but, hiding beneath his cloak, he freely allowed the sailors to trample on him' (1142-1146).¹ Although the compressed form of the narrative and the man's anonymity give a sense of general relevance, Menelaus makes sure that Teucer—and, by extension, the audience—knows how the fable ought to be interpreted under the current circumstances: thus, he explains, οὐτῶ, Teucer's grand claims are likely to be extinguished in the face of a real storm (1147-1149).² By employing the fable as a metaphor for Teucer's behaviour, Menelaus can suggest that Teucer's specific obstinacy in the matter of Ajax's burial is part of a wider pattern of foolish behaviour to which men can succumb if they are not careful. At the same time, Menelaus suggests that he, unlike Teucer, knows how the world works and will therefore avoid the trouble which Teucer is likely to face.

In his reply, Teucer assails not only the wisdom of Menelaus' position on the burial of Ajax, but also the rhetoric which he has employed in defence of his position.³ In a stinging parody of the fable which Menelaus has just told, Teucer comments, 'Well, I saw a man, full of idiocy, who was arrogant in the face of his neighbours' troubles, and, seeing him, a man very much like me and of a similar temperament said this to him, "Man, do not do wrong against the dead, for if you do, know that you will suffer for it"' (1150-1155). Where Menelaus had clearly emphasized the relevance of his fable in the final

¹ Garvie *ad* 1142-1146 suggests that Menelaus' fable is related to the nautical fable told by Eteocles at Aesch. *Sept.* 602-604.

² Heath 1987:200 argues that Menelaus' use of the fable smacks of desperation and calls it 'a rhetorical device of low character'.

³ Hesk 2003:116 notes that Teucer 'mocks [Menelaus'] chosen mode and the banality of its execution'.

lines of his speech, Teucer goes even further, concluding, ‘And I see this man, and, as it seems to me, he is none other than you—or do I speak in riddles?’ (1157-1158). The non-literal equivalence suggested by Menelaus’ οὔτω has been replaced by actual fact, and, in the same breath, the power balance in the dispute has shifted.⁴ By appropriating the form of Menelaus’ fable, Teucer suggests that Menelaus is every bit as full of empty bluster as he has accused Teucer of being; Menelaus’ idiocy, as Teucer presents it, lies not only in his treatment of the dead, but also in his transparent attempt to use his fable to bolster his own authority.

Although the fictionalized Teucer of the second fable warns the fictionalized Menelaus that there will be consequences for dishonouring the dead, both fables are as much concerned with rhetorical control as they are with the actual treatment of Ajax’s body. Throughout his debate with Teucer, Menelaus has been concerned with representing himself as speaking from a position of greater authority; his decision to criticize Teucer’s behaviour by telling a fable constitutes an attempt to consolidate the authority which he has been claiming all along. When Teucer caps Menelaus’ fable with his own pseudo-fable in reply, he changes the terms of the argument; the authority which Teucer claims at this point is not a matter of political power or military prowess, but, instead, a matter of being able to think on one’s feet and to engage successfully in verbal debate.⁵ Although Menelaus may still have a degree of political power which Teucer lacks, he is verbally outmatched by Teucer and can find no suitable reply to his fable.⁶ Although Menelaus has been arguing all along that Teucer is not a suitable adversary, and

⁴ Garvie *ad* 1150-1158 comments, ‘Avoiding the metaphorical language of Menelaus, he more directly, and less imaginatively, says merely, “I have seen a man who...It is in fact you whom I have in mind”’. Hesk 2003:116-117, however, argues persuasively that Teucer’s parody is designed to undercut the rhetorical force of Menelaus’ fable.

⁵ Hesk 2007:128-129 draws attention to the importance of improvisation, or the appearance of improvisation, in verbal duels.

⁶ Collins 2004:ix-x comments that poetic contests in which speakers cap each others’ responses typically end when one contestant is outmatched.

although he departs after Teucer's fable, claiming that it would be shameful for him to continue debating with an inferior (1159-1160), Teucer's pseudo-fable allows him to beat Menelaus at his own game.⁷

The form of the fables allows the two men to move a little distance beyond the specific circumstances of the play, but neither Menelaus nor Teucer shifts entirely into the realm of generality—both men claim to be telling stories about specific individuals whose behaviour they have themselves witnessed, and Teucer eventually admits that he has not been telling a fable after all but has in fact been speaking about Menelaus all along.⁸ Nevertheless, the exchange of fables provides a framework for examining the function of generalities in onstage interactions. Although Menelaus uses his fable to argue that he has a level of general knowledge which Teucer lacks, Teucer's reply suggests that attempts at exemplarity are not in and of themselves a sign of authority or understanding; Menelaus, according to Teucer, does not understand the main issue—'Do not dishonour the dead' (1154)—and, as such, his fable will not allow him to win the debate. That is, although Menelaus may, by generalizing about the way of the world, lay claim to a degree of privileged knowledge, his claim may not be validated by his listeners. Moreover, Teucer suggests that Menelaus' inability to apply appropriate generalizations to the matter at hand is indicative of a more general lack of understanding on the part of Menelaus.⁹

Elsewhere in *Ajax*, and throughout the extant Sophoclean corpus, many characters display a tendency to generalize in moments of heightened tension, particularly during struggles for control or other moments in which important decisions need to be made. Different figures interact with the truths contained in their own general statements in different ways, and, similarly, different figures react differently to the generalizations of

⁷ Hesk 2003:117. See also Rutherford 2012:395.

⁸ Campbell *ad* 1150 notes that while Teucer 'retains the form of allegory', he 'instead of seeking for an illustration, puts the case as it stands'.

⁹ Hesk 2003: 116 notes that Menelaus' fable about the dangers of 'speaking big' actually works against him in ways which he does not intend, but which are apparent both to Teucer and to the audience.

others. Successful generalizations depend on a certain kind of relationship between speaker and listener; I will therefore begin this chapter with a brief discussion of the interaction between speaker and listener which is suggested when someone makes a general statement and of the potential risk to this interaction when a generalization is misused or misinterpreted. Keeping in mind the idea that the act of generalizing has certain established rhetorical implications, I will go on to discuss the ways in which the use of generalizations both allow Sophoclean characters to interact with each other and their current circumstances and also allow the audience to interact with the figures onstage.

WHAT IT MEANS TO GENERALIZE

The generalizations with which I will be concerned in this chapter share a few main characteristics. On the most basic level, they are statements of broadly applicable truth; they are typically linked to the specific dramatic circumstances under which they are spoken, but their speakers nevertheless suggest that their words can be applied more generally, whether in equivalent situations or in other situations which happen to involve equivalent figures. The subjects of such general statements are therefore indefinite: most general statements concern 'a man', a generalized second-person subject, or some other abstract quantity such as 'the divine' or 'truth' or 'justice'. For another thing, the general statements discussed in this chapter are all relatively self-contained; although they are often delivered in series, individual general statements spoken by Sophoclean characters very rarely stretch over more than two or three verses.¹⁰ Such brief generalizations can be classified as 'gnomic statements' or *gnomai*; the Oxford English Dictionary defines a

¹⁰ Brevity is often identified as a feature of such general statements; Abrahams 1972: 120 notes that most proverbs fit in a single line of 'folk verse'.

‘gnome’ as ‘a short pithy statement of a general truth; a proverb, maxim, aphorism, or apophthegm’.¹¹ The idea of *gnomai* as statements of general truth extends into antiquity; although the word γνώμη is often used to refer broadly to intellect, thought, or judgement, Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* gives γνώμη a more technical definition, saying, ἔστι δὴ γνώμη ἀπόφανσις, οὐ μέντοι οὔτε περὶ τῶν καθ’ ἕκαστον, οἷον ποῖός τις ἴφικράτης, ἀλλὰ καθόλου, and going on to specify further that *gnomai* deal with how one should or should not act (*Rhet.* 1394a21-25).

Throughout this chapter, I will be alternating between describing statements as ‘generalizations’ and as ‘gnomic statements’ or *gnomai*, taking ‘gnomic statements’ as a particular subset of ‘generalizations.’ Despite the OED’s linkage between gnomes and proverbs, however, I will for the most part be avoiding the term ‘proverb’ in my analysis of Sophocles. According to my definitions of the terms, proverbs are a subset of *gnomai*; both share the self-contained form which I mentioned above, and both similarly claim to be applicable to a variety of different people and circumstances.¹² Proverbs, however, have a traditional element which is often missing from gnostic statements; to call a statement a proverb is to imply that it has been handed down in roughly the same form through multiple speakers or writers over an extended period of time.¹³ Although many Sophoclean *gnomai* have a formal resemblance to proverbs, and although some Sophoclean *gnomai* have roots in statements of traditional wisdom, relatively few Sophoclean *gnomai* can be firmly identified as traditional, and it is not for the most part their traditional aspect on which I wish to focus here.¹⁴ Nevertheless, since *gnomai* and

¹¹ OED Online 2014: gnome, n.1.

¹² My definitions thus diverge somewhat from those of Aristotle, who states that ‘some proverbs (ἐννία τῶν παροιμιῶν) are also *gnomai*’. Kindstrand 1978:74 suggests that Aristotle only classes some proverbs as *gnomai* because *paroimia* may lack the ethical element which is central to Aristotle’s definition of *gnomai*.

¹³ Kindstrand 1978:77 notes that ‘antiquity and truth’ are the defining qualities of Greek proverbs. Proverbs need not be repeated verbatim to count as traditional; see Slater 2000:104 and Easterling 2009:162-163.

¹⁴ Lardinois 2001:94-95 discusses the flexibility of *gnomai* in archaic Greek poetry, noting that *gnomai* are rarely repeated verbatim, but instead tend to be ‘a variety of renditions of the same basic thought’.

proverbs are often deployed under similar circumstances and to similar effect, and since a considerable body of scholarship exists on the use of proverbs, both in ancient Greek literature, and in the literature and society of other cultures, I will be drawing on this scholarship in order to support some of my arguments about the use of Sophoclean *gnomai*.¹⁵

The successful use of a gnostic statement requires a degree of common ground between a speaker and his or her listeners; since *gnomai* by definition contain few details, their hearers must both have a general awareness of how such statements function and be able to fill in whatever blanks need to be filled in in order to make a particular gnostic statement applicable to the matter at hand. Part of learning to be conversant within a culture is learning to understand that culture's socially sanctioned use of proverbs and gnostic speech; Seitel notes in particular that many cultures have traditional ways of using and explaining proverbs in speech to children, designed to give young members of society the tools which they need to understand proverbs later in life.¹⁶ *Gnomai*, like proverbs, are spoken with the tacit assumption that their hearers will be able to interpret the statements correctly; by making such an assumption, moreover, the speaker includes her listeners in an imaginary community based on shared knowledge.¹⁷

Even more strikingly, the act of speaking in *gnomai* provides a degree of information about the speaker—or at least about how the speaker wishes to be seen. A hearer with some experience of the typical use of gnostic statements can be expected to know that making gnostic statements is often the prerogative of speakers who have some kind of special authority.¹⁸ By tapping into a store of collective wisdom, a speaker makes

¹⁵ For a similar approach to the application of modern and cross-cultural studies of proverb usage to *gnomai* in Greek poetry, see Lardinois 1997.

¹⁶ Seitel 1981:134.

¹⁷ Foley 1994:89, writing about the role of proverbs in South Slavic epic, observes that both the singer and his audience need to be 'fluent in this special register'.

¹⁸ Martin 2009:119 discusses the performance of proverbs as a way to lay claim to authority.

a claim both to have understood that wisdom, and to be in a position to reinterpret it for others.¹⁹ This connection between gnomic speech and socially sanctioned wisdom exists across cultures; among the Apache, general statements with a traditional form are the exclusive rhetorical property of men and women of advanced years and an established reputation for wisdom and understanding, while Lardinois has observed in his study of characterization through *gnomai* in the *Iliad* that *gnomai* containing advice for their direct addressee are usually spoken by characters—Nestor is a prime example—who have some degree of accepted political or moral authority.²⁰ Not all speakers of *gnomai*, however, are unequivocally authoritative; since speaking gnomically is often associated with wisdom or authority, figures in Homer, tragedy, and elsewhere often speak in *gnomai* when they wish to assert an authority which may not be recognised by all.

The act of speaking in *gnomai* thus has implications for the identities of both speaker and listener as well as for the presumed relationship between speaker and listener. As authoritative speech acts, both proverbs and the non-traditional *gnomai* with which I will primarily be concerned contain implicit commands or injunctions; whenever they are used, proverbs and other gnomic statements propose an answer to the question of what ought to be done in a given situation.²¹ Importantly, the advice contained within a gnomic statement can be directed at different figures depending on the circumstances under which the statement is made. Seitel has borrowed the grammatical terms ‘first person’, ‘second person’, and ‘third person’ to describe the intended recipient of a piece of proverbial wisdom; a ‘first person’ use of a proverb includes advice for the speaker herself, a ‘second person’ proverb suggests a course of action for the addressee, and a ‘third person’ proverb

¹⁹ Abrahams 1972:122 notes that it is ‘the appearance of collective wisdom’ that makes proverbs authoritative, not their actual reliance on tradition. Seitel 1981:126-128 argues that the relationship between speaker and listener is an important element in proverb meaning.

²⁰ Basso 1976:99 discusses ‘wise words’ among the Apache; Lardinois 2000:643, 649-650. On the widespread use of *gnomai* in archaic Greek literature and thought, see Versnel 2011:221-231.

²¹ Seitel 1981:130.

offers advice to some third party, who may or may not be present to hear the proverb. Importantly, these categories are not reliant on the grammatical person used in the proverb; a grammatically identical proverb can be first, second, or third person depending on the circumstances in which it is used. Seitel's categorization of proverbs according to the person for whom their advice is intended has since been adopted by other scholars, including Lardinois in his work on Homer, and it can often a useful perspective on the speakers of Sophoclean *gnomai* and their interactions with the world around them.²²

DRAMATIC GENERALIZATIONS

Given that the use of proverbial statements in geographically and temporally disparate societies seems to follow relatively consistent rules, several related sets of questions arise when dramatic characters speak in proverbs or gnomic statements. The first set of questions concerns the identity of the speaker in relation to her onstage listeners: is the speaker the kind of figure who might be expected to speak gnomically, or is she otherwise in a position to lay claim to a greater degree of verbal authority than that held by her listeners?²³ The second set of questions concerns the *gnomai* themselves and their interpretation by both speaker and listener. For whom do the gnomic statements contain advice, and how are they interpreted by their hearers, both on and offstage? The question of who should heed the advice embedded in a gnomic statement is more complicated than it may at first appear; just as the person of a proverb may vary depending on the circumstances, it is entirely possible for a gnomic statement to be presented as second or third person while at the same time containing useful advice for its speaker.²⁴

²² Seitel 1981:128-129; Lardinois 2000:643.

²³ Martin 2009:119.

²⁴ Similarly, Lardinois 2000:644 discusses 'indirect second person *gnomai*', which ostensibly contain advice for the speaker or a third party, but at the same time allow the speaker to make a comment about the addressee.

Moreover, dramatic speakers of *gnomai* do not always understand the implications of their generalizations; in the case of the exchange of fables in *Ajax*, Hesk notes that Menelaus' fable can also be read as a critique of Menelaus' own behaviour.²⁵

Linking several of these lines of questioning together is the issue of appropriateness: is the gnomic statement under consideration appropriate for the circumstances, and, if so, is it appropriate in the way that its speaker seems to imply? Since *gnomai* are speech acts which imply certain patterns of interaction between speaker and listener, their use carries a degree of risk.²⁶ On a rhetorical level, if a gnomic statement is used under the wrong circumstances or by a character who lacks the authority to generalize, both the statement and the advice contained in it are likely to go unheeded. Perhaps more importantly, inappropriate uses of *gnomai*—or uses of *gnomai* which are considered inappropriate—can have personal consequences for a speaker, who may find her authority called into question in ways that it might not have been had she not tried to offer a piece of gnomic advice; in *Antigone*, Creon and Haemon hold opposing views about who is entitled to offer advice, and the breakdown in communication between the two stems in large part from the fact that Haemon has dared to offer advice, much of it gnomic, to his father.²⁷ Looking at the circumstances under which different tragic characters use *gnomai* and the onstage reactions to those *gnomai* can provide important insights about the interactions which take place, both between individual characters and between characters and the wider issues at stake in the world of the play.

The choruses of Sophoclean tragedies' are some of the plays' most prolific users of generalizations, and it is therefore easy to think of gnomic statements as largely within the

²⁵ Hesk 2003:116. More generally, Lardinois 2006:214 comments, 'Gnomic expressions are notoriously difficult to interpret because they are by definition polysemous and applicable to many different situations'.

²⁶ Martin 2009:123-124 draws attention to several characters in tragedy who fit uneasily into their social roles and also have difficulty using generalizations appropriately, suggesting that the misuse of *gnomai* is often emblematic of a more general lack of authority.

²⁷ Podlecki 1966a:362-364; Griffith 1998:69-70.

rhetorical purview of the chorus.²⁸ Gnomonic statements, like proverbs, are typically associated with collective wisdom, and there is a sense in which the chorus, inasmuch as they are a group, are therefore better placed to offer collective wisdom than most individual characters are.²⁹ The extent to which the chorus are detached from the action—which varies from tragedy to tragedy—can also give them access to the breadth of perspective which is implied by many general statements.³⁰ The gnomonic authority of the chorus, however, does not go uncontested; being able to deliver successful *gnomai* depends not only on access to collective wisdom, but also on applying that wisdom aptly to the situation at hand, and individual Sophoclean characters with a tendency to generalize often reject choral *gnomai* on the grounds that the chorus do not fully understand the present circumstances.³¹ Although choruses generalize under many of the same circumstances which prompt Sophoclean characters to make gnomonic statements, and although choral *gnomai* provide insights into the interactions between the chorus, other figures, and the events of the play which are in many ways similar to the insights provided by gnomonic statements delivered by characters, I will in this chapter, as I have throughout this thesis, be focusing on individual characters.³² In my discussion of what happens when individual characters appropriate collective wisdom by speaking in *gnomai*, I will be concerned with the chorus mostly inasmuch as their generalizations provide a foil for the different generalizations offered by named characters in moments of tension.

²⁸ Wolf 1910:24 suggests that *gnomai* contribute to the solemnity of the tone of many choral odes.

²⁹ On the collective voice of the chorus, see, e.g., Burton 1980:3-4, Goldhill 2012:85-87, Rutherford 2012:221. Gould 1999:111 comments on the connection between choral *gnomai* and the collective memory of the group. The tragic chorus also gains a degree of authority through association with the non-tragic choruses who performed on other occasions; on the association between tragic and non-dramatic choruses, see, e.g., Goldhill 1996:250-251; Gagné and Hopman 2013:23-25.

³⁰ Rutherford 2012:389-390 comments on the variable importance of generalization to tragic choruses, noting that the choruses of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, which are closely connected to individual named characters, generalize much less than the more detached choruses of *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

³¹ The reactions of Creon in *Antigone* and Deianeira in *Trachiniae* to the attempts at generalization by their respective choruses will be discussed later in this chapter.

³² See the Introduction above for a brief discussion of my decision to limit my treatment of Sophoclean characterization to the interactions which shape named, individual characters.

Over the course of the rest of this chapter, I will be exploring the interactions which take place when Sophoclean figures generalize about themselves and the workings of the world around them. Although characters employ gnomastic statements throughout the plays of Sophocles, different characters in the plays use *gnomai* under different circumstances and to very different effect.³³ In the tragedies of Sophocles, characters use gnomastic statements both in order to come to terms with themselves and their place in the world and in order to assert some kind of authority over their circumstances. This takes place in the first instance in interactions between characters, but when characters interact with each other by means of gnomastic statements, they engage in a somewhat more complicated version of the triangular interaction between character and concept which I described in the Introduction; the interactions which take place between characters provide a framework for interactions between those characters and a shifting third point, which is not necessarily the gnomastic statement in question, but instead encompasses the characters' respective ideas about truth, collective wisdom, and authority. More broadly, characters' use of *gnomai*—whether appropriate or inappropriate, conservative or eccentric—provides a framework according to which the audience can interpret characters and their ability to function in the world of the play.³⁴

In the next three sections, I will examine the ways in which figures in three different plays use gnomastic statements differently to frame their interactions with the world and how, in turn, their individual approaches to generalizing can be seen as important character traits.³⁵ In *Trachiniae*, Deianeira, a character who finds herself trapped in an ominous chain of events, which spirals further and further beyond her control, uses generalizations to come to terms with her changing circumstances and to lay claim to

³³ Rutherford 2012:365-366 comments on the variety of contexts for tragic generalization. Seidensticker 1994:281 observes that many Sophoclean figures tend to express their heroic values in *gnomai*.

³⁴ Martin 2009:23-24 comments on the varying levels of success of different characters' *gnomai*.

³⁵ Wolf 1910:19-20 draws attention to the importance of Sophoclean *gnomai* as illustrations of the mental states of their speakers.

some small amount of authority in the face of approaching disaster. In *Antigone*, the connection between gnomic statements and authority is even clearer, as Creon establishes his political position in Thebes with the aid of several speeches heavily laden with generalizations, and, later, as Creon and Teiresias trade increasingly pointed *gnomai* in their argument about Creon's behaviour. Finally, over the course of *Ajax*, the ways in which different figures generalize becomes a reliable metric for judging their respective abilities to interact successfully with the world at large.

GNOMAI ARE 'GOOD TO THINK WITH': DEIANEIRA GENERALIZES

As many critics have pointed out, *Trachiniae*, perhaps even more than other plays of Sophocles, is a tragedy in which much supposed knowledge is later discovered to be false or, at least, misleading.³⁶ Although Heracles' 'late learning' plays a substantial part in his eventual destruction, it is Deianeira's evolving knowledge which is most visible to the audience over the course of the play. At each stage in her understanding, Deianeira generalizes about the world, and, throughout the play, Deianeira's generalizations often stand in counterpoint to other general statements on the human condition, particularly the chorus's frequent *gnomai*, which, although calculated to support Deianeira in her trouble, are often at odds with her assessment of her situation. By correcting the generalizations of the chorus, Deianeira makes a claim to be able to speak not only for herself, but also for others who might be in analogous positions. As the play goes on, this ability to generalize is one of the few sources of certainty left to the increasingly desperate heroine.

Trachiniae opens with an extended speech from Deianeira, which begins with one of the most famous gnomic statements in the extant Sophoclean corpus. 'It is an old

³⁶ See, among others, Whitman 1951:103-121, Lawrence 1978, and Kraus 1991. Heiden 1989 and 2012 present a more extreme version of this view.

saying among men’, says Deianeira, ‘that you cannot learn the truth about a person’s life, whether it was a good one or a bad one, before that person dies’ (1-3). Deianeira explicitly identifies her opening *gnome* as traditional when she introduces it with Λόγος μὲν ἔστ’ ἀρχαῖος ἀνθρώπων φανείς (1); although, in fifth-century Athens, the claim that a man’s happiness cannot be judged until the end of his life was associated with the wisdom of Solon, what is more important for my purposes here is the fact that Deianeira initially locates her opening speech in the context of traditional wisdom.³⁷ As her speech continues, Deianeira judges the traditional saying with which she began and finds it inadequate as an assessment of her own life. Deianeira’s interaction with the play’s first *gnome*—she presents it, puts it to the test, and then moves towards her own formulation of how her life ought to be judged—provides a useful model for the use of gnostic statements in processing human events.³⁸

When Deianeira presents the ‘ancient saying’ which dictates that one must not judge a man’s life until it is over only to reject the proverb, commenting, ἐγὼ δὲ τὸν ἐμόν, καὶ πρὶν εἰς Ἄιδου μολεῖν, | ἔξιδ’ ἔχουσα δυστυχῆ τε καὶ βαρύν (4-5), she at first suggests a rhetorical stance entirely at odds with the instinct to generalize about the human condition.³⁹ Rather than accepting the wisdom put forth (φανείς, 1) by earlier men and supposedly applicable to all, Deianeira offers instead details about her own life, which she claims is an exception to the rule.⁴⁰ The highly individualized litany of suffering which follows—Deianeira does not suggest that all human life is unfortunate, but merely

³⁷ Easterling *ad* 1 notes the connection with Solon, referring to Solon’s advice to Croesus at Herodotus 1.32. Deianeira predates Solon in mythological time, so it would be anachronistic to say that Sophocles’ Deianeira is actually quoting Solon, but it is nevertheless likely that an Athenian audience would have thought of Solon.

³⁸ Kitzinger 2012:113 notes that ‘the prologue introduces an idea which the action will elaborate and complicate’; I would argue that this statement is true in terms of Deianeira’s rhetoric as well as the content of her opening speech.

³⁹ Heiden 2012:136 sees Deianeira as trying to distance herself from ‘the ungrounded commonplaces of traditional belief’.

⁴⁰ Kitzinger 2012:113.

that her own has been—is enough to disprove the proverb with which she began her speech.⁴¹ Although Deianeira does not say so in so many words, her forceful denial of the applicability of the proverb to her own circumstances hints at the difficulty of finding a generalization which applies to all mortals.

By going against a piece of established wisdom, Deianeira makes a claim about her own authority, suggesting that she knows more than the originators of the proverb or, at the very least, is in a better position to judge in her own case. As the play goes on, it becomes apparent that this initial attempt to assert her own authority by situating herself with respect to another statement is a typical rhetorical move on Deianeira's part.⁴² Despite her initial rejection of the proverb, Deianeira does not give up on generalizations altogether, but instead she uses them to support particular statements about the appropriate course of action under her current circumstances. Although Deianeira often uses *gnomai* to assert her authority over those around her, her gnomic statements retain throughout the play a strong first-person emphasis; even when she is ostensibly advising Hyllus or Lichas or the chorus, Deianeira's generalizations reflect strongly upon her own life.

After her firm rejection of the proverb in her opening lines, Deianeira's authority falters over the course of the rest of the prologue. Deianeira does not know where Heracles is, but is nearly (σχεδόν, 43) sure that he has suffered some misfortune, and her need for the Nurse's advice emphasizes her lack of control over her own life; Hyllus, when he arrives, also knows more than Deianeira does about the fate of Heracles, and his access to what is said about his father (φασί, 70; ὡς ἐγὼ κλύω, 72; φασίν, 74) suggests

⁴¹ Heiden 1989:23 argues that Deianeira, by rejecting the proverb's doctrine of change, gives her own life a comforting appearance of stability, even if that stability is a matter of constant suffering.

⁴² Kraus 1991:79 likewise draws attention to the extent to which Deianeira's rejection of the proverb is typical, although Kraus focuses on Deianeira's revision of a previously held truth in light of new information.

another limit to Deianeira’s power.⁴³ It is from this state of uncertain control that Deianeira begins to generalize on her own behalf, and her gnomic statements from the end of the prologue up until just before she sends the poisoned robe to Heracles serve to reclaim and consolidate some of her lost authority. When, just before the *parodos*, Deianeira delivers a gnomic statement to the departing Hyllus, her comment, καὶ γὰρ ὑστέρω, τό γ’ εὔ | πράσσειν ἐπεὶ πύθοιτο, κέρδος ἐμπολᾶ (92-93), like many of her *gnomai*, can be read in multiple ways. Most obviously, it spurs Hyllus on his way, but it also suggests that Deianeira, despite her passivity up to this point, may yet regain control.⁴⁴ It is the very ambiguity of Deianeira’s generalization, which can apply either to Hyllus or to Deianeira herself, which allows her to interact with the complicated status of her own authority at this point in the play.

Deianeira makes her first generalization after the conclusion of the prologue early in the first episode, in response to the comforting advice given by the chorus in the *parodos*.⁴⁵ She offers an extended description of the innocence of youth and the changes in perception which occur along with marriage, arguing that the chorus, as a group of still-unmarried girls, cannot understand the depth of Deianeira’s worry on behalf of her husband:

τὸ γὰρ νεάζον ἐν τοιοῖσδε βόσκεται
 χώροισιν αὐτοῦ, καὶ νιν οὐ θάλπος θεοῦ,
 οὐδ’ ὄμβρος, οὐδὲ πνευμάτων οὐδὲν κλονεῖ,
 ἀλλ’ ἡδοναῖς ἄμοχθον ἐξαίρει βίον
 ἐς τοῦθ’, ἕως τις ἀντὶ παρθένου γυνῆ
 κληθῆ, λάβη τ’ ἐν νυκτὶ φροντίδων μέρος,
 ἥτοι πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἢ τέκνων φοβουμένη (144-150).

⁴³ Hall 2009:85 suggests that Deianeira’s need for the Nurse’s advice suggests that for years she has not even begun to deliberate about the best course of action.

⁴⁴ Easterling *ad* 92-93 comments on a third level of meaning in Deianeira’s *gnome*, in that, ‘There is irony in these words for anyone who knows from the story what kind of news Hyllus will in fact hear’.

⁴⁵ Although Hyllus and the Nurse exit at the end of the prologue, it is likely that Deianeira remains onstage (Taplin 1977:246). The chorus could theoretically be apostrophizing an absent Deianeira when they address her at 122 and 136, or Deianeira could re-enter during the epode, but the length of her response to their consolation suggests that she has heard the entirety of the *parodos*.

Deianeira's generalization, which takes up seven full lines of iambic trimeter, is much longer than the typical proverb described by Abrahams, who comments, 'The length of the sentence generally confirms to the common length of a line of folk verse'.⁴⁶ Despite its extraordinary length, however, Deianeira's comment to the chorus conforms to her usage of *gnomai* elsewhere in the play. It is a self-contained statement about the way of the world, and it suggests a level of knowledge which Deianeira has and which the chorus lack. Even more than the literal content of Deianeira's generalization about youth and age, it is her ability to make such a generalization which highlights Deianeira's greater experience.

Deianeira's description of the innocence of youth is ostensibly a second-person *gnome*, designed to shape her interactions with the chorus by convincing them that they should not offer opinions about matters in which they are inexperienced. Its application in the context of the play, however, is more complicated. Although Deianeira speaks in general terms about youth as τὸ γὰρ νεάζον (144), and introduces her comment about the transition to womanhood with the indefinite τις (148), what Deianeira presents to the chorus at this point is in large part a summary of her own life in general terms.⁴⁷

Deianeira's account of the idyllic life of the unmarried girl has little in common with her earlier account of her girlhood fear of marriage, but her comment that the married woman λάβη τ' ἐν νυκτὶ φροντίδων μέρος, | ἦτοι πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἢ τέκνων φοβουμένη (149-150) echoes her comment in the prologue that, since her marriage to Heracles, she has been constantly fearing for his safety, νύξ γὰρ εἰσάγει | καὶ νύξ ἀπωθεῖ διαδεδεγμένη πόνον (29-30).⁴⁸ Deianeira's generalization, which is presented as a piece of advice to the chorus, who have made the mistake of thinking that they are in a position to advise

⁴⁶ Abrahams 1972:120. See also p. 226 above on the usual length of proverbs and Sophoclean *gnomai*.

⁴⁷ Wolf 1910:21 sees the passage as a lament for Deianeira's own lost youth.

⁴⁸ Easterling *ad* 149-50 notes the parallels between this passage and 27-30. See also Segal 1981:84 on the contrast between Deianeira's description of generalized maidenhood and her own past.

her, is at the same time a first-person reflection on her own life. Deianeira's experience, which in the prologue was suggested to be an exception—albeit a negative one—to the general uncertainty of life, has become the pattern of all human experience.⁴⁹

Deianeira's life of unbroken misery is disrupted by the news of Heracles' plans for Iole, and, as her personal circumstances grow increasingly complicated, it becomes increasingly difficult to assign single meanings to her *gnomai*. In the speech in which she tries to convince Lichas to tell the truth, Deianeira offers two gnomic statements, one explaining her husband's shifting affections, and another urging Lichas to speak honestly. The first of these *gnomai*, on the power of Eros, has implications for Heracles, Deianeira, and even Lichas. When Deianeira says, "Ἐρωτι μὲν νυν ὅστις ἀντανίσταται | πύκτης ὅπως ἐς χεῖρας, οὐ καλῶς φρονεῖ (441-442), she refers most directly to herself and Heracles: Heracles cannot be blamed for his infatuation with Iole, and Deianeira, by the same logic, should not fight against Eros by reacting against the god's power over her husband.⁵⁰ A few lines earlier, at the beginning of her speech to Lichas, Deianeira assures Lichas that she is 'not a base woman' (438), and 'not one who does not know the ways of men' (439); now, by gnominically distancing herself from the sort of person who οὐ καλῶς φρονεῖ (442), Deianeira reminds Lichas, that, if he respects her authority, he must not expect her to react foolishly to the truth.⁵¹ As she generalizes to Lichas about the power of Eros, Deianeira simultaneously takes control of her own reaction to a piece of unwelcome news and asserts the household authority which might seem to be threatened by the arrival of Iole.⁵²

⁴⁹ Kitzinger 2012:115 comments that Deianeira's description of youth 'typifies a natural and universal human desire for permanence in the defiance of death'.

⁵⁰ Conacher 1997:25 notes the irony of Deianeira's *gnome* in light of her actions in the following episode.

⁵¹ Kitzinger 2012:116 draws attention to the importance of Deianeira's self-characterization as she explains her reaction to the news. McCall 1972:149-150 notes that Deianeira gets what she wants from Lichas precisely by minimizing her own agency.

⁵² Winnington-Ingram 1980:77 notes, 'Deianira is still trying to make herself believe that the situation is after all tolerable for the woman she thinks herself to be'.

As Deianeira tries both to come to terms with Heracles' behaviour and to settle upon the appropriate course of action in light of that behaviour, her gnomic statements offer a glimpse of her evolving personal interaction with issues of truth and reputation. In her efforts to convince Lichas to speak the truth, she comments, ὡς ἔλευθέρω | ψευδεῖ καλεῖσθαι κῆρ πρόσεστιν οὐ καλή (453-454), beginning with a reminder of the sort of person Lichas is—he is a free man—and then offering a general comment on how a free man ought to behave and be perceived. Not much later, however, after telling the chorus about her plan to send the robe to Heracles, she follows her wish that the chorus may keep her secret with the gnomic statement, ὡς σκότῳ | κἂν αἰσχρὰ πράσσης, οὔποτ' αἰσχύνῃ πεσῆ (596-597). Since the end of her exchange with Lichas, Deianeira's personal interaction with truth seems to have changed.⁵³ When urging Lichas to tell her the whole truth about Iole, Deianeira claimed that lying—which in Lichas' case consisted of claiming ignorance rather than inventing falsehoods—was incompatible with freedom.⁵⁴ Now that it is her own behaviour which she wants not mentioned, Deianeira changes tack, claiming that it is not the doing of shameful deeds which leads a person into shame, but having those deeds come to light.⁵⁵

When it becomes apparent to Deianeira that her actions will almost certainly be discovered—if not in the manner which she feared at first—she arrives at yet another general assessment of the value of a good reputation. As she nears the end of the speech in which she first describes the effect of the potion on the tuft of wool and then revisits her encounter with the centaur, Deianeira's fears about what the potion may do to Heracles are

⁵³ Kraus 1991:89 observes that Deianeira's insistence that Lichas tell the full truth clashes with her own habit of telling stories which, even if they are not deliberately deceptive, omit important elements.

⁵⁴ Conacher 1997:25.

⁵⁵ Easterling *ad* 596-597 notes that Deianeira is not making 'an absolute claim that all evil doing is acceptable provided that it is done in secret', but she also notes the irony of Deianeira's statement in light of her earlier speech to Lichas. See also Winnington-Ingram 1980:79.

closely related to fears about the effect of the catastrophe on her own life.⁵⁶ She closes her speech with a resolution to die along with Heracles if the potion proves fatal to him, and she explains her resolution with a gnomic statement, ζῆν γὰρ κακῶς κλύουσιν οὐκ ἀνασχετόν, | ἥτις προτιμᾷ μὴ κακὴ πεφυκέναι (721-722).⁵⁷ In basic structure and meaning, this first-person *gnome* is similar to the one which Deianeira used to urge Lichas to tell the whole truth (453-454); in both cases a certain kind of reputation is said to be incompatible with a certain kind of otherwise noble life. The two *gnomai*, however, have different implications: Lichas could avoid being called a liar by telling the truth, but, now that it is clear that her actions will be discovered, Deianeira gives up hope of salvaging her reputation in life and resolves instead on death.⁵⁸ Deianeira's interactions with general truth, it seems, are guided by specific circumstances; although she consistently describes the world in general terms, she deploys her general truths to different effect depending on the needs of the moment.

Both Deianeira's resolution to die along with Heracles and the gnomic statement with which she justifies this resolution bring to the forefront of the action the differences in philosophy between Deianeira and the chorus which have surfaced periodically throughout the play. In the short exchange between Deianeira's speech about the likely consequences of her actions and the entrance of Hyllus at 734, the chorus try to dissuade Deianeira from her resolution; they argue that the situation may not be quite so dire as she believes it to be, while Deianeira insists that there is nothing which can save her now.⁵⁹

As the chorus try to make Deianeira heed their advice and she tries at the same time to

⁵⁶ McCall 1972:152-153 sees in Deianeira's references to the possibility of Heracles' death an implied commentary on her own comparative weakness.

⁵⁷ Deianeira's comment that it is shameful for the noble to live with a bad reputation has parallels with statements made by other Sophoclean heroes; Easterling *ad* 721-722 compares *Aj.* 479 and *El.* 989. For Deianeira's acknowledgement of her responsibility as a sign of heroism, see, e.g., McCall 1971:153, Lawrence 1978:298-299, Davies *ad* 721. Segal 1981:106 associates her resolution with civilization.

⁵⁸ Winnington-Ingram 1980:80 reads Deianeira's resolution as a return to her natural state of honesty.

⁵⁹ McCall 1972:153 sees the chorus's first comforting *gnome* as a statement of total disregard of Deianeira's resolution to die.

retain a degree of authority in the face of catastrophe, both parties speak almost entirely in gnomic statements; the chorus offer generalizations which encourage patience, fortitude, and continuing hope, and Deianeira replies with *gnomai* of her own focusing on the fact that the past cannot be changed. On a basic level, everything which the chorus and Deianeira say in this exchange is true, but their competing *gnomai* suggest incompatible views of the world, which point to divergent courses of action. Despite their similar rhetorical choices, this final exchange of *gnomai* constitutes a breakdown in communication between Deianeira and the chorus; the multivalence of all gnomic statements, which so far has provided Deianeira with room to manoeuvre in her interactions with her changing circumstances, now makes it impossible for her to see eye-to-eye with the otherwise supportive chorus.⁶⁰

The chorus at first respond to Deianeira's resolution with a *gnome* which echoes sentiments Deianeira herself has previously expressed: their comment, *ταρβεῖν μὲν ἔργα δεῖν' ἀναγκαίως ἔχει* (723), refers most directly to the matter at hand, but also resonates with Deianeira's words of caution after she first heard of Heracles' sack of the city of Eurytus (296-297).⁶¹ The chorus follow this first *gnome*, however, with a gnomic qualification, arguing that although a degree of fear is necessary, *τὴν δ' ἐλπίδ' οὐ χρὴ τῆς τύχης κρίνειν πάρος* (724).⁶² Their note of optimism is restrained, insofar as they use *ἐλπίς* in its neutral sense to refer to any expectation—good or bad—of what is to come, but they nevertheless suggest that Deianeira's resolution to die is premature.⁶³ As far as Deianeira is concerned, however, it is no longer *τῆς τύχης... πάρος*, and she

⁶⁰ On the chorus's general support for Deianeira, Conacher 1997:28 describes their reassurance after Deianeira first decided to send the robe as 'all too easily available'. See also McCall 1972:153.

⁶¹ Easterling *ad* 723-724 sees a protective element in the chorus's generalization, and comments, 'The Chorus do not want to be too specific'.

⁶² Lawrence 1978:198 comments that the chorus here 'criticise an unjustifiably gloomy *ἐλπίς* not based on experience'.

⁶³ Both Jebb and Easterling *ad* 723-724 comment on the chorus's neutral use of *ἐλπίς* here.

therefore has no reason to hold out hope.⁶⁴ Her hope was destroyed when she sent the robe to Heracles, and she answers the chorus with her own *gnome* about what happens to hope under such circumstances, telling them, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τοῖς μὴ καλοῖς βουλευμάσιν | οὐδ' ἐλπίς, ἥτις καὶ θράσος τι προξενεῖ (725-726).⁶⁵ Deianeira, unlike the chorus, uses in ἐλπίς a strictly positive sense; her interpretation of the word allows her to write off the chorus's gnomic statement as nothing but ill-considered optimism, delivered at a moment when she no longer has any use for words of comfort.

In their reply, the chorus once again seek to frame their interaction with Deianeira in terms of common ground. They begin with an implicit concession to Deianeira; rather than saying that she will not suffer for her actions at all, they offer a comforting *gnome* on a slightly different theme, reassuring her, ἀλλ' ἀμφὶ τοῖς σφαλεῖσι μὴ ἔξ ἐκουσίας | ὀργὴ πέπειρα (727-728). They follow their gnomic statement with a comment on its relevance to Deianeira; they say, τῆς σε τυγχάνειν πρέπει (728), and they have some reason to hope that Deianeira will agree with their *gnome*, given that she earlier described herself as having acted ἀπ' ἐλπίδος καλῆς (667). Deianeira's answering criticism, in which she finds fault both with the particular reassurance offered by the chorus and with the presumption of their trying to comfort her at all, is likewise framed in general terms; she explains, τοιαῦτά τ' ἄν λέξειεν οὐχ ὁ τοῦ κακοῦ | κοινωνός, ἀλλ' ὅ μὴδὲν ἔστ' οἴκοι βαρὺ (729-730). The chorus, who have throughout the play been Deianeira's supporters and confidantes—although she has always emphasized their relative lack of experience—are suddenly placed at a great distance, reduced to the sort of person—who, as a generic concept, is masculine and singular—who has not experienced trouble and has

⁶⁴ Kraus 1991:91 observes that up until Deianeira realizes μεθύστερον what she has done (710), she has seen trouble in the past and vague hope in the future; even this vague hope is destroyed once she sees the effect of the poison on the wool.

⁶⁵ Lawrence 1978:199 notes that Deianeira assigns more responsibility to herself than she did to Heracles in her earlier statement on the power of Eros.

no difficulties in his own affairs. Since the chorus are οὐχ ὁ τοῦ κακοῦ | κοινῶνός (729-730), they are also, by extension, not κοινῶνός to Deianeira, and, as such, they cannot generalize about her world.

After her final refusal to be reassured by the chorus, Deianeira speaks only five more lines, all of which are questions directed at Hyllus. Up to the entrance of Hyllus, Deianeira has been able to maintain a level of tenuous rhetorical control over her situation; her future in Heracles' household has grown increasingly uncertain, but, despite the deterioration of her situation, she has maintained the ability to integrate her specific current circumstances into her general view of the way of the world.⁶⁶ By expressing her worldview at each stage in its development in gnomic statements delivered to those around her, Deianeira has continued to assert her authority in the household; she may not be in control of events, but she understands their implications, and is therefore in a position to guide the responses of others.⁶⁷ When Hyllus returns with news of the robe's effect on Heracles, Deianeira's ability to process and generalize about events ceases to matter. Hyllus is convinced of his mother's culpability, and, as such, he has no use for Deianeira as an interpreter of events.⁶⁸ Throughout the play, Deianeira's main asset has been a belief in her own understanding of her circumstances; now that Hyllus has seen the effect of the robe on Heracles, his understanding has outstripped his mother's, and there is nothing more that she can say to him.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *contra* Bowman 1999:344-346, who discounts Deianeira's powers of interpretation, arguing that the 'female sexual power' which Deianeira tries to maintain by sending the robe is 'the only power (via beauty) she or any woman has in the play' (346).

⁶⁷ Wiersma 1984:51 identifies Deianeira's ability to process events as one of her defining features, describing her as a 'perplexed but ultimately purposive personality'.

⁶⁸ Segal 1981:97 notes, 'Hyllus has his own *logos* to tell'.

⁶⁹ Lawrence 1978:299 comments on Deianeira's questions as standing in contrast to Hyllus' direct knowledge.

Although Deianeira works to assert her authority over the course of *Trachiniae*, she is never in direct conflict with her addressees—even Lichas has acted only out of fear of upsetting her. Within the limited setting of Heracles' household, Deianeira uses her general statements to assure herself and those around her that established patterns of interaction are working as they are supposed to. The situation in *Antigone*, on the other hand, is different; although Creon's power is greater than Deianeira's, his role as the new ruler of Thebes is less firmly established than Deianeira's as the wife of Heracles, and, throughout most of the play, Creon treats criticism of his actions as a direct affront to his authority.⁷⁰ From his own entrance until the exit of Teiresias, Creon has a series of confrontations with figures whose views are increasingly difficult for him to discount. All of these interactions are shaped by the authority granted to different individuals, and it gradually becomes clear that, in the world of *Antigone*, authority is closely connected to control of general truths.

Although the matters at hand—the burial of Polyneices and Antigone's punishment for her role in it—are specific, Creon's confrontations tend to hinge on conflicting ideas about how the world should work, which are expressed on both sides with gnomic statements. Creon's tendency to generalize is frequently noted; Podlecki identifies Creon's reliance on generalities as a way of covering up the tenuous nature of his power, while Foley comments, 'He approaches every dilemma that requires judgment through descriptive and prescriptive generalizations about money, human types, and the behavior expected from such types.'⁷¹ Throughout the play, the *gnomai* of others are particularly

⁷⁰ On the newness of Creon's rule, see Knox 1964:84, Podlecki 1966a:360, Winnington-Ingram 1980:122-124, Roisman 1996:26 Cairns 2013:ix-xx.

⁷¹ Podlecki 1966a:362; Foley 2001:184-184. Wolf 1910:48 identifies Creon as the most prolific generalizer in Sophocles; Kitzinger 1976:144 comments on the number of generalities which Creon issues, identifying 25 in 350 lines of text.

threatening to Creon, and, in most of his interactions, he asserts his authority by replacing other characters' *gnomai* with generalizations of his own. His mode of leadership, it seems, depends in large part on his ability to generalize for those in his power.

Creon's reliance on generalizations becomes apparent in his first speech, in which he lays out the principles according to which he believes that a man ought to rule.⁷² In speaking to the chorus—with whom he has no obvious reason to be at odds—Creon demonstrates many of the rhetorical strategies which will mark his subsequent interactions with the guard, Antigone, Haemon, and Teiresias.⁷³ After an initial summary of the events which led him to assume the throne of Thebes (162-174), Creon begins the body of his speech with a gnomic statement in which he claims,

ἀμήχανον δὲ παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἐκμαθεῖν
ψυχὴν τε καὶ φρόνημα καὶ γνώμην, πρὶν ἂν
ἀρχαῖς τε καὶ νόμοισιν ἐντριβῆς φανῆ (175-177).⁷⁴

Although this statement applies to Creon as a new ruler, he says nothing about its particular application to the present circumstances in Thebes. As he continues, however, Creon connects himself more closely to his generalizations; although the man who does not follow good advice remains an indefinite ὅστις (178), Creon's personal opinion of such a man is made clear by the comment ἐμοὶ γὰρ... κάκιστος εἶναι νῦν τε καὶ πάλαι δοκεῖ (178-181). Throughout this first speech, Creon's personal views take the form of generalizations, and his closing statement, ὅστις εὖνους τῆδε τῆ πόλει, θανῶν | καὶ ζῶν ὁμοίως ἔκ γ' ἐμοῦ τιμήσεται (209-210), would be gnomic but for the insertion of ἔκ

⁷² Knox 1964:84 describes this speech as a kind of 'inaugural address' to the people of Thebes.

⁷³ Foley 1996:60 notes that Creon does not adapt his mode of speaking to his audience.

⁷⁴ It is generally agreed that the sentiments expressed in Creon's opening speech, beginning with this *gnome*, are essentially acceptable, and only prove problematic when Creon takes them to extremes; Demosthenes (19.247) quoted Creon's description of good rule with approval, on which see Budelmann 2000:76-77. See also Winnington-Ingram 1980:123-124, Blundell 1989:116-117, Sourvinou-Inwood 1989:141-142, Griffith *ad* 162-210, Carter 2012:117-118.

γ' ἐμοῦ. In the city which Creon rules, he is the driving force behind statements of general truth.⁷⁵

Although the chorus acknowledge that Creon has the power to do what he wants in the city (211-214), his absolute control over general truth slips as soon as he stops speaking. When Creon urges the chorus not to side with those who would attempt to disobey his edict, they reply with their own gnomic statement, οὐκ ἔστιν οὕτω μῶρος ὃς θανεῖν ἐρᾷ (220). Creon agrees with the chorus in part, commenting, καὶ μὴν ὁ μισθός γ' οὔτος (221), but he qualifies their statement with a counter-generalization which consolidates his rhetorical authority, explaining, ἀλλ' ὑπ' ἐλπίδων | ἄνδρας τὸ κέρδος πολλάκις διώλεσεν (221-222). The chorus may deserve some respect as loyal citizens of Thebes—Creon trusts them enough to ask them to support his edict—and they may be in a position to contribute usefully to a discussion of human tendencies, but Creon makes sure to have the last word.⁷⁶

When Creon speaks gnominically about the city and its rule, he mostly delivers third-person *gnomai*; although he makes a few comments about what a good ruler should do, which function as first-person *gnomai* with implications for Creon himself, most of his generalizations are aimed at shaping the behaviour of others. This particular aspect of Creon's use of generalizations becomes apparent in his initial interaction with the chorus, and grows even clearer after the entrance of the guard.⁷⁷ The guard, like Creon, is a frequent user of *gnomai*, but the guard's generalizations, unlike Creon's, are almost entirely limited to the fate that he is likely to suffer as the bringer of unwelcome news; when Creon presses him to reveal his news, he answers with a gnomic statement, τὰ

⁷⁵ Winnington-Ingram 1980:123 suggests that Creon's use of first-person singular pronouns may be somewhat 'too insistent'.

⁷⁶ Segal 1981:163 notes, 'for [Creon], as for the Atreids in the *Ajax*, communication is one-way: the leader speaks and the subjects "hear" or "obey"'.
⁷⁷ Yoon 2012:56 observes that it is with the arrival of the guard that the principles laid out in Creon's opening speech are first put to the test.

δεινὰ γάρ τοι προστίθησ' ὄκνον πολύν (243).⁷⁸ He closes his account of the mysterious burial of the body with another *gnome* explaining his reluctance, στέργει γὰρ οὐδεὶς ἄγγελον κακῶν ἐπῶν (277). Faced with the unpleasant task of delivering unwelcome news to the ruler of the city, the guard falls back on *gnomai* for comfort; he is not alone in his fears, and he has behaved in the present situation just as anyone else would under equivalent circumstances.

The news that someone has disobeyed the edict represents a crack in Creon's authority, and in his reaction Creon employs a variety of gnomonic statements to repair the damage. Faced with both the chorus's worry that the gods may have been involved and the possibility that the guard may not be willing or able to find the culprit, Creon must enforce his moral authority in the face of the chorus and his civic authority in the face of the guard.⁷⁹ After challenging the understanding of the chorus, he explains that the burial originated, not in specific problems with his rule, but in the general human susceptibility to corruption, and he supports this view with a series of gnomonic statements, beginning with, οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀνθρώποισιν οἶον ἄργυρος | κακὸν νόμισμ' ἔβλαστε (295-296), and ending with the claim that money teaches men παντὸς ἔργου δυσσέβειαν εἰδέναι (301).⁸⁰ On the one hand, this string of *gnomai* allows Creon to regain control of his interaction with the guard, who has just brought an uncomfortable revelation, and the chorus, who have offered an unwelcome explanation for that revelation.⁸¹ By speaking

⁷⁸ Blundell 1989:139-140 notes the guard's concern with his own well-being; while Blundell suggests that the guard is implicitly contrasted with Antigone, Yoon 2012:59 rightly argues that the guard is primarily important in his ability, through his interaction with Creon, to draw out the new ruler's character.

⁷⁹ Blundell 1989:122 identifies in Creon's reaction to the guard's news a 'shift away from the more persuasive criterion (*soteria* of the *polis*) to that of absolute obedience'.

⁸⁰ Winnington-Ingram 1980:126 notes that Creon 'immediately finds a political explanation of a kind that he can understand'. Lauriola 2007:400 observes that Creon question the wisdom of anyone who challenges him.

⁸¹ On Creon's comments about widespread corruption, Roisman 1996:28 notes, 'The ascription of base motives to others, especially by way of generalizations, is a major characteristic of the authoritarian personality'. Reinhardt 1979:73 comments that Creon's *gnomai* for the guard have little to do with the reality of the situation.

out about the evils of corruption, moreover, Creon places himself solidly on the moral high ground before threatening dire consequences against those who have disobeyed him.

From this moral vantage point, Creon presents his threats against the guard as a kind of lesson; he begins with the admonition, εὖ τοῦτ' ἐπίστασ' (305), and explains that the guard, if he does not reveal the doer of the deed, will suffer torture so that later he will think more carefully before taking a bribe (310-311).⁸² As he nears the end of the guard's lesson, Creon gives him several *gnomai* to learn; first he says that the guard must learn that οὐκ ἐξ ἅπαντος δεῖ τὸ κερδαίνειν φιλεῖν (312), and he concludes by insisting, ἐκ τῶν γὰρ αἰσχροῶν λημμάτων τοὺς πλείονας | ἄτωμένους ἴδοις ἂν ἢ σεσωμένους (313-314).⁸³ Faced with a world which is not working according to the rules which he laid out in his opening speech, Creon works to inculcate those rules in his subordinates; if the guard can be compelled to live by Creon's *gnomai*, the authority which was threatened by the news of the burial will be just a little more secure.

Although the guard and his news force Creon for the first time to confront the fact that his authority is not absolute, the guard himself is a relatively minor challenge; the guard's fear shows that he knows very well that Creon is in charge.⁸⁴ With the chorus and the guard, Creon has been able both to explain how things will work while he is in power and also to stifle any objections; in the face of scepticism from the guard in the form of the gnomic statement, ἦ δεινόν, ᾧ δοκῆ γέ, καὶ ψευδῆ δοκεῖν (323), Creon can simply suggest that the guard is in no position to comment on δόξα (324) and reiterate his earlier threats (324-326).⁸⁵ After the guard's exit, however, Creon must interact with a series of

⁸² Griffith *ad* 308-309 notes that the punishment Creon threatens was 'a familiar mode of execution, at least for low-class criminals and traitors'.

⁸³ Cairns 2013:xxi, on the ways in which Creon's *gnomai* reflect key themes in the play, observes that Creon presents *atē* as opposed both to safety and to *kerdos*.

⁸⁴ Yoon 2012:56. Sourvinou-Inwood 1989:142 argues that the guard's fear would not have been taken by the Athenian audience as a sign of excessive harshness on Creon's part; see also Calder 1968:397n.41.

⁸⁵ I read *δοκῆ* here, along with Griffith, in preference to *δοκεῖ*, which is found in some mss. and printed in Lloyd-Jones and Wilson, on the grounds that the particular criticism against Creon which would be implied

figures whose interaction with him and his authority is more complicated.⁸⁶ As the first of these figures, Antigone enters having already decided to live by a set of rules not espoused by Creon and, even more problematically, remains throughout the scene unwilling to learn Creon's lesson and henceforth live by his rules.

Antigone interacts with general truth differently than Creon does, and her justification for disobeying the edict calls into question not only the particulars of Creon's presentation of himself as ruler, but also his habit of generalizing not just for himself but also for the city which he rules. Antigone generalizes very little; when she explains the laws to which she does and does not feel herself to be subject, her statements, although broad, provide not so much a declaration of her own worldview as a rejection of the assumptions behind Creon's rule, and she thus begins her speech with ten lines of negated statements (450-460).⁸⁷ When Antigone finally turns to the likely punishment for her actions and explains that she does not mind the prospect of death, she does put her explanation in general terms, suggesting that anyone in her situation would see death as a benefit. Her generalization, however, is phrased as a question, ὅστις γὰρ ἐν πολλοῖσιν ὡς ἐγὼ κακοῖς | ζῆ, πῶς ὄδ' οὐχὶ καθανῶν κέρδος φέρει; (463-464), her interrogative phrasing, the relative ὡς ἐγὼ, and the indicative φέρει all suggest that Antigone's view on death is a personal one, which may not be shared by all people under all circumstances. Although she begins in general terms with an indefinite ὅστις, Antigone is by the end of her question speaking for herself from her own experiences, about which she is the ultimate authority.⁸⁸

by δοκεῖ would be too dangerous for a man of the guard's position and would also elicit a more forceful response from Creon.

⁸⁶ Griffith 1999:23-24 suggests that, in the original production, Antigone, Haemon, and Teiresias would all most likely have been played by the same actor; their shared voice would thus perhaps have emphasized the serial nature of Creon's confrontations.

⁸⁷ Foley 1996:52 notes that Antigone is much less inclined to generalize from personal experience than Creon.

⁸⁸ Foley 2001:174 comments, 'Antigone's language pointedly personalizes the burial issue'.

Antigone, like Haemon and Teiresias in the following scenes, is troublesome to Creon because she disrupts his ideas about hierarchy.⁸⁹ Creon's generalizations are, as a rule, concerned with the establishment and maintenance of order, and Antigone's refusal to be bound by hierarchical human laws is a threat to his entire worldview. Creon mitigates this threat by taking Antigone's stubbornness as a sign of deficient knowledge, beginning his response to her explanation with ἀλλ' ἴσθι (473) and launching from there into a series of gnomic statements suggesting that it is the rigid who most often break under pressure.⁹⁰ Throughout this series of *gnomai*, Creon emphasizes both the lessons Antigone must learn and his own superior knowledge; he says πλεῖστ' ἄν εισίδοις the tendency of hardened iron to shatter (476), and that he knows (οἶδα, 477) the possibility of subduing a spirited horse with a small bit. By delivering a string of second-person *gnomai* to the disobedient Antigone, Creon can put her back in her rightful place; by speaking to her from the same position of authority which he has previously used with the guard and the chorus, Creon can maintain the role as ruler and educator of his subjects which he established in his opening speech.

As he condemns her actions, Creon describes Antigone's current rebellion as only the latest episode in a long history of insolent behaviour (480-483).⁹¹ His authoritatively gnomic interaction with Antigone, in which he tries to put her in the place where she ought to have been all along, thus has a different starting point than his interaction with Haemon in the following episode. When questioned about the issue of Antigone's punishment, Haemon answers that he remains loyal to his father, commenting further, καὶ

⁸⁹ Roisman 1996:29.

⁹⁰ Lauriola 2007:396 notes Creon's criticism of Antigone's way of thinking.

⁹¹ Creon makes a similar suggestion at 561-562 when he says that Antigone has been mad all her life; see Griffith *ad* 561-562 on the suggestion that there is a history of hostility between Antigone and Creon.

σύ με γνώμας ἔχων | χρηστὰς ἀπορθοῖς, αἷς ἔγωγ' ἐφέψομαι (635-636).⁹² Once Haemon has thus declared himself not only obedient to his father's wishes, but also receptive to his father's tutelage, Creon sets forth his full views on the current situation. Having begun by reminding his son of the need to count all things less important than γνώμης πατρῶας (640), Creon proceeds immediately to present Haemon with a list of the *gnomai* by which he ought to live, starting with a pair of general statements about the value of dutiful children and about the trouble which follows when a man has disobedient children (640-647) and going on to explain in gnomic terms the connection between domestic and civic weakness (661-662).⁹³

As he works to educate his son, Creon's interaction with his own gnomic wisdom grows more complicated than it has been before. In previous scenes, Creon has offered advice to others and suggested that his advice will benefit both its direct recipients and the city as a whole. With Haemon, Creon has a closer personal stake in the effectiveness of his own *gnomai*, and his opening generalizations about fathers and children make it clear for whose benefit Creon is speaking. Although he does not say so in so many words, Creon advises his son to be dutiful not so much because being dutiful will benefit Haemon, but because Creon and his reputation will be strengthened if Creon retains the ability to dictate his son's behaviour.⁹⁴ Later, as he moves on to the subject of Antigone, Creon continues to use gnomic statements to sidestep his own role in the current situation; after warning Haemon about the precedent which would be set by nurturing τὰ γ' ἐγγενῆ

⁹² On the potential ambiguity of Haemon's opening lines, Griffith *ad* 635-638 notes, 'γνώμας ἔχων χρηστὰς could be causal ("since you have...") or conditional ("if you have...")'; Creon's response suggests that he takes the phrase as causal.

⁹³ Creon's opening speech to Haemon has been variously received; e.g., Winnington-Ingram 1980:127 and Blundell 1989:120-121 suggest that it is in his interactions with Haemon that the flaws in Creon's world-view become most apparent, while Goldhill 2012:58 claims that 'Creon welcomes [Haemon] with a long, reasoned speech about social and familial order'.

⁹⁴ Blundell 1989:120 notes, 'his language also suggests a one-sided and purely instrumental view of parenthood'. Winnington-Ingram 1980:125 argues that this one-sided view is typical of Creon and comments, 'Creon speaks, mostly, of his office, but thinks of himself'.

φύσει | ἄκοσμα (659-660), Creon never mentions a personal connection with Antigone, and, in the last lines of his speech, Creon speaks of her only in general terms, warning his son, οὕτως ἀμυντέ' ἐστὶ τοῖς κοσμουμένοις, | κοῦτοι γυναικὸς οὐδαμῶς ἠρσητέα (677-678). By increasingly eliding his family relationship to Antigone, however, Creon also diminishes the importance of the family relationship according to which he expects Haemon's loyalty.⁹⁵

In his response to Creon, Haemon picks up on elements of his father's rhetoric and reshapes them in an attempt to convince him to change his plans.⁹⁶ Like Creon, Haemon draws attention to his own authority; Haemon, however, emphasizes the fact that his verbal authority serves Creon's political interests insofar as Haemon can report the things which most Thebans are afraid to say in his presence. Haemon's authority to some extent comes at the expense of Creon's, inasmuch as Creon typically insists that he can speak for the whole city, but, by describing the awe which prevents the Thebans from speaking, Haemon ostensibly leaves Creon's power intact.⁹⁷ It is only after establishing his credentials and reporting on public opinion that Haemon begins to advise his father, and as he does so, he begins to generalize; with the rhetorical question, τί γὰρ πατὴρ θάλλοντος εὐκλεία τέκνοις | ἄγαλμα μείζον, ἢ τί πρὸς παίδων πατρί; (703-704), he offers a counterpoint from a son's point of view to Creon's earlier *gnomai* about the value of good children.

Haemon's advice to his father is largely gnomic, and, as such, it provides the play's first sustained challenge to Creon's status as the sole authoritative dispenser of general truth; like his father and unlike the guard, who relied on *gnomai* for his own

⁹⁵ Blundell 1989:120.

⁹⁶ Foley 2001:185 comments, 'Haemon uses generalization in a fashion that is far more responsive to the circumstances than his father'.

⁹⁷ On Creon's illusions about public opinion, see Carter 2012:122-123.

comfort, Haemon directs his *gnomai* at others.⁹⁸ After his first-person gnostic question about the value of parental success, Haemon's next *gnomai* approach Creon's need for advice from a slightly different angle. As Creon did with Antigone, Haemon moves into the role of educator as he begins to deliver second-person *gnomai*; no man, says Haemon, is right in thinking that he has a monopoly on speech and thought (707-709), and therefore, even for a wise man, τὸ μανθάνειν | πόλλ' αἰσχρὸν οὐδὲν καὶ τὸ μὴ τείνειν ἄγαν (710-711).⁹⁹ From this suggestion that Creon stands in need of advice, Haemon moves into a pair of *gnomai* reminiscent of Creon's earlier *gnomai* to Antigone about the dangers of not yielding under pressure (712-717); Haemon's examples—trees that cannot bend in the wind and men who refuse to slacken their sails—are different from his father's, but their overall message is much the same.¹⁰⁰ By offering a set of *gnomai* for his father's benefit, Haemon lays claim to a different kind of authority than that which he suggested at the beginning of the speech—Haemon both knows what is going on and is in a position to interpret the situation—and this claim shapes the rest of his interaction with Creon.¹⁰¹

Although both Creon and Haemon touch on the subject of Antigone's sentence, the final debate between father and son focuses largely on whether Haemon has any right to instruct Creon; when the chorus advise Creon that it would be appropriate for him to learn from his son if his son should say anything worthwhile, Creon ignores the content of Haemon's speech and asks, οἱ τηλικοῖδε καὶ διδαξόμεσθα δὴ | φρονεῖν πρὸς ἀνδρὸς

⁹⁸ Foley 2001:187 notes that Haemon and Creon are similar in their reliance on generalizations.

⁹⁹ On Haemon's rhetorical choices, Reinhardt 1979:86 comments, 'Haemon's first blindness, his false idea of his own strength, is that he believes that he has the power to teach this father of his a lesson; his second blindness is that he believes that his father's mistake is simply the result of not knowing something that he, the son, has discovered'.

¹⁰⁰ Griffith *ad* 712-718 argues that both Haemon's imagery and his language are gentler than Creon's.

¹⁰¹ See Lardinois 1997:226-227 on the claim to authority implicit in second-person gnostic statements.

τηλικοῦδε τὴν φύσιν; (726-727).¹⁰² From 730 until 745, the stichomythia between the two consists of questions from Creon and answers from Haemon; although Haemon's comment, πόλις γὰρ οὐκ ἔσθ' ἥτις ἀνδρός ἐσθ' ἑνός (737), is the only real gnomic statement in the latter part of the scene, Creon's questions all deal in one way or another with Haemon's right to offer advice to his father and king, advice which has already manifested itself in general statements.¹⁰³ Despite the differences in tone between his *gnomai* and his father's, Haemon's reliance on generalization at this critical juncture in the play has marked him as very much his father's son; nevertheless, when Haemon infringes on his father's rhetorical territory, communication between the two breaks down, and general statements on justice and civic leadership give way to increasingly personal insults.¹⁰⁴

When Teiresias enters two hundred lines later, Creon's interaction with the seer raises further troubling questions about his presentation of himself as the arbiter of truth. The first hint that Teiresias may prove problematic comes when, having been asked what news he brings, he says ἐγὼ διδάξω, καὶ σὺ τῷ μάντει πιθοῦ (992), taking on the didactic role which Creon has previously adopted in his interactions with others.¹⁰⁵ As the scene continues, Teiresias continues to stress his own authority, ending his account with the injunction, ταῦτ' οὔν, τέκνον, φρόνησον (1023). By addressing Creon as τέκνον and attempting to guide his thoughts, Teiresias emphasizes the role which he established when he announced his intention to teach Creon, and the advice which follows and its

¹⁰² Blundell 1989:131 notes that Haemon's youth exacerbates Creon's 'irrational wrath at every attempt to make him reconsider'.

¹⁰³ Podlecki 1966a:363 sees Creon's questions in this exchange as the unfortunate logical conclusion of his milder gnomic statements about civic loyalty in his opening speech; Carter 2012:123 suggests that Creon's statement that the city belongs to its ruler indicates that, whatever he may have said in his opening speech, '[his] proclamation rests on his own will and not on the rule of law'.

¹⁰⁴ Goldhill 2012:62 questions the assertion from Griffith *ad* 726-765 that 'Haemon emerges as the clear moral and verbal victor in the debate', noting that Haemon eventually resorts to verbal abuse. Hall 2009:77-78 sees the exchange as a matter of failed deliberation on Creon's part.

¹⁰⁵ Roisman 1996:36 notes, 'Tiresias assumes the superior position of an old and stern teacher'.

format both suggest that Creon has much to learn. The seer's advice is simple—give due respect to the dead—but it is embedded in a set of *gnomai* about the possibility of recovering from errors with the aid of good advice. Like Haemon, Teiresias suggests that, perhaps even more than his injunction against the burial, it is Creon's inflexibility which puts the city at risk.

Despite his initial willingness to vouch for the good advice which Teiresias has given in the past (993), Creon takes the seer's warning as a serious affront to his authority. Having first denied the mantic authority on the basis of which Teiresias dared to offer him advice, suggesting that Teiresias, like all seers, must be corrupt (1033-1036), Creon assails the premises behind Teiresias' injunction. His own knowledge of divine matters is sufficient, and he need not listen to Teiresias' warnings of pollution because, he explains, switching into gnomic mode, εὖ γὰρ οἶδ' ὅτι | θεοὺς μιάινειν οὔτις ἀνθρώπων σθένει (1043-1044).¹⁰⁶ This general statement and the following *gnome* about the fate of those who say shameful things for the sake of profit (1045-1047), allow Creon to suggest not only that he will not take Teiresias' advice under the current circumstances, but, more generally, that he has no need for the seer's wisdom at all. As far as Creon is concerned, Teiresias' general truths are less valid than Creon's rival generalities, which suggest both that the seer has nothing to offer and that he will suffer for suggesting anything to the contrary.

After this initial gnomic assault on Teiresias' authority, Teiresias and Creon quarrel not so much about Creon's current behaviour as about who has the authority to state general truths. When Teiresias begins to ask, ἄρ' οἶδεν ἀνθρώπων τις, ἄρα φράζεται— (1048), Creon interrupts with a pair of sarcastic counter-questions referring to Teiresias' attempt to speak for all men, τί χρῆμα; ποῖον τοῦτο πάγκοινον λέγεις;

¹⁰⁶ Griffith *ad* 1043-1044 notes that Creon's claim sounds 'hollow and unpersuasive' in the immediate aftermath of Teiresias' account.

(1049). In the following lines, Teiresias and Creon trade gnomic statements and rhetorical questions relating to the flaws which they see in each other; Teiresias asks whether anyone knows ὄσῳ κράτιστον κτημάτων εὐβουλία (1050), and Creon replies, ὄσῳ περ, οἶμαι, μὴ φρονεῖν πλείστη βλάβη (1051). Although they officially agree that εὐβουλία is beneficial and μὴ φρονεῖν is dangerous, Teiresias' comment about εὐβουλία suggests that Creon lacks good counsel, while Creon suggests in his answering comment that Teiresias has no shortage of folly.¹⁰⁷ As they interact with each other, Creon and Teiresias articulate very different conceptions of various key concepts, and their interaction with these concepts, in turn, shapes their ability to interact fruitfully with each other.¹⁰⁸

As Creon and Teiresias exchange their pointed *gnomai*, both the content and the form of their statements play important roles in the dynamic of their conversation. When Teiresias praises εὐβουλία, he suggests not only that his counsel will be beneficial to Creon, but also that it will reflect well on Creon if he is willing to be advised. Throughout the play, however, an unwillingness to be advised has been one of Creon's prominent features, and Creon responds as much to the fact that Teiresias has dared to advise him as to the content of his advice.¹⁰⁹ His statement about the harm caused by not thinking (1051), which serves both to accuse Teiresias of folly and to suggest that it is Creon who is really in a position to educate the seer, thus emphatically denies Teiresias' suggestion of the roles which the two men ought to play in their interaction with each other. Creon knows already how the world works, and, despite his comment about having received

¹⁰⁷ This disconnect between different definitions of good sense has grown increasingly important over the course of the play; Cairns 2013:xxx notes, 'From the entrance of Haemon onwards...opinions are unanimous that good judgement is the best and bad judgement the worst thing'.

¹⁰⁸ Coray 1993:193-194 comments that, after an emphasis on εὐβουλία and related words in the latter half of the play, 'Kreon erkennt schliesslich selbst seine δυσβουλία (1269)'.

¹⁰⁹ Reinhardt 1979:86 describes the Teiresias scene as 'a question of "teaching a lesson" to the unteachable'.

good advice from Teiresias before, he sees any attempt to influence his worldview as an insult to his dual role as ruler of Thebes and authoritative dispenser of truth to his subjects.

When, after the departure of Teiresias, Creon finally begins to acknowledge that the seer may in fact be correct, his change of heart is accompanied by a corresponding change in his interaction with general truths.¹¹⁰ The magnitude of this change is signalled at 1105, when, in response to the chorus's gnomic, *συντέμνουσι γὰρ | θεῶν ποδώκεις τοὺς κακόφρονας Βλάβαι* (1103-1104), Creon, rather than lashing out at the chorus for telling him a general truth, replies, *οἴμοι* (1105), and then offers his own *gnome*, *ἀνάγκη δ' οὐχὶ δυσμαχητέον*, in agreement with the chorus's advice.¹¹¹ For the first time in the play, rather than using *gnomai* to assert his own authority and belittle the knowledge of those who might seek to change his mind, Creon begins to interact with general statements—both his own and those of others—from a position of uncertainty. His final *gnome*, *δέδοικα γὰρ μὴ τοὺς καθεστῶτας νόμους | ἄριστον ἢ σῶζοντα τὸν βίον τελεῖν* (1113-1114), is phrased not as a matter of conviction but as a matter of misgiving.¹¹² Having failed to force others to accept his assessment of the world, Creon must learn to live by a new kind of general truth.

GNOMAI IN SOCIETY: GENERALIZING ABOUT AJAX

In *Trachiniae* and *Antigone*, the tendency to generalize is strongly associated with individual characters; *gnomai* are most important to Deianeira's presentation of herself and her evolving understanding, while Creon in *Antigone* tries to maintain exclusive control over the power to generalize. In the prologue of *Ajax*, both Athena and Odysseus

¹¹⁰ Roisman 1996:36-37 suggests that Creon is aware all along of the seer's superior authority, even though his desire to save face prevents him from yielding while Teiresias is still present.

¹¹¹ Knox 1966:216-217 notes the concentration of passive formulas in Creon's description of his change of mind.

¹¹² Foley 2001:187 notes that, as Creon changes his mind, 'he recognizes at first only the validity of the traditional usages (1113-1114) that he rejected in Antigone's argument'.

generalize about the human condition and the workings of divine power in the lives of men; later, most of the other named characters offer their own general assessments of related issues. In their early generalizations, Athena and Odysseus interact with concepts which will be important throughout the play, both before and after Ajax's death, and, moreover, they establish the rhetorical backdrop against which subsequent discussions of those concepts will take place.¹¹³ In this section, I will analyse the importance of general statements after the death of Ajax, arguing that the debate over Ajax's body, which takes place largely in general terms, represents a final working out of the generalities uttered by Ajax and others in the first half of the play, which in turn often reflect on the figure of Ajax himself.¹¹⁴ Over the course of the debate, the ability both to generalize successfully about the world and to interpret the generalizations of others provides an important indication of any given character's broader ability to function within the world of the play.

The generalizations which shape the debate over Ajax's body deal for the most part with issues which were also of great importance during Ajax's life. In life, Ajax, like both Creon and Deianeira, viewed the world in general terms; after he recovers from Athena's delusion, Ajax uses *gnomai* to process the events in which he finds himself and to provide himself with some guidance on what to do next. Ajax generalizes from the perspective of one who used to be great and has now—unjustly, as he sees it—been deprived of his status; he therefore offers *gnomai* on the power of an unfriendly god to disrupt human life (455-456), how a man beset by evils can best avoid shame (473), and how an εὐγενής man should live and die (479-480). Ajax's gnomic statements are mostly not in themselves unreasonable, but it gradually becomes clear that the moral qualities which underpin his *gnomai*—what is αἰσχρὸς, which events are κακά, what it means to

¹¹³ On the importance of the gnomic statements in the prologue for the early characterization of Odysseus and Athena, see the Introduction above.

¹¹⁴ Murnaghan 1989:172 suggests that, in the second half of the play, Sophocles is 'exploring the implications, both social and literary, of various modes of presenting and evaluating heroic figures'.

live or die *καλῶς*—are qualities which he defines differently than most other figures in the play.¹¹⁵ Throughout the play, his gnomic statements suggest a worldview that differs from those held by Athena and Odysseus in the prologue; it is indicative of the scale of Ajax’s troubles that his worldview also differs widely from that held by his most loyal followers.¹¹⁶

When other characters begin to deliver gnomic statements after Ajax’s death, then, most of the issues—particularly the changeability of human fortune, the importance of social order, and the meaning of nobility—about which they speak have already been articulated in one form or another by Ajax himself.¹¹⁷ As the play’s surviving characters debate how one ought to react to figures like Ajax and whether the world has room for such figures at all, their interactions with the moral terms that have throughout the play come to be associated with Ajax shape their interactions with each other. Menelaus and Teucer oppose each other, that is, not only because their opinions about Ajax are incompatible, but also because they disagree more generally on what makes a man noble and how order ought to be maintained in an army. For Menelaus and Teucer, Ajax is a flashpoint for broader disagreements about the rules according to which one ought to live.

The issues which will guide different characters’ reactions to Ajax’s death are brought to the forefront shortly after Tecmessa discovers his body. Tecmessa begins with the divine; when the chorus express the hope that the gods will prevent the Atreidae from taking advantage of their power over Ajax’s dependants, Tecmessa says, οὐκ ἄν τὰδ’ ἔσθη τῆδε μὴ θεῶν μέτα (950). With τὰδε and τῆδε, she links her comment to the

¹¹⁵ On the figure of Ajax within the Greek force at Troy, Knox 1961:21 comments, ‘Qualities and defects alike mark him as unfit for the kind of society in which the individual’s position is based on consent and cooperation’. Cairns 1993:231 draws attention to Ajax’s focus on his own personal shame.

¹¹⁶ The chorus echo his gnomic statement about time at 714, but Goldhill 2012:87 notes that they misapprehend the implications of his *gnome*, commenting, ‘Their desire to place Ajax within a generalizing discourse is itself placed as the specific failure of a particular group of sailors to appreciate the hero’s tortured commitment, and the audience in the theatre responds to this *méconnaissance* [*sic*]’.

¹¹⁷ Ajax’s own articulation of these issues is not always clear, either to other characters or to the audience; Lardinois 2006:223 comments particularly on the riddling nature of the *gnomai* contained in the deception speech when that speech is taken in its context as a semi-prophetic speech delivered as Ajax nears his death.

current situation, but there is also the implication that her statement would nevertheless be true under other circumstances.¹¹⁸ As she is concerned with divine involvement, Tecmessa is also concerned with the alternation of human fortune; although she does not hold out much hope for divine intervention, and although she agrees that Ajax's enemies are likely to exult over his death, Tecmessa believes in the possibility of some sort of change, as she suggested from a very different perspective when she described her own past to Ajax before his suicide (487-491).¹¹⁹ Now, before the beginning of the debate over Ajax's body, she observes gnomically that οἱ γὰρ κακοὶ γνώμασι τ'ἀγάθ' ἐν χεροῖν | ἔχοντες οὐκ ἴσασι πρὶν τις ἐκβάλη (964-965). Tecmessa does not know what will happen now that Ajax has killed himself, and she has no part in the eventual debate, but her current gnostic assessment touches on moral terms which have been active throughout the play and will now take on slightly different dimensions in the aftermath of Ajax's death.

When Menelaus and Agamemnon arrive one after another to forbid the burial of Ajax, they interact with a similar set of issues surrounding Ajax and his reputation after death, but they frame those issues differently than Tecmessa and the chorus do.¹²⁰ In life, the Atreidae had a very different pattern of interaction with Ajax than either Tecmessa or the chorus did, and, as such, they speak after his death less about Ajax himself than about the effect of having someone like Ajax as part of a military expedition.¹²¹ Tecmessa's moral terms, terms of goodness and badness, baseness and nobility, which, despite some importantly different definitions, she shared with Ajax and Odysseus, are mostly replaced in Menelaus' and Agamemnon's speeches by a much more limited gnostic vocabulary of

¹¹⁸ Finglass *ad* 950 contrasts Tecmessa's 'bitter realism' with the conventional prayer of the chorus.

¹¹⁹ Cairns 2006:111.

¹²⁰ Poe 1987:22 describes the debate over Ajax's body as 'petty quibbling' between the Atreidae and Teucer, which sidesteps the real issues of Ajax's guilt and motives, but this assessment does not take into account the overlap between Ajax's moral concerns and those of his surviving friends and enemies.

¹²¹ Cairns 2006:116 draws attention to the increased focus on 'society' in the arguments of the Atreidae.

power. As they generalize about people like Ajax, the Atreidae work to characterize Ajax as marked by a dangerous tendency to disregard established military structures, a tendency which, if widespread, could lead to broader social breakdown.

Hierarchies matter deeply to both Ajax and his enemies; Ajax, Menelaus, and Agamemnon all believe that they are—or should be—at the top of their relevant hierarchies, but they define the qualities according to which men should be ranked differently, and, as such, interact differently with general truths about societal order. Menelaus defends his assertion that he and his brother ought to be able to rule over Ajax now that he is dead with a series of *gnomai* about the need to honour hierarchies.¹²² Although some of the terms overlap, the moral claim with which Menelaus begins, καίτοι κακοῦ πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ὄντα δημότην | μηδὲν δικαιοῦν τῶν ἐφεστῶτων κλύειν (1071-1072), suggests a different idea of baseness than which Ajax assumed when he claimed that a noble man ought either to live well or die nobly.¹²³ Menelaus' statement assumes the possibility of a man who is both ἐσθλός and subordinate, so long as that man admits that he is a δημότης and behaves accordingly. Such an idea is antithetical to the worldview espoused by Ajax; his anger against the Greek leaders stemmed from being ranked below Odysseus in the contest over the arms of Achilles (445-446), and, particularly after the failed attack against Odysseus and the Atreidae, he was unable to reconcile the prospect of living in the resulting subordinate position with the concept of nobility which had previously shaped his idea of his role.¹²⁴

Whereas Ajax's *gnomai* were for the most part concerned with ideals, Menelaus, after suggesting that those who disrupt established hierarchies are morally wrong, generalizes primarily about practical issues; he follows his statement equating

¹²² Heath 1987:200 comments, 'His appeal to these maxims is an inadequate veil for his real motives, a weak man's envy and resentment of a greater'.

¹²³ Cairns 1993:235-237; Garvie *ad* 1071-1072 draws attention to 'the ambiguity in the meaning of κακός'.

¹²⁴ Winnington-Ingram 1980:27-28 comments on Ajax's faith that the attack against the Greek leaders was the right choice, and the contribution of the attacks failure to his sense of his own dishonour.

disobedience with baseness with a pair of gnomic statements suggesting that neither a city nor an army will function if subordinates do know their place.¹²⁵ Over the course of his series of *gnomai*, Menelaus shifts from an emphasis on listening to those in command to a more general emphasis on the need for fear; when he says, οὐ γάρ ποτ' οὔτ' ἄν ἐν πόλει νόμοι καλῶς | φέροντ' ἄν, ἔνθα μὴ καθεστήκοι δέος (1073-1074), he suggests that it is fear of consequences as much as simple understanding of hierarchy which maintains order within a city. The benefits of good order to society as a whole transfer to individuals within that society, and Menelaus argues that people who know their place increase their chances of success. Fear and shame, again, are his watchwords—δέος γὰρ ᾧ πρόσεστιν αἰσχύνη θ' ὁμοῦ, | σωτηρίαν ἔχοντα τόνδ' ἐπίστασο (1079-1080), he says—but the αἰσχύνη about which Menelaus speaks is a different force than the shame which Ajax feared.¹²⁶ Menelaus interacts differently with his concept of shame than Ajax did with his; at this point in the debate, Menelaus presents shame as something which applies to inferiors, and with which he himself has little to do, while, for Ajax, shame was always a possible—and intolerable—consequence of failing to live up to his own standards.

The practical focus of Menelaus' generalizations is tied to Menelaus' stake in the matters at hand; although shame should not be an issue for Menelaus himself, he has a personal interest in the shame which he believes his inferiors ought to feel. Thus when he presents his version of the philosophy of change which has been expressed in various forms by Odysseus, Athena, the chorus, and Ajax himself, Menelaus begins with a general statement, ἔρπει παραλλάξ ταῦτα (1087), but goes on to present a narrowly focused view of change. Where Ajax in the deception speech described an entire world governed

¹²⁵ Rutherford 2012:397 draws a distinction 'between generalisations which arise from introspection and reflection, from a struggle to clarify one's own thoughts to oneself by articulating them in generalities, and generalisations which are deployed as part of a persuasive process'.

¹²⁶ Winnington-Ingram 1980:62 suggests that 'by *aidos* [Menelaus] means respect for his own authority and by fear means fear of his own and his brother's power'.

by the principle of change, Menelaus limits his comments to his personal interaction with his now-fallen enemy: Ajax was once αἴθων ὑβριστής, but now Menelaus is in a position to ‘be proud’ (1088).¹²⁷ Menelaus’ personal take on change leads him to a conclusion which is not only hostile to Ajax, but also at odds with conclusions drawn by other figures; Odysseus’ reflections on the fragility of life led him in the prologue to pity the humiliated Ajax (121-126), while even Athena, Ajax’s great enemy, commented on the changeability of human fortune (127-132). Menelaus, however, engages only with the pieces of this philosophy which serve his purposes. His gnomic statements constitute not so much a coherent worldview as a set of justifications for his own current actions, and the chorus notice; when he finishes speaking, they warn him, Μενέλαε, μὴ γνώμας ὑποστήσας σοφὰς | εἶτ’ αὐτὸς ἐν θανοῦσιν ὑβριστῆς γένη (1091-1092).¹²⁸

It is not long after this choral assessment of the gap between Menelaus’ high words and ignoble actions that Menelaus tries to regain his rhetorical control by delivering the fable which I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The fable is an exercise in generality, designed to suggest that the current debate is reflective of broader social issues, but, when Teucer draws attention to the hollowness of his rival’s rhetorical strategy, Menelaus gives up on words altogether, instead threatening to compel Teucer’s obedience by force. He explains his resolution to depart with a final gnomic statement, commenting, καὶ γὰρ αἰσχρόν, εἰ πύθοιτό τις | λόγοις κολάζειν ᾧ βιάζεσθαι πάρα (1159-1160).¹²⁹ This *gnome*, like most of Menelaus’ other general statements, is concerned with issues of honour and hierarchy; although being αἰσχροός, a quality which Menelaus has so far associated with Ajax and his allies, has in Menelaus’ view much to do with pre-established social standing, it also now seems to be a quality which can be acquired

¹²⁷ Rutherford 2012:394.

¹²⁸ Winnington-Ingram 1980:62.

¹²⁹ Hesk 2003:117 argues that Menelaus’ parting *gnome* falls flat, commenting, ‘This mention of physical force, and the laughable assertion that he has been punishing Teucer with words, shows that Menelaus has lost the verbal contest’.

through certain actions, and Menelaus leaves after suggesting that by deigning to speak to Teucer, he runs the risk of being tainted with Teucer's bad characteristics.

Agamemnon, when he enters, repeats much of his brother's rhetoric from a position of greater military authority.¹³⁰ The brothers interact with general truth in much the same way; after an initial, personally charged tirade against Teucer and Ajax, in which he insists that Teucer is a low-born blusterer, and Ajax was never as essential to the Greek cause as he held himself to be, Agamemnon offers a series of general statements to support his specific denial of Ajax's right to burial.¹³¹ Like Menelaus, Agamemnon begins with a statement about the need for order: the rule of law cannot be maintained, he says, if we push out the rightful victors and lead those in the rear up to the front (1246-1249). Agamemnon's *gnomai* likewise quickly take on a personal tone: first he says that it is not the strong, broad-shouldered men who are most reliable, but the wise who always prevail (1250-1252), and then he comments that great oxen can be controlled with small whips (1253-1254). Physical strength having been one of Ajax's defining features, both the strong man and the great ox are clear representations of Ajax. Where this leaves Agamemnon himself, however, is more complicated; he begins his series of *gnomai* by suggesting that he should win over Ajax both in the interest of maintaining social order and by right of his superior mental prowess, but in the end, like Menelaus, he falls back on his ability to force others to do his bidding.

Teucer, except for his pseudo-fable in response to Menelaus, does not tend to speak gnomically; he responds to Agamemnon's opening speech with a series of specific points rebutting his accusations and a further series of increasingly specific insults to

¹³⁰ Reinhardt 1979:31 describes Menelaus as 'the over-commanding sub-commander', thus drawing attention to the disconnect between Menelaus' rhetoric and his real power in the army. See also Winnington-Ingram 1980:65 on the difference in authority between the two brothers.

¹³¹ Agamemnon's *gnomai*, though they reinforce Ajax's inferior status, have little to do with the issue of the burial itself; see Winnington-Ingram 1980:65, Heath 1987:201.

Agamemnon and his family.¹³² It is into this rhetorical environment, one in which general truths have always been employed for personal ends and the gnomic has gradually given way entirely to the specific and the personal, that Odysseus enters.¹³³ Odysseus is the only character to span both the beginning and the end of the play, and he is, moreover, the only character who expresses mixed feelings about Ajax; everyone else in the play is strongly partisan, one way or another, but Odysseus, as he explained in the prologue (121-124), can distance himself from the personal enmity he once felt for the fallen hero. His last lines in the prologue consisted of a general statement, ὁρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν | εἶδωλ' ὅσοιπερ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν (125-126), suggesting that the fragility of human experience is a reason to moderate one's personal antipathies; in his final conversation with Agamemnon, Odysseus, on the basis of this general truth, encourages his commander to rethink both his position on Ajax and many of the gnomic statements which have been in question throughout the play.¹³⁴

Odysseus' impartiality is crucial to his interaction with general truth. Although throughout much of the play, the personal designations of friend and enemy have been conflated with the moral qualities of baseness and nobility, Odysseus warns Agamemnon not to hate so much that he tramples justice in the process (1335), and follows this warning with an assessment of Ajax's good qualities capped with the gnomic statement, ἄνδρα δ' οὐ δίκαιον, εἰ θάνοι, | βλάπτειν τὸν ἐσθλόν, οὐδ' ἔαν μισῶν κυρῆς (1344-1345). A good man, in Odysseus' view, can be an object of hatred, but his goodness still deserves some credit.¹³⁵ His next warning, μὴ χαῖρ', Ἀτρεΐδη, κέρδεσιν τοῖς μὴ καλοῖς (1349), similarly calls into question Agamemnon's habit—a habit he shares with both

¹³² Heath 1987:202 comments on the exchange of personal insults between Agamemnon and Teucer.

¹³³ Winnington-Ingram 1980:66 comments, 'Odysseus enters to meet a certain situation, to achieve a certain purpose, towards which he must speak what the situation allows and the purpose demands'.

¹³⁴ This rethinking of general truths does not represent a decisive judgement on Ajax; see Murnaghan 1989:184 on 'the play's exposure of the pressures shaping individual moments of evaluation'.

¹³⁵ Winnington-Ingram 1980:66-67.

Menelaus and Ajax—of assuming that what is good for him is by definition noble. As he uses his generalizations to separate the terms according to which figures in the play have been characterizing each other and their actions since the prologue, Odysseus injects a degree of subtlety into a debate which has previously operated on the level of absolutes.

As Agamemnon tries to come to terms with Odysseus' willingness to honour a dead foe, the conversation between the two men moves, for the last time in the play, to the subject of change. Worried about granting posthumous favours to Ajax, Agamemnon complains, *τοιοῖδε μέντοι φῶτες οὔμπληκτοι βροτῶν* (1358); Ajax, he suggests, was problematic largely because his behaviour as part of the Greek army was unpredictable, and honouring him in death would set a dangerous precedent.¹³⁶ Odysseus, however, points out that the unpredictable aspect of Ajax's character is not unusual; ἦ κάρτα πολλοὶ νῦν φίλοι καὶ φίλοις πικροί (1359), he says, echoing Ajax's earlier resolution to remember that enemies may become friends and friends will not endure.¹³⁷ For Ajax, this mutability of human loyalties was one of the things which made the idea of continuing to live in the world unbearable; inasmuch as the adjective ἔμπληκτος implies a tendency to change one's mind, Ajax was willing to die in part so as not to risk becoming ἔμπληκτος, and Agamemnon's comment at 1358 would therefore have been a grave insult from Ajax's point of view.¹³⁸ Odysseus, on the other hand, interacts differently with change and finds the idea that all men share a degree of changeability liberating; although Agamemnon worries that he will look like a coward if he shows respect to the fallen Ajax

¹³⁶ Both Jebb and Kamerbeek take 1358 as referring to Odysseus; Winnington-Ingram 1979:4, however, argues that ἔμπληκτος would be an inappropriate word for Agamemnon to use about Odysseus; Finglass *ad* 1358 provides further support for taking the line to refer to Ajax.

¹³⁷ Rutherford 2012:392 comments, 'Odysseus and Ajax, though enemies in life, experience some of the same emotions (see esp. 121 and 652 "I pity") and share the same insight'.

¹³⁸ On this meaning of ἔμπληκτος see Knox 1966:228n.41.

(1362), Odysseus suggests that Agamemnon will simply look like a leader who understands the way of the world.¹³⁹

Odysseus' willingness to put aside his own grievances and argue in favour of Ajax's burial does not mean that he does not think about his own circumstances; Odysseus simply suggests a different relationship between personal goals and universal truth. When he explains to Agamemnon that he has intervened on behalf of Ajax because he too may someday need such intervention (1365), Agamemnon responds with the gnomic, ἢ πάνθ' ὁμοῖα· πᾶς ἀνὴρ αὐτῷ πονεῖ (1366).¹⁴⁰ Given that Agamemnon's self-interest has been a prominent force throughout since his appearance onstage, it is not self-interest in itself that is the problem here; instead, Odysseus' care for his own interests represents a flaw in the way of the world inasmuch as it demonstrates that not everyone's interests align perfectly with Agamemnon's. Odysseus' self-interest, moreover, differs from that of other characters; where Ajax and the Atreidae were prompted by self-interest to ignore the claims of those around them, Odysseus' self-interest causes him to look outward at the world of which he is a part.¹⁴¹ His careful gnomic analyses of that world provide a framework for interacting successfully with both gods and men by treading a narrow line between adherence to principle and the occasional necessity for compromise.

During his time on stage in the first half of the play, Ajax lays out his principles about how the world ought to work, and struggles with the fact that the world—or at least the Greek army at Troy—does not seem to work according to those principles. He speaks about the world in general terms, and tries in vain to make reality square with his

¹³⁹ Cairns 2006:113 discusses Ajax's refusal to live in a changing world, noting that 'he refuses (as the reactions of Odysseus and Tecmessa suggest) to see the fragility of human existence as a bond between himself and other human beings'.

¹⁴⁰ Rutherford 2012:391 comments on 'the crudity of [Agamemnon's] response, and its inadequacy as a summary of Odysseus' outlook'.

¹⁴¹ Cairns 2006:116 notes Odysseus' ability to 'generalize from Ajax's fate to his own and that of all mankind, but still [respond] to the individual and unparalleled excellence of Ajax'.

generalizations.¹⁴² With Ajax dies his particular moral stance, and, over the course of the debate over his body, those who remain all attempt in various ways to draw generally applicable conclusions about the world as it stands in the aftermath of Ajax's death. Although figures in conflict with each other often draw apparently similar gnomic conclusions, they interact with general truth differently, both in their definitions of key terms and in their ability to apply generalities to their own lives. As the play nears its end, the ability to adapt moral terminology to changing circumstances eventually tips the balance of the debate towards Odysseus.¹⁴³ It is by both recognizing that change is integral to human experience—as most of his fellow characters also recognize—and by being able and willing to alter his course accordingly—as most of his fellow characters are not—that Odysseus manages to survive in the tragic world which destroyed Ajax.¹⁴⁴

CONCLUSION: THINKING GNOMICALLY ABOUT CHARACTER

When Sophoclean characters generalize, the resulting statements can serve a number of different—if sometimes overlapping—purposes. On one level, the *gnomai* delivered by characters onstage function much like proverbs or other generalizations outside of drama; the generalizations made by tragic characters typically have implications for the behaviour of the speaker or her intended listener, and those who are on the receiving end of gnomic statements must decide whether or not they will act in accordance with the *gnomai* delivered by fellow characters. Moreover, gnomic statements—both in and out of drama—allow characters to project an image of themselves and their place in

¹⁴² Rutherford 2012:394 comments on Ajax's eventual refusal to live according to the general conclusions which he draws.

¹⁴³ Hesk 2003:130 notes, 'Odysseus shows that an awareness of flexibility and mutability need not undermine justice, *philia*, or social bonds'.

¹⁴⁴ On the idea that Odysseus and Ajax belong in fundamentally different worlds, see, e.g., Knox 1961:25 and Winnington-Ingram 1980:62.

the world they inhabit.¹⁴⁵ Along with using *gnomai* to influence the actions of others under specific circumstances, characters can also use *gnomai* to define their social interactions more broadly. Successful interactions between characters depend in large part upon shared assumptions and shared definitions for key terms; in many cases, gnostic statements provide a context for testing the compatibility of the worldviews held by different figures.

The act of making gnostic statements is, in effect, a way of making a claim to a certain level of authority; generalizing requires a view of the world which is broad enough to make a gnostic statement applicable beyond its immediate context.¹⁴⁶ When Teiresias generalizes in *Antigone* about the tendency of humans to err and the ability to recover from past errors, his authority comes both from his prophetic ability and from his history of advising well in the past. Similarly, when Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* generalizes to Theseus about the susceptibility of all things to time and change, he suggests that it is his extensive experience of the world which gives him the right to speak in gnostic terms about the vicissitudes of fortune.¹⁴⁷ Other characters whose authority is not so well established also generalize, and when they do, they often use their *gnomai* to make claims for their own authority. Creon, for example, generalizes frequently early in his rule over Thebes, particularly when his public decisions are likely to be called into question.¹⁴⁸ The *gnomai* delivered by Agamemnon and Menelaus in the dispute over Ajax's body serve a similar purpose; after their ability to control the army has been called into question by Ajax's behaviour, their general statements represent an attempt to add a level of rhetorical support to their efforts to maintain political and military control. Generalizations,

¹⁴⁵ Kindstrand 1978:71, Lardinois 2000:641-643, and Martin 2009:119 comment on gnostic statements as a way for individuals to situate themselves in society.

¹⁴⁶ Lardinois 2006:223 comments on the characteristics shared by gnostic statement and prophecy.

¹⁴⁷ Easterling 2009:168 comments on Oedipus' ability to generalize for others.

¹⁴⁸ Podlecki 1966a:362.

however, are a risky way of maintaining authority; when *gnomai* do not achieve their desired effect, they can leave their speakers looking more foolish than they did before.¹⁴⁹

In many cases, the tendency to view the world in general terms goes hand-in-hand with the famous inflexibility of many tragic—and particularly Sophoclean—heroes. *Gnomai* can only function in an essentially consistent world, and characters who are themselves rigid often describe the world in rigid terms and lay out equally rigid general principles for human behaviour which are meant to apply to all people in all possible situations. In this vein, Ajax uses gnomic statements to outline the principles by which he lives and dies, and Creon's tendency to speak gnomically diminishes sharply once he has agreed to be swayed by Teiresias' advice; after he returns to the stage following the death of Haemon and Antigone, the shattered Creon makes no more generalizations, while the chorus delivers a series of *gnomai* intended to comfort and guide him in his misfortune.¹⁵⁰ Once the world has shown itself to be inconsistent with the *gnomai* upon which he has previously relied, Creon loses much of his ability to generalize about the world as he now sees it to be.¹⁵¹

At the same time, not all tragic *gnomai* are indicative of an inability to adapt successfully. In both *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, the figure of Odysseus employs gnomic statements in order to convince others to accept the fact that different circumstances bring with them the need for different types of action. Anticipating an objection from Achilles' naturally honest son, the Odysseus of *Philoctetes* urges Neoptolemus to undertake the deception of Philoctetes with the *gnome*, ἡδὺ γὰρ τι κτήμα τῆς νίκης λαβεῖν (81), reassuring him that there will be time enough to be honest after the completion of the

¹⁴⁹ On the ineffectiveness of the generalizations made by the Atreidae, see, e.g., Heath 1987:200, Rutherford 2012:394-395; see also Hesk 2003:117-118 on the humiliation of Menelaus after his verbal duel with Teucer.

¹⁵⁰ Hesk 2003:83-86 and Rutherford 2012:394 discuss Ajax's attitude to his own general conclusion that the world is defined by instability.

¹⁵¹ Roisman 1996:38 notes, 'his passivity shows how completely he is stripped of his authoritative roles and outlooks'.

scheme (82-85).¹⁵² On a less sinister level, the Odysseus of *Ajax* generalizes in the prologue about the human condition in order to explain his reluctance to exult over Ajax's misfortune, and, in the debate over Ajax's body at the end of the play, he employs several *gnomai* in his effort to convince Agamemnon that being willing to show mercy to a fallen enemy is neither bad policy nor a sign of personal weakness.¹⁵³ Depending on the circumstances of its use, a gnomic statement can have a variety of implications, and this flexibility of interpretation can be used to support a matching flexibility of action.

Because of their connection with both action and interpretation, *gnomai* play an important part in the onstage reasoning processes of many tragic characters; *gnomai* provide a framework within which characters can interact with concepts and situations which are otherwise difficult to face. Some characters, as Deianeira does in her first speech, begin with a gnomic statement, and then use that gnomic statement as a tool for interpreting their own lives. In other cases, the process works in the opposite direction, and a character will deliver a gnomic statement as the logical conclusion to an account of particular events; much later in *Trachiniae*, at the conclusion of the speech in which she describes Deianeira's suicide, the Nurse says, οὐ γὰρ ἔσθ' ἢ γ' αὐριον | πρὶν εὔ πάθη
τις τὴν παροῦσαν ἡμέραν (945-946). Her *gnome* is closely related to the proverb which Deianeira quoted at the beginning of the play, but the two characters use their *gnomai* in different ways.¹⁵⁴ Deianeira's *gnome*, which she swiftly rejects, provides a starting point for her own reflections; she holds her own experiences up against the proverb, finds that they do not fit, and decides to draw her own conclusions from her own life. The Nurse, by contrast, uses her concluding *gnome* as a way to come to terms with the events she has just witnessed; although her generalization does not diminish the horror of Deianeira's death,

¹⁵² Pucci *ad* 81-82 comments that Odysseus' argument here implies a problematic notion of justice.

¹⁵³ Hesk 2003:127-129.

¹⁵⁴ Kraus 1991:94 observes the similarity between the two *gnomai* and comments on the different dramatic function of the Nurse's final statement.

it allows her to locate recent events within a broader pattern of human experience and to suggest that sometimes catastrophe cannot be avoided.¹⁵⁵

Although *gnomai* can provide comfort and guidance in difficult situations, they remain a dangerous rhetorical tool, and they can easily get out of hand. The form of most *gnomai* lends itself to multiple interpretations; since gnostic statements are by definition generally applicable, they can easily be applied to situations and people other than the ones intended by their speakers.¹⁵⁶ Often, when a character delivers a gnostic statement, her audience—both on- and offstage—may approach the statement from a different perspective and interact differently with both its content and its context. Deianeira rejects the proverb with which she begins her opening speech on the grounds that she already knows her life to be unhappy. What she does not know, however, is that her life is about to become even more unhappy, and as the play continues, her rejection of the proverb looks increasingly naïve.¹⁵⁷ Deianeira takes the proverb, as it is often taken, to refer to the foolishness of assuming that present happiness will last, and, since she already believes herself to be unfortunate, she sees no reason to heed its warning; by rejecting the proverb, moreover, she assumes a degree of authority over her own story.¹⁵⁸ As her situation worsens, however, it becomes apparent that she did not know how fortunate she really was at the beginning of the play. By the time the Nurse rephrases the rejected *gnome* after Deianeira's suicide, Deianeira's initial rejection of the proverb no longer seems like a sign of her authority, but instead suggests that her control over her own life has been illusory all along.

* * *

¹⁵⁵ Easterling 1968:66; Lawrence 1978:300 comments that the Nurse's use of the proverb 'round[s] off Deianeira's tragedy', while Kraus 1991:94 suggests that it 'pronounces judgement on the *Trachiniai*'.

¹⁵⁶ Lardinois 2006:216.

¹⁵⁷ On the irony of Deianeira's interpretation of the *gnome*, see, among others, Easterling 1968:58, Lawrence 1978:300, Kraus 1991:76-77.

¹⁵⁸ Heiden 2012:136.

Although gnomic statements are self-contained in their form, Sophoclean characters do not generalize in a vacuum. Whatever the immediate purpose of a generalization—whether it allows a character to think through a difficult situation, pass judgement on the actions of another figure, or assert her authority over those around her or over the events of her life—gnomic statements trigger a range of interactions which extend far beyond the interaction between the speaker and the task at hand and thus tie together many of the issues which have been relevant throughout this study. When Neoptolemus generalizes to Philoctetes shortly before revealing the deception, ἅπαντα δυσχέρεια, τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν | ὅταν λιπῶν τις δρᾷ τὰ μὴ προσεϊκότα (902-903), his generalization is in the first instance a first-person *gnome*, which helps Neoptolemus to explain his current reasoning as he decides what to do in the present moment.¹⁵⁹ At the same time, Neoptolemus’ gnomic statement suggests his complicated personal interactions with his role as Achilles’ son, his memory of the immediate past, and his sense of the trajectory along which his own actions are guiding him.¹⁶⁰ For the audience, moreover, a comment from Neoptolemus about his φύσις will suggest also the interactions between the Sophoclean Neoptolemus and other versions of both his story and that of Achilles.¹⁶¹

The web of interactions in which Neoptolemus is caught at this point in the play is a matter not just of situation, but of character. His memory of his recent unsavoury deeds and the uncertainty of his current trajectory—is he going forward to military glory among the Greeks at Troy or heading towards enduring personal shame?—have situational aspects, inasmuch as Neoptolemus has acted as he has because he was ordered to do so under certain circumstances by Odysseus, but Neoptolemus reacts to them in personal ways. Over the course of the play, Neoptolemus’ reactions to the changing situation at

¹⁵⁹ Visser 1998:177 suggests that Neoptolemus is at this point essentially speaking to himself.

¹⁶⁰ Taplin 1971:35-36 describes the effect of Neoptolemus’ moral sense on the momentum of the whole play after the revelation of the plot.

¹⁶¹ Pucci *ad* 902-903 sees in these lines an emphasis on the question of whether it is possible to change one’s nature.

hand reflect the pressures of the various interactions to which he is subject; sometimes his role as Odysseus' subordinate counts more than his role as Achilles' son, while sometimes the shame of his present actions counts more than his hope for future glory.¹⁶² At what may be the moment of the highest tension in the play, Neoptolemus' generalization represents an attempt to make sense of the various interactions which have brought him to this state of uncertainty and made him who is at this point in the play. Just before he takes one of his defining actions by going against Odysseus to reveal the plot to Philoctetes, Neoptolemus positions himself as a character in interaction.

¹⁶² See Chapters 2 and 4 above for discussions of the role-tension to which Neoptolemus is subject and of his negotiation of the relationship between present and future.

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