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Heroines and Murderers: The World of Sophoclean Women

by
Nathan DeBar

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
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Approved by

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For Kelley, my *carissima mater*, and for Brigitte Reed, *pulcherrima coniunx*.

ABSTRACT

NATHAN DEBAR: Heroines and Murderers: The World of Sophoclean Women
(Under the direction of Jonathan Fenno)

This thesis will examine the female characters of the extant and fragmentary plays of the 5th-century BC Athenian poet Sophocles. These plays' composition date ranges from the second half of the 5th century BC. Not every play will be considered for this study, as some do not contain female characters or female characters cannot be ascribed to a fragmentary play. Only plays that feature female characters or plays in which female characters and their actions can be reasonably estimated will be used in this study. For the fragments and their information, I shall default to Hugh Lloyd-Jones' 1996 *Sophocles: Fragments*. To ascertain which fragmentary plays and quotes are relevant, I read Lloyd-Jones' description for each play which he believes existed and can provide evidence written by Sophocles. In my study I use the *kurios* as a reference point for each female character, which is how I divided each character as "good" or "bad" in their respective role. Some characters can take multiple roles, such as being both a mother and wife, and will be judged by each role, as some characters will appear twice in this paper. Although I am labeling the characters good or bad, I am not condemning nor endorsing their actions but am labeling based on their actions related to their *kurios*. I have divided each chapter based on the progression of a typical Athenian woman's life, starting with girlhood, then marriage, and finally motherhood. The most important theme in Sophocles' work is passion, which brings out the worst and the best in different characters. Overall, I believe my thesis works the same way, showing Sophocles' female characters at their best and worst. Passion is a neutral force in Sophoclean drama; it is the characters themselves that decide to wield it for good or bad, and no characters exemplify this more than the Sophoclean women.

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Introduction

In the fragmentary tragedy of Sophocles named *Tereus*, pessimistic words are ascribed to the character Procne:

... ἀλλὰ πολλάκις
ἔβλεψα ταύτη τὴν γυναικείαν φύσιν,
ὡς οὐδέν ἐσμεν. αἶ νεαί μὲν ἐν πατρὸς
ἡδιστον, οἶμαι, ζῶμεν ἀνθρώπων βίον·
... ὅταν δ' ἐς ἡβην ἐξικώμεθ' ἔμφορες,
ὠθούμεθ' ἔξω καὶ διεμπολώμεθα
θεῶν πατρῶων τῶν τε φυσάντων ἄπο.

...but many times
I have seen the feminine nature in this way,
that we are nothing. On one hand we young women living in our father's house,
I think, live the most pleasant life of humans;
...But when we arrive into our prime of life and begin to understand,
we are pushed outside and sold in lots
from our paternal gods and fathers.¹

Soph. *Tereus* Fr. 583²

This statement points to three significant phases in a typical 5th century Attic woman's life, childhood, marriage and motherhood, and reveals how women's lives were dependent on men.

The quotation from *Tereus* provides insight into how women may have pictured their subordination, even if a man did write it. Although only fragments from *Tereus* survive, the myth is told by several later authors such as Hyginus which allows modern historians to reconstruct the plot. One can appreciate Procne's words even more knowing the full extent of her predicament, as she had been forced to leave a happy childhood home in order to marry an older

¹ My own translation. All translations will be mine unless explicitly stated otherwise.

² For the numbering of the fragments, I use Sophocles. *Sophocles: Fragments*. Edited by Hugh Lloyd-Jones. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

man for the sake of her father's political interest. Being married to the Thracian barbarian Tereus and living far away from her birth family, the differences between her unwed and married years are amplified. The play's conflict is augmented when Procne learns that Tereus has abducted, maimed, and repeatedly raped her sister. In revenge for this terrible crime, Procne will butcher her son and feed the remains to Tereus, thus destroying her new family in revenge for her old one. Infanticide and cannibalism could hardly have been a common occurrence in Athenian society, but Sophocles uses these acts to evoke fears about rifts between two households joined in marriage.

Women in Attic tragedy are worth examining because they are in a unique position. Nearly all tragedies deal with myth, but in a much more personal way than epic. Tragedies allow the characters to speak for themselves so that one can understand the characters more intimately than in epic. I believe that examining Sophocles' female characters is especially important because he is considered the most successful of all the tragic playwrights, never coming in third.³ He was regarded as extremely wise and a great tragedian, as evidenced by Aristophanes and Phrynichus paying him high compliments in their comedies.⁴ Another reason I have chosen to focus on Sophocles' plays is because of the modern world's perception of his female characters. Some scholars consider to be him a proto-feminist for his portrayal of the strong female characters Antigone and Electra, but they quickly overlook the more conservative portrayals of Tecmessa and Deianeira.⁵ Charles Segal notes, "In Aeschylus the religious interpretation predominates; in Euripides, the psychological. The combination and balance of the two in Sophocles make him perhaps the hardest of the three Attic tragedians for a modern reader to

³ William Bates, *Sophocles: Poet and Dramatist* (New York: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 6.

⁴ Alan Sommerstein, *Greek Drama and Dramatists* (London: Routledge, 2002), 41.

⁵ Catherine Holland, "After Antigone: Women, the Past, and the Future of Feminist Political Thought," *American Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (1998): pp. 1108-1132, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2991851>, 1108.

understand.”⁶ Ultimately, Sophocles’ complexity is what makes the study of his work so interesting, and the women of his tragedies personify this with their moral complexity.

Women in 5th Century Attica

To fully understand Sophoclean women, one must first understand the context in which women lived in Sophocles’ era. There are few accounts of women from this time, and all of these are written by men. Sophocles lived during almost the entirety of the 5th century BC, and at that time from the moment a woman was born, her life was dependent on a man. A woman at this time was dependent on her *kurios*, the male head of her *oikos*, and it was through him that all aspects were performed.⁷ An Attic woman’s life was predicated on preparing for the final stage of life: motherhood.⁸ Her life followed a general pattern of three stages.⁹ She first lived with her father and siblings, one of whom would soon become a *kurios* himself, and at this stage was generally not restricted like her mother. When she soon matured into a woman and she was taken from her father’s house and transferred to her husband’s house. Finally, women then usually soon began to give birth to sons and daughters, ensuring that the cycle continued to another generation. Women who lived during the Golden Age of Athens had to contend with extraordinary social restrictions both within and outside their homes, and their *kurioi* acted as intermediaries to the larger social and legal world.

⁶ Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 7.

⁷ Victoria Wohl, *Intimate Commerce: Exchange, Gender, and Subjectivity in Greek Tragedy* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 1998), xvii.

Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York City, New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 62.

⁸ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, 62.

⁹ Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York City, New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 62.

As attested to by Procne previously, Attic women's childhood, the period before marriage, can be considered the most unrestrained time of their lives. An Athenian girl's life would be controlled by her *pater* or eldest male relative, whose primary goal for her was ultimately to find a suitable husband for her to bear legitimate children. Certainly, most parents in Athens loved their children, but it would also be naïve to assume that they were not cognizant of the opportunities that arose from having daughters. Parents could use marriage as a tool to advance their social or political status, or, in the case of Antigone and Electra, to punish a girl by refusing to have her wed.

When girls were born, they were given a tuft of wool, which signified their future status as women.¹⁰ Girls would mix freely with boys until about the age of six, and it is from here that the segregation of the sexes became clear.¹¹ Children of both sexes were raised either by nurses, in households that could afford it, or by family members.¹² In upper-class families, boys attended school for physical training and mental tutoring. The girls of such families stayed home and learned some literacy, as well as weaving, music, and dancing. While upper-class girls could receive such an education, the final say would have belonged to their fathers.¹³ Girls received bare-bones schooling compared to their male counterparts in accordance with men's status at the top of society. However, an extraordinary woman, such as Pericles' mistress Aspasia, might become famed in her time for her intellect. In contrast, both boys and girls of lower-status had to help their family with their workload, as they could not afford slaves or consistent help.¹⁴

¹⁰ Monique Saliou, "The Processes of Women's Subordination in Primitive and Archaic Greece," in *Women's Work, Men's Property: The Origins of Gender & Class*, ed. Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 169-206, 175.

¹¹ Sue Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 132.

¹² Lesley Beaumont, *Childhood in Ancient Athens: Iconography and Social History* (London: Routledge, 2015), 118.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

Girls played a sizeable role in Athenian religion, as certain specific roles could be done only by them. Antigone is a notable example of these pious young women, as she defies her uncle Creon to dutifully bury her brother Polynices. The religious roles were learning experiences for the girls for two reasons. The first was that the temporary separation from her family was used to prepare her for her actual separation from her family after marriage.¹⁵ The other reason it was important girls performed these tasks was that they learned responsibility for different essential functions in their adult lives, such as washing clothes or raising children. A typical Athenian girl would spend her formative years being prepared by her parents and society to enter the realm of womanhood through marriage.

The foremost turning point in an Attic girl's life would be her marriage, which marked a change in her *kurios* and *oikos*. According to Sourvinou-Inwood, a girl became a woman when she was old enough to have children, and she was married around this time as well.¹⁶ As a *kore* became a *gune*, she would undertake a series of purifying rituals and was symbolically led to her new *oikos*.¹⁷ Marriage was more important to her new family than her previous one, as she was tasked with providing legitimate heirs. This legitimacy sometimes becomes blurred in Sophocles, as the statuses of Tecmessa and of Deianeira as wife or concubine is never fully explained. The marriage also financially supported the new couple, as the bride's family typically gifted the newlyweds a dowry, which had to be returned in the event of a divorce. If a formal agreement between the woman's father and fiancée was made, the husband could legally sue his father-in-law if he so wished for a breach of such a contract.¹⁸ In a wealthy *oikos*, a woman's time would

¹⁵ Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, 134.

¹⁶ Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, *Studies in Girls' Transitions: Aspects of the Arkteia and Age Representation in Attic Iconography* (Athens: Kardamitsa, 1988), 78.

¹⁷ Kirk Ormand, *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 9.

¹⁸ Douglas MacDowell, *The Law in Classical Athens* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 88.

be preoccupied with managing the household's affairs, managing slaves and wool-working.¹⁹ In contrast, lower-class Athenian women could work jobs to support their families, like washing and making clothing.²⁰ For most affairs outside the house, married women were utterly dependent on their husbands as the men acted as an intermediary between the private and public spheres.²¹ Married women at this time had very few rights and social mobility, and much of their world revolved around their new *oikos*, which is where much of their tension and anxiety would be focused.

Women's most important societal role was motherhood, as they were responsible for creating the next generation of politicians, soldiers, farmers, and child-bearers. In the 5th century B.C., Athens was involved in the Persian Wars and Peloponnesian War and several more minor conflicts, which resulted in a loss of the male population. A woman's status was also important because she could give birth to citizens only if she was herself the daughter of a citizen. Producing citizens ensured that the *oikos*' political influence would pass on and that the family would continue to enjoy citizenship benefits. When giving birth, women undertook a considerable risk to their health as hygiene standards were much lower than modern ones. On average, women would expect to give birth five or six times, and the child and mother's mortality rates were relatively high.²² Mothers were expected to help mold their children from a young age into their eventual roles as adults. Giving birth to a male heir was of utmost importance, as it ensured that the legacy and property of the *oikos* was passed down to the next generation. An Attic mother was placed in a precarious position with her children. For her daughters, a mother knew that they would leave the *oikos* at a young age and would be taken to

¹⁹ Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, 140-141.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

²² *Ibid.*, 110.

her a new family. This looming separation could create estrangement between mother and daughter, as a mother would have to desensitize herself to prepare for the daughter's exit. For her sons, she was tasked with raising the person that would possibly one day become her *kurios* and control every aspect of her life. This dynamic of raising one's dominator could strain many mother-son relationships, and this conflict is frequently portrayed in Attic tragedy. An Attic mother's job was of tremendous importance, as she ensured the survival of her *oikos* and her *polis* as well.

Women's lives certainly could differ from the generalizations mentioned previously, but this cycle was the norm. From birth, women were subject to a male *kurios* in all significant aspects of their lives. There certainly must have been conflicts in their lives, against their fathers, husbands, and sons, for control over their own lives. Their primary function, according to their male-dominated society, was to produce legitimate heirs for the *oikos* to continue, and the highest honor a typical Attic woman could receive was to be the mother of a great son. Certainly, there are outliers, as this dynamic does not fit for priestesses or the vast number of slaves living in Attica at the time, who enjoyed virtually no rights or protection. Women's lives depended on their *kurios*, but he would change throughout their lives. First, girls were subject to their father, or eldest male relative such as a brother or uncle, who as *kurios* would arrange her marriage and settle her dowry. Then, after she moved to her husband's household, the husband became her *kurios* and would make all decisions outside of the house for the family. Finally, if a woman outlived her husband, her *kurios* would become a son, should he be old enough. Men's dominance characterized women's lives, and the societal struggle between women and the men who wished to control them was a constant battle. Sophoclean tragedy takes this dynamic and thrusts it upon stage, as many conflict in his tragedies revolves around social tension in an *oikos*.

Sophocles' Tragedies and Women

In many Ancient Greek tragedies, women often play significant roles. Despite the abundance of female characters in tragedies, they were all played by male actors, and it is even unknown whether women were allowed to watch theatrical performances.²³ Although tragedies were set in the mythic past, they reflect the social setting of 5th century Attica in which the author lived. Conflicts in tragedies generally center around a mythical *oikos*, and many examine women struggling with or against their *kurios*-figure. In many Sophoclean tragedies, the family unit comes under attack, either from within or outside, and pits different family members against each other. I believe that examining female Sophoclean characters' relationship with their *kurioi* can reveal the social and legal acceptableness for their actions. As stated above, Sophocles' tragedies combine a mix of psychological, religious, and social tension to create morally ambiguous female characters.

Sophocles' seven extant tragedies are as follows: *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Ajax*, *Electra*, *Women of Trachis*, and *Philoctetes*. All of these but *Philoctetes* contain female characters, and the female characters influence the conflict within their families. In these plays, the position of the *kurios*-figure is essential, as his legitimacy influences the women's actions. If the play depicts a man as an illegitimate *kurios* or harmful to the *oikos*, then action against him can be interpreted as legitimate. In his extant works, Sophocles seems to prize the integrity of the *oikos* over the status of the *kurios*.

There are two pairs of daughters in *Antigone* and in *Electra*, and in each play the more obedient daughter contrasts well with her strong-willed sister. In *Antigone*, the conflict of the

²³ H.C. Baldry, *The Greek Tragic Theatre* (New York City NY: The Norton Library, 1971), 31-32.

play is between Antigone and her uncle Creon over the burial of her brother Polynices. Antigone defies the new *kurios* Creon, who gained the position after her previous one died in battle, in respect to her old one, which contrasts with her sister Ismene, who chooses to accept the new household and reaps benefits. Antigone and Ismene's relationship compares nicely with Electra and Chrysothemis, the two daughters of *Electra*. Like Antigone, Electra opts for open defiance against her father's killers, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, while Chrysothemis accepts her new situation. Antigone and Electra's actions in their tragedies are morally ambiguous, as the revolt against their current *kurioi* in service out of loyalty to their previous ones. Ismene and Chrysothemis are just as complex because they choose obedience to their new *kurioi*, but seemingly disregard their duty to their old ones. In *Antigone* and *Electra*, the moral uncertainty of the pairs of sisters is a critical to the drama of both tragedies.

In *Women of Trachis* and *Ajax*, two wives, Deianeira and Tecmessa, attempt to save their *oikoi* from their *kurioi*. Deianeira wishes to stop her lover Heracles from destroying their *oikos* by bringing in another woman, thus disrupting the conventional family dynamic. She is unsuccessful and is tricked by a centaur with a poisonous cloak into killing her husband, then takes her own life. Tecmessa, Ajax's lover, wishes to stop his suicide, which is in response to being tricked and disgraced by his fellow soldiers. Tecmessa is unsuccessful, but she is alive as the play ends. Both of these women can be viewed as good wives, in the lens of the *kurios-oikos* dynamic, and they contrast well with Jocasta of *Oedipus Rex* and Eurydice of *Antigone*. Both of these women commit suicide as a result of their *kurioi*'s actions, and in the process further destroy their *oikoi*. Though their situations may be tragic, their actions make them bad wives for the abandonment of their *kurioi*. The wives of Sophocles are in a precarious position, as they must juggle the safety of their *kurioi* and the integrity of their *oikoi*.

An infamous mother of Greek tragedy is Clytemnestra of *Electra*, but even her position can be debated. She had murdered her *kurios* Agamemnon before the play and did so because of the sacrifice of their daughter Iphigenia. However, her condemnation as a mother is brought about her treatment of Electra and Orestes. She does not allow Orestes to take his place in the *oikos* as the rightful *kurios*, and refuses to allow Electra to fulfill her duty by marrying. She introduces a hostile and illegitimate *kurios*, Aegisthus, into the household and allows him to potentially harm her children. These factors, which cannot be ignored, allows Clytemnestra to be categorized as a wicked mother. In Sophoclean drama, the wicked mothers are those who allow their sons to be usurped and to forbid their daughters to marry.

The morality of the women of the seven extant plays of Sophocles can be compared well with the approximately 966 fragments of his preserved. These fragments were pieced together from incomplete or damaged manuscripts or quoted by other writers after they were performed. While having the full texts of all of Sophocles' plays would be ideal, the fragments provide additional evidence for patterns found within the extant plays. All the known Sophoclean fragments have a mythic setting, as in his extant plays. In the fragments, Sophocles uses the mythic settings as a backdrop to convey morality for his own age, just as he does in the surviving plays. The plots of these fragmentary plays have been estimated using account of the myths, including other complete tragedies or epics. The reconstructed conflicts of many fragmentary plays are also similar, as characters attempt to heal or defend their *oikoi*. The fragmentary plays *Tereus* and *Phaedra* feature women giving valuable insight into themselves and other Sophoclean female characters. The moral questionability of Procne and Eriphyle contrasts nicely with the heroines Antigone and Electra. The precise details of how the plots unfold are unclear for all the fragments, and many fragments cannot be safely ascribed to specific plays. However,

the preserved quotations do lend legitimacy to asserting specific trends in all of Sophocles' tragedies. The fragments of Sophocles can be used best to complement our understanding of the extant plays, and the women depicted in the fragments can be compared nicely to their fleshed-out counterparts.

I would like to analyze all of Sophocles' corpus to examine which female characters can be classified as "good" or "bad" based on their relationship to their *kurioi*. I believe that this way of classifying the female characters is useful, as it may allow modern readers to better understand how the original audiences viewed them. I will organize this study by the progression of a Greek woman's life, first as a daughter, then a wife, and finally a mother. Many women fall into multiple categories, and a fascinating aspect is that some women may be considered "good" for one category and "bad" for another. One of Sophocles' best qualities as a writer was to make his characters morally complex, which allows for so many differing interpretations of his works.

Chapter 1: Daughters

In Sophocles' tragedies, his "daughter" characters are perhaps the most famous, equaled only by their legendary fathers. Although well-known, the daughters are the lowest in their family's hierarchy, always subject to the power of their eldest male relative or mother, should a *kurios* be absent. Sophocles typically depicts these daughter characters as the only ones fighting against the injustices done to their *oikos*, increasing the heroism of the daughters in that they are the least influential family member. The daughters of Sophoclean drama are dependent on obedience to their *kurios*. However, it is equally important for daughters to disobey their *kurios* should he gain the position illegitimately by taking the place of the previous *kurios*. Sophocles depicts his daughter characters morally sound by being passive, but they can also be depicted positively by acting firmly, a reversal of the ideal of feminine passivity. Sophoclean daughter characters' morality is not universal dependent on their being wholly passive or active. Instead, Sophocles can flip the Athenian ideal of feminine passivity by depicting strong daughter characters who are morally good, while many passive daughters are condemned for refusing to clash with their illegitimate *kurios*

Good Daughters

Antigone

Antigone is perhaps the most famous woman in Greek tragedy, on par with Clytemnestra and Medea. However, unlike the other two, Antigone is always depicted as an un-wed woman and a dutiful daughter. Antigone appears in a speaking role in two of Sophocles' tragedies: *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, and appears silently in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In both plays in

which she speaks, there is a clear divide between her behavior across each play, but the common attribute she displays is a responsibility to her *kurios* and *oikos*. The reason for the differences in character is that Sophocles wrote *Antigone* in his 50s and *Oedipus at Colonus* in his 90s. Sophocles had children, so perhaps his attitude toward children changed in the forty-year separation between the composition between tragedies. Antigone is loyal and protective of her family but works within the confines of acceptability for Athenian women of Sophocles' era.

Although Antigone appears in three different extant tragedies, it is important to note that each play should be read separate from one another. Each play has its own mythological background and it is expected if characters are different from play to play, given the length between the composition of each. The plays were never meant to be read together, as they were never presented together. Antigone's first appearance in the "Oedipus Cycle" is in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. At the play's end, Oedipus describes Antigone and her sister Ismene as "my miserable and pitiable girls" and begs Creon to protect them and to allow their father to hold them (Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 1462-1467). By making this appeal, Oedipus removed himself from his *oikos* and has given Creon *kurieia*, guardianship rights, of the girls. Oedipus wants to ensure that his daughters will have a marriage uncontaminated by his polluted genealogy by making them *epikleroi*, un-wed heiresses, essentially becoming adopted by Creon.²⁴ Through an Athenian legal lens, Oedipus attempts to give Antigone a limited form of freedom by releasing her from his foul deeds. Creon shares this sentiment as he orders Oedipus to leave his children (1522). This of abandonment is meant to allow for Antigone to potentially keep her role as a good *parthenos*, leaving her attractive to suitors in marriage. Oedipus expresses that he does not

²⁴ Kirk Ormand, *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999), 150-151.

wish to leave his daughter but recognizes that it would be impossible for her to find a good marriage because of his actions (1523). Transferring Antigone from his household still leaves hope for Oedipus, as it allows him to have hope of her fostering legitimate children, which would give him suitable heirs and continue his household.²⁵ Antigone remains symbolically silent throughout the tragedy, which can be interpreted as accepting her new *kurios*.²⁶ Antigone is dutiful to her father in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Antigone accepts her transference to a new *kurios*, probably realizing that this would be her only chance at marriage.

Antigone's appears speaking in *Oedipus at Colonus*, which takes place after *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Inconsistencies in continuity, such as Creon not ruling Thebes, require all three plays to be read separately; Antigone can be justified as it is assumed that Oedipus has not renounced his *kurieia* over Antigone. Antigone alone brings her father and *kurios* Oedipus into the Athenian deme of Colonus to rest when villagers approach them and demand that they leave the sacred place. Antigone has dutifully helped her father to Colonus and attempts to help him further still should he need assistance, as she states that he is her responsibility alone and that she does this out of love for him (*Oedipus at Colonus* 199-201). In this play, Sophocles has masterfully reversed the roles of *kurios* and *parthenos*: he has made Antigone the protector and guide of Oedipus and made this reversal a moral good. Ismene formalizes Antigone's protector role by entrusting her sister to "guard [our] father" and reminds her that children must guard parents (507-509). Antigone is given this role by default, as both of her brothers instead choose to squabble over the kingdom.²⁷ Antigone's finest moment coincides with her most significant

²⁵ Ormand, *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy*, 152.

²⁶ Jacques Jouanna, *Sophocles: A Study of His Theater in Its Political and Social Context*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 338-339.

²⁷ Laurialan Reitzammer, "Sightseeing at Colonus: Oedipus, Ismene, and Antigone as Theōroi in Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus," *Classical Antiquity* 37, no. 1 (2018): 124.

failure in the play: she convinces Oedipus to talk with his estranged son Polynices but fails to convince the youth not to die while attacking Thebes (1181-1203, 1403ff). Antigone sides with her present *kurios* Oedipus and stays with him to oversee his burial. The act of burial is a crucial function for female family members, and Antigone's decision is expected and praiseworthy by Athenian standards. By allowing Oedipus to be buried, Antigone has blessed both herself as a virtuous maiden and also the Athenian land. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Sophocles depicts Antigone as a virtuous maiden, who defends her father when his family abandoned him until his life's end.

Antigone's most famous role is in the play *Antigone*, where she defies her *kurios* Creon and attempts to bury her slain brother Polynices. Antigone could be seen as a disobedient woman for defying Creon, but instead is depicted as a hero standing against a tyrant. Antigone's heroism stems from one core reason: she is still duty-bound to her old *kurios* Polynices because he has not received a proper burial. It is a woman's responsibility to bury her *kurios* and to publicly mourn him. She refuses to split her *oikos* between the brother that attacked her city and the one who defended it.²⁸ Creon's edict forbidding his nephew's burial breaks both unwritten and codified laws of the Greeks, which maintain that all free people, even traitors, have the right to burial.²⁹ Furthermore, Creon undermines his position as Antigone's *kurios* by keeping Polynices from peacefully entering the next life, which by default leaves him as Antigone's *kurios*.

Antigone's resistance to Creon is also legitimate as she uses the approach most frequently used in tragedy: female persuasion. The practice of female persuasion was depicted positively by Aeschylus and Euripides in their tragedies.³⁰ When summoned by Creon to explain her actions,

²⁸ Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York City, NY: Zone Books, 2006), 314.

²⁹ Edward Harris, "Sophocles and Athenian Law," in *A Companion to Sophocles*, ed. Kirk Ormand (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 287-300, 289-290.

³⁰ Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, 275.

Antigone goes into a lengthy speech defending her actions as lawful, as she is following the law of the gods (*Antigone* 450-470). Antigone is justified to use a speech to defend herself, as Athenian law courts could respect women's activities on behalf of their male relatives.³¹ Antigone also uses the masculine attribute of defiance but stays within the confines of acceptability to her audience. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle supports such a view, that female characters can be considered courageous, but he argues that their form of courage is different from male characters (Aristotle *Poetics*, 54a15). Creon is eventually convinced that Polynices ought to have a burial by the prophet Tiresias, but Creon's mind is convinced too late as Antigone has committed suicide after being condemned. Overall, Antigone's defiance is laudable in *Antigone* because she exhibits loyalty to Polynices, who is still technically her *kurios* because he has been denied proper burial rites.

Electra

Like Antigone, Electra is depicted as a heroine, defying her mother Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus, who comes Clytemnestra's lover after they killed Agamemnon. However, Electra's position differs from Antigone's because she relies on her brother Orestes to save her, and her resistance is morally ambiguous in parts of the play. Electra attempts to convince her sister Chrysothemis to help her kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (Soph. *Electra*, 947-989). The desperateness of her situation can excuse this extreme act of social transgression. The two villains have murdered her father, and her last legitimate male relative is seemingly dead. She also must avenge Agamemnon's death must do so by default, much like Antigone in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Of course, Orestes is not actually dead and returns to save his sisters and avenge his

³¹ Helene Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 274.

father, and Electra is not depicted as villainous for proposing the murder. She proposes violence for noble reasons, as her illegitimate *kurios* has denied her marriage and children.³² This case of female violence for revenge is a large part of Greek culture, as Greek women would take part in revenge killings up to the 20th century.³³ One example being Electra's call for violence can be viewed as heroic, as she justly believes that she must avenge her murdered *kurios* against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

Moving to Electra's fealty to her new *kurios*, her brother Orestes, she displays loyalty to a man unjustly removed from his birthright in the *oikos*. Since Agamemnon's murder and Orestes' exile, many years have passed with Electra attempting to resist the killers' authority. Electra's situation has festered much longer than Antigone's, whose brother was killed the night before the play's plot, so her defiance of calling for Orestes to return is a clear threat to the murderers.³⁴ Despite her attempted active role after Orestes "death," Sophocles depicts Electra as a heroine who keeps within the confines of her societal position. For years, she mourns her father's death as an affront to Clytemnestra (284-292). Electra does so publicly as an attempt to raise public sympathy for herself and her father and to drum up support for Orestes upon his possible return.³⁵ Electra's very life insults the killers as she makes every part of her life about undermining their position in their *oikos*. Electra explains that her mother hates her because she openly wishes for Orestes to return (293-309). Electra's objective in the play is to help the rightful *kurios* set her *oikos* in order, but in doing so, she diminishes her position within it. As Ormand argues that Electra's position before Orestes' return is that of an *epikleros*, but after his

³² Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, 160-161.

³³ *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁴ Jouanna, *Sophocles: A Study of His Theater in Its Political and Social Context*, 353.

³⁵ Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, 153.

return she reverts to being under his *kurieia*.³⁶ However, the return of Orestes as her *kurios* is a necessary action, as he will give her in marriage, whereas Aegisthus forbids it. Electra is successful in her hopes as Orestes returns and kills both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Even Electra's location during the killing shows her new role as a passive *parthenos*, she does not witness either murder and waits away from the room. As a good daughter and sister, Electra fills the void of caretaker of her *oikos* but fully submits and aids her *kurios* when he returns to take his place.

Danae

Danae was a character in the fragmentary Sophoclean play titled *Acrisius*, named after her mythical father. While scholars cannot ascertain the exact plot of Sophocles' tragedy from the fragments attributed to it, one can reasonably assume that the tragedy contends with the issue of Danae's marriage and pregnancy. In the general myth, Acrisius learns that Danae will bear a son, and that this child is destined to kill him, so he locks her away to keep the prophecy coming to pass. However, Zeus is filled with lust for Danae, so he travels from Mt. Olympus to impregnate her, and she bears a son, the famous Perseus. Danae does not seek to disobey her father, but she cannot allow him to harm her child.

If the theory that this play contended with the issue of Danae's pregnancy and imprisonment, it bears strong links to *Antigone* and *Electra*. In both extant plays, the heroines are threatened by their *kurios* with becoming a solitudinarian. *Acrisius* might seem to be in the right for not allowing his daughter to rear a son who will commit parricide against the legitimate *kurios* of the *oikos*. However, *Acrisius* breaks a fundamental rule that would destroy his *oikos*

³⁶ Kirk Ormand, *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999), 77.

should he forbid her to give birth. Part of the oracle prophesized Acrisius' demise and also told him that he would never bear a son. Acrisius has no children other than Danae, so he would end his *oikos* in the same breath by forbidding his daughter's marriage.

Acrisius' actions resemble Laius' actions, the father of Oedipus, who both men were received an oracle prophesizing their ruin at the hand of a family member. One line attributed to *Acrisius*, which I believe to be either spoken by Acrisius or referring to him, reads, "For no one loves living as the man growing old (*Acrisius*, Fr. 66)." This line, if about Acrisius, could paint him as a man wishing to tempt fate and selfishly destroy his *oikos* in order to live. In lines I attribute to Acrisius speaking to Danae, Danae is encouraged to say little or nothing to contradict her father:

ῥῆσις βραχεῖα τοῖς φρονοῦσι σώφρονα
πρὸς τοὺς τεκόντας καὶ φυτεύσαντας πρέπει,
ἄλλως τε καὶ κόρη τε κάργεια γένος,
αἷς κόσμος ἢ σιγή τε καὶ τὰ παῦρ' ἔπη.

It is clear to wise people that a speech to parents
and begetters should be short and moderate,
especially for both a maiden and a woman belonging to the Argive race,
for whom decency is silence and few words.

Acrisius Fr. 64

These lines resemble those of Creon when he argues that Antigone's speech defending her actions ought to be disregarded (*Ant.* 640ff.). Acrisius is partly at fault for his daughter's seduction or, even worse, her rape because he attempts to circumvent fate. Danae does not plot with Zeus to foster a child against her father, but tradition maintains Zeus visits her as golden rain and impregnates her without her knowledge or consent. Traditionally, Danae's room where she is imprisoned is similar to Antigone's punishment: a room sealed off from the outside world

with no chance of escape (773-780). Danae is an innocent bystander who attempts to save her child and the lineage of her *oikos*, while Acrisius attempts to destroy it to protect his own life.

Bad Daughters

Ismene

Ismene is Oedipus' other daughter and the sister of Antigone, Polynices, and Eteocles. Ismene is a double-sided character, but this character inconsistency is a prime example of why Sophocles' tragedies must be read separately. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, she is a loyal protector of her father in his old age. In *Antigone*, she expresses a wish to do the right thing and bury her brother but is afraid by failing to act and leaves her sister to take sole responsibility. Unlike her sister, she does not maintain a consistent loyalty to her *kurios* and tries to justify her actions or lack thereof. Sophocles uses Ismene well to draw a symmetrical contrast to Antigone in *Antigone*. She is combined with her sister to symmetrically balance the children of Oedipus in their reverence for him. Her silent role in *Oedipus Tyrannus* is identical to Antigone's and will not be discussed further in this section. Ismene's actions in *Oedipus at Colonus* place her in the "good" category of daughters; however, her actions in *Antigone*, her most prominent role, force her to be classified as "bad" in that play.

Starting with the positives, Ismene displays loyalty to her *kurios* Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, and her actions are trumpeted by both him and Antigone. When Ismene arrives in the middle of the play, Oedipus tells of her loyalty guarding him as he was exiled from the Theban territory (OC 352-355). Ismene fills the role of messenger in the play but gives the message a more personal tone being a loving daughter. She tells Oedipus that his two sons are fighting for the throne of Thebes and that they wish to take him forcibly to Thebes for burial (367-385).

Ismene has come from Thebes to Attica to deliver this message, a long journey on a horse, which intensifies the play's drama and demonstrates her love for Oedipus.³⁷ Ismene then offers to undertake another trip to ask for the Erinyes' favor for Oedipus to be buried there (502-503, 507-509). Ismene's conduct is admirable in this play: she displays the characteristics commonly found in good *parthenos*-characters in Sophoclean tragedies. Her only part that raises suspicion is her absence from Oedipus' side at the beginning of the play, but this can be explained by her wishing to find out information on his behalf. If Ismene appeared only in *Oedipus at Colonus*, she would be considered another Sophoclean heroine, but in *Antigone*, she does not display any consistent loyalty.

In *Antigone*, Ismene does not support her sister's attempts to bury her brother, instead thinking of her own interest. She obeys Creon's edict forbidding Polynices' burial, despite her duty to mourn and bury him. Ismene's biggest failure is that she does not follow the example of Antigone in being firmly committed to a just cause.³⁸ Passivity is usually considered a positive for a *parthenos*, in reality or in a tragedy, but Sophocles flips the role upon itself to make Ismene a bad *parthenos*. Ismene's refusal to help Antigone places a break between the two, and she effectively takes Creon's side by her pacifism. Ismene tries to aid her sister later in the play, but the bond has been broken, and Antigone has cast her out of the *oikos* because she refused to help with the burial. She breaks one of Aristotle's rules about characters needing to maintain consistency to be considered good within a play (Arist. *Poet.* 54a15). Antigone rejects her sister's pleas to be allowed to aid her, which causes a deep cut in Ismene. She no longer appears in the play after Antigone rejects her in the famous line, "You chose to live, I chose not (Soph.

³⁷ Jouanna, *Sophocles A Study of His Theater in Its Political and Social Context*, 262-263.

³⁸ Charles Segal, *Sophocles' Tragic World: Divinity, Nature, Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 48.

Ant. 556).” Ismene pleads for her sister not to leave her as her reversal stems not from a principle but a deep fear of being abandoned by her last family member.³⁹ Ismene’s attempt to redeem herself falls short and harms her reputation. Ismene’s cowardness contrasted with her sister’s heroism enhances Antigone’s courageousness as she alone takes the blame.⁴⁰ In sum, Ismene displays good *parthenos* characteristics in *Oedipus at Colonus* by aiding her father, but her actions are inconsistent when faced with severe danger in *Antigone*.

Chrysothemis

If Antigone and Electra are comparable characters, then Ismene’s most obvious match is Chrysothemis. In her lone appearance, Chrysothemis takes essentially the same role as Ismene: a passive acceptance of the new order of the *oikos* and of her new *kurios*. Homer’s *Iliad* mentions Chrysothemis, but in Hesiod’s *Catalog of Women*, she is not mentioned at all.⁴¹ Aeschylus omits Chrysothemis in his earlier tragedy *Libation Bearers*, so her character is left to Sophocles.⁴² Sophocles probably knew of Chrysothemis from Homer and included her to play the role of foil to his hero Electra. She accepts Aegisthus as her *kurios* and does not aid Orestes upon his return, nor does she offer an explicit condemnation of her mother for her father’s murder. Throughout *Electra*, Chrysothemis seems to act as if her life has not changed after her father’s murder, contrasted with Electra’s long resistance and lament. Symbolically, Chrysothemis comes from inside the house to meet Electra, who refuses to step foot in the *oikos*. The only act of slight resistance she takes is by agreeing to leave a lock of Electra’s hair upon their father’s grave (*El.* 450-471). Chrysothemis is similar to Ismene because she possesses excessive passivity; she does

³⁹ Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, 194.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁴¹ Jouanna, *Sophocles: A Study of His Theater in Its Political and Social Context*, 140-141.

⁴² Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, 307.

not justly rebel, either femininely or masculinely, against her father's killers, and she does not aid her brother and sister in the plot to avenge Agamemnon.

Chrysothemis' justification for her passivity is the fear of punishment. She fears that her fate will become that of Antigone or Electra, being forever a *parthenos* (161-163, 959-966). Electra is kept a virgin because of her intent to avenge Agamemnon, then cede power to her son, or to have her future son become the avenger.⁴³ Perhaps Chrysothemis is playing the long game and plans to have her children become Agamemnon's avengers, but this seems unlikely. It is doubtful that the cunning Clytemnestra will allow her daughter to foster resentment in a grandson and possible that Chrysothemis' children would become supporters of their grandmother and her lover. Chrysothemis is a princess and probably would be married to a king or prince far away from Argos. If so, her children would have little incentive to grow up with a searing hatred for their grandmother. Chrysothemis' first lines of the play reveal that she has never nor will start defying her mother because it is futile to do so (329-340). There is no mention of her attempting to assist Orestes in his return, so one can assume she has moved past her brother as *kurios*. In the long period that Orestes has been absent, Chrysothemis has chosen passivity in contrast to Electra's open defiance.

Like Antigone, Electra offers her sister a chance at redemption, but she too rejects her sister outright. When Orestes fakes his death to infiltrate the palace, this leaves Electra with a final option: kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra herself. She asks Chrysothemis to join her plot, offering glory and marriage. Still, Chrysothemis rejects the offer and begs her sister to reconsider (994-1014). After Chrysothemis rejects her sister's proposal, she completely disappears from the

⁴³ Ormand, *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy*, 74.

play, just as Ismene did after rejecting Antigone.⁴⁴ When direct action is necessary, Chrysothemis refuses to help Electra. This refusal confirms the theory that Chrysothemis has accepted the *oikos*' new order. While Electra's efforts grow more desperate after the supposed gravity of her situation, Chrysothemis withdraws further within herself but does not change her course of action. Sophocles seems to have perfected his formula on pairs of sisters by making them opposed to one another. He puts the stronger of the two in a heroic, albeit unorthodox position, while the meeker of the two is condemned and ineffective. Chrysothemis suffers from her inability to act and chooses rewards and loyalty to her mother over her father, thus condemning herself.

Hippodamia

Hippodamia is the mythical princess of Pisa in Elis and the daughter of Oenomaus. Her only known appearance in Sophoclean drama is in the fragmentary tragedy *Oenomaus*, in which the plot probably revolves around her courtship by Pelops. Hippodamia is an ancestor of Electra and Chrysothemis, moreover, in the play *Electra*, the "Curse of Pelops" is regarded as the source of the *oikos*' woes (501-511). *Oenomaus* is similar in certain ways to *Acrisius*, but there is evidence that Hippodamia, unlike Danae, is not depicted heroically. Firstly, the circumstances differ, as Danae is kept prisoner with no marriage prospects while Hippodamia's suitors must win a chariot race. The race stipulates that should the suitor lose, Oenomaus will kill him. However, Pelops is gifted horses by Poseidon and he conspired to bribe Oenomaus' charioteer Myrtilus to win the race. Oenomaus is killed by his own horses, but Pelops treacherously kills Myrtilus the questionable charge that he tried to rape Hippodamia. With his dying breath,

⁴⁴ Jouanna, *Sophocles: A Study of His Theater in Its Political and Social Context*, 351.

Myrtilus then curses Pelops and his descendants. Oenomaus is certainly villainous, as there are references to him skinning the heads of the potential suitors and displaying them on his walls.

Still, there is no reference to danger for Hippodamia (*Oenomaus*, Fr. 473, 473a.).

Hippodamia's crime is the reversal of that of Antigone and Electra, who are loyal to their father's *oikos*; Hippodamia apparently conspires with another person outside the *oikos*, *resulting* in her father's death. In a non-ascribed Sophoclean fragment, a character states, "wherever the fathers are beaten by their children / this city is not of sound mind (Fr. 936)." This fragment fits well within the context of *Oenomaus*, as Oenomaus' humiliation is double-fold because he is defeated by his child and a woman. The quote may also read a condemnation of Hippodamia's actions, as she helps bring down her former *oikos* and *polis* by killing the leader of both. Hippodamia could be comparable to Euripides' Phaedra from the play *Hippolytus*, a woman whose love destroyed her husband's *oikos*. Hippodamia's motive is love for Pelops which results in the murder of her *kurios*. Sophocles writes of the dangers of love and its destructive nature in a fragment that reads:

ὦ παῖδες, ἦ τοι Κύπρις οὐ Κύπρις μόνον,
ἀλλ' ἐστὶ πολλῶν ὀνομάτων ἐπώνυμος.
ἔστιν μὲν Ἄιδης, ἔστι δ' ἄφθιτος βίος,
ἔστιν δὲ λύσσα μανιάς, ἔστι δ' ἴμερος
5 ἄκρατος, ἔστ' οἰμωγμός. ἐν κείνῃ τὸ πᾶν
σπουδαῖον, ἡσυχάϊον, ἐς βίαν ἄγον.
ἐντήκεται γὰρ ἄπλευμόνων ὅσοις ἐν
ψυχῇ· τίς οὐχὶ τῆσδε τῆς θεοῦ βορός;
εἰσέρχεται μὲν ἰχθύων πλωτῶ γένει,
10 χέρσου δ' ἔνεστιν ἐν τετρασκελεῖ γονῆ,
νωμᾶ δ' ἐν οἰωνοῖσι τοῦκείνης πτερόν.

* * *

ἐν θηρσί, ἐν βροτοῖσιν, ἐν θεοῖς ἄνω.
τὶν' οὐ παλαίους' ἐς τρις ἐκβάλλει θεῶν;
εἴ μοι θέμις—θέμις δὲ—τάληθ' ἴ λέγειν,
Διὸς τυραννεῖ πλευμόνων ἄνευ δορός,

15 ἄνευ σιδήρου· πάντα τοι συντέμενεται
Κύπρις τὰ θνητῶν καὶ θεῶν βουλεύματα.

O Children, truly, the Cyprian is not only the Cyprian,
but she is a taker of many names.

On one hand she is Hades, on the other she is immortal life,
on another she is raging madness, she is also pure

5 desire, she is lamentation. In that goddess is all
eagerness, all tranquility, leads them into violence.

For she sinks deep into the organs of all which have
a soul; who is not gluttonous of this here goddess;
some she comes into are the swimming race of fish,

10 she is within the four-legged begetters of land,
and her feather guides within the birds...

* * *

in wild beasts, in mortals, in the gods above.

Whom of the gods does she not throw around thrice in wrestling?

If I may speak the truth –and I may– the true decrees,

15 she lords over the organs of Zeus without a spear,
without a sword; indeed the Cyprian cuts down all
the plans of mortals and gods alike.

Soph. Fr. 941

The Cyprian referenced is Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and Hippodamia succumbs to her passion for Pelops. Hippodamia is in love with Pelops, but her crime differs from Phaedra's, as Hippodamia is not yet married. However, her actions lead to the death of her father, who has authority over herself and her marriage prospects. It is unclear if Hippodamia is punished beyond the Curse of Pelops and no other sources mention any punishment in connection with this event, so one may assume that she suffers no direct repercussion in the play.⁴⁵ Hippodamia's actions result in her father's death, who had the legal right to choose her husband. By conspiring with Pelops, she removes her father and herself from the *oikos*. She has betrayed her *oikos* to save an outsider from it and in the process killed her father, causing a curse to be laid on her descendants.

⁴⁵ Alan Sommerstein, "Women in Love in the Fragmentary Plays of Sophocles," in *Female Characters in Fragmentary Greek Tragedy*, ed. Patrick Finglass and Lyndsay Coe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 62-72, 66.

Chapter 2: Wives

As a married man, Sophocles knew that a happy wife made for a happy *oikos*. He asked in one lost play, “But what house (*oĩkos*) among mortals was ever deemed happy / having been heaped with luxury without a good woman (Soph. Fr. 942)?” Unfortunately, the wives of Sophocles’ tragedies were not a happy lot, almost by definition, as many either died or suffered significant losses in the plays. A woman in Classical Athens has no traditional power but manages all the inner-workings of an *oikos*, such as raising children and making food and clothing. Sophocles often intensifies his tragedies’ conflicts by introducing a new member or removing an established character in an *oikos*. These additions or subtractions disrupt the balance of an *oikos*, leaving its members scrambling to find their new place. Wives are particularly vulnerable, as may be confronted, for example, with the death of their husband or with the possibility that he will introduce a rival into the house. The death of a husband is not a death sentence to an *oikos*, should a suitable heir take his place as *kurios*. However, a wife that is responsible for her husband’s death or even his humiliation is usually condemned, though there are exceptions. When another woman is introduced to the *oikos*, she is typically a slave introduced for the sole purpose of sex with the *kurios*. In Classical Athens, such sex slaves were uncommon, and most slave women were ordered to do housework by the *kurios*’ wife.⁴⁶ The morality of a *kurios* is complex in these situations, as he has the legal right to keep his sex slave but is depicted in tragedy betraying his wife’s love and trust. In general, a wife’s primary and most acceptable weapon is persuasion rather than take action, as she has no legal authority over her husband and must convince him of the error of his ways. In contrast a wife who brings a

⁴⁶ Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 146.

lover to the *oikos* is seen as a traitor, the female equivalent of allowing an enemy to sneak in and ransack a city. While the actions which a respectable wife might take under duress were rather limited, one desperate option was suicide. Female suicide, which is usually performed when the *oikos* is entirely in shambles, serves two purposes: rectifying shame and punishing an erroneous *kurios*. Many moral wife characters in Sophoclean tragedy are defenders of their homes, while the bad wife characters betray their *kurios* and their *oikos*' integrity.

Good Wives

Jocasta

To label as “good” the woman who unknowingly married her son after he unwittingly murdered his father may be controversial, yet I believe that Jocasta’s actions as a wife earn her this distinction. She is infamous for marrying her son Oedipus, but the play *Oedipus Tyrannus* does not fully condemn her for such action. Instead, the marriage is an inescapable product of fate warned about by a series of prophecies and oracles to Laius, Jocasta’s first husband and Oedipus’s father, and to Oedipus (*Oedipus Tyrannus* 350-353, 448-460, 710-714, 789-793). The oracles and prophecies in *Oedipus Tyrannus* are vague to the characters, who spend the tragedy attempting to make them fit within their present situation.⁴⁷ However, one moral of the play is that destiny still comes to those trying to evade it. Jocasta and Oedipus’ marriage could not have been prevented: Apollo spoke it so, and Sophocles, the pious man, used oracles as inescapable forewarnings.⁴⁸ Inevitable consequences mitigate some of the responsibility of Jocasta’s incestuous marriage, but this is not the only reason absolving her. All the characters of *Oedipus*

⁴⁷ Jouanna, *Sophocles: A Study of His Theater in Its Political and Social Context*, 380-381.

⁴⁸ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, 105, 316-317.

Tyrannus, excluding the seer Teiresias, are ignorant of the two's relation. Oedipus and Jocasta do deliberately commit incest and, if they had known their true connection, they would have attempted to avoid each other.⁴⁹ As presented by the play, Oedipus' exposure and his departure from Corinth are examples of trying to subvert the tragic oracle (717-720, 794-798). By any standard, and certainly by 5th-century Athenian standards, Jocasta and Oedipus are unrelated before the revelation, both ignorant of their kinship. Their relation cannot be proven to the characters until the revelation near the play's end that Oedipus is the son of Jocasta and Laius. Until this fact is established, Oedipus and Jocasta are not related and their marriage is legitimate; Jocasta's marriage to Oedipus cannot be held against her, as her ignorance and its inevitability erase the guilt from her.⁵⁰

Oedipus and Jocasta's marriage seems prosperous and happy before the truth is revealed. Sophocles may have made Oedipus and Jocasta's marriage seem ideal to increase the tragedy when their *oikos* is shattered. Jocasta is presented as a model wife who could be viewed on par with Penelope if she had not married her son. Jocasta birthed four living children and gave Oedipus an heir, the hallmark sign of a fruitful marriage in ancient Greece. Jocasta speaks persuasively and attempts to comfort her husband, at her first appearance in *Oedipus Tyrannus* when she tries to settle a dispute between her husband and brother (639-641, 646-648). Jocasta serves as a mediator in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and she does this by acting as a wife rather than a mother to Oedipus.⁵¹ Jocasta uses her counsel to keep her *oikos*' order intact, but she ultimately fails and the incest is revealed. Moreover, towards the end she attempts to keep him from finding the truth, which is a noble act in this tragedy. Jocasta eventually realizes that Oedipus is indeed

⁴⁹ Segal, *Sophocles' Tragic World: Divinity, Nature, Society*, 140.

⁵⁰ Ormand, *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy*, 131-132.

⁵¹ Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, 144.

her son before he realizes it, as she begs him not to pry into his past (1054-1073). When Jocasta understands that her marriage is incestuous, she realizes that her *oikos* would be destroyed should Oedipus learn this; thus, it cannot be discovered. Jocasta wishes to save her *oikos* from anger, the emotion which in Sophocles is “the source of incomprehension of the other and of error about oneself.”⁵² A *kurios*’ anger is a destructive force that can bring down an *oikos*, such as Creon’s anger in *Antigone*, and Jocasta wishes to save her *oikos* from Oedipus’ anger. From the moment where Oedipus and the rest of the cast apprehended the truth, Jocasta ceases to be Oedipus’ wife and becomes his mother. This change is caused by the unnaturalness of the marriage, as the revelation of relation effectively nullifies the marriage. The shift from wife to mother is a great dramatic irony, as most Sophoclean wives are mothers, but no others are both to the same man. To recap, Jocasta is a good wife, as all her actions were to preserve her *oikos* and *kurios*.

Tecmessa

Tecmessa is the lover of the legendary hero Ajax, although the legitimacy of their marriage is uncertain. Tecmessa was a princess taken from her home by Ajax after he had killed her father during the Trojan War. The Roman poet Horace explains the reason for Tecmessa’s abduction: “The form of the captive Tecmessa struck her lord / Ajax, son of Telamon” (Hor. *Carm.* 2.4.5-6). Under these circumstances, Tecmessa is Ajax’s slave and perhaps more than that, so all of the characters of *Ajax* must interpret the relationship between the two. Ajax’s brother Teucer uses the word *gunē* to refer to Tecmessa, which contextually means “wife” (Soph. *Aj.* 1169). At another point, the chorus refers to her as *numphē*, a term often used regarding a bride

⁵² Jouanna, *Sophocles: A Study of His Theater in Its Political and Social Context*, 432.

or young wife (895). Tecmessa's most substantial claim to Ajax's *oikos* is during a speech where she pleads to Ajax not to commit suicide: "For you destroyed my fatherland with your spear / and another fate took my mother and father / to be inhabitants in the house of Hades. / Then what fatherland could be for me except for you" (515-518). Kirk Ormand sees these lines comparable to a scene in the *Iliad* in which Andromache begs her husband Hector not to fight and believes that Tecmessa acts similarly to give herself legitimacy within Ajax's *oikos*.⁵³ Tecmessa's status is uneasy, as she must attempt to legitimize herself within the *oikos* for herself and her son. Teucer attempts to legitimize her union with Ajax by declaring that he, Tecmessa, and Eurysaces stand united in defense of Ajax (1309-1310). This declaration places Tecmessa firmly within the *oikos* that Teucer has been out in charge of by Ajax (562-563), giving her ties and legitimacy to it. Ajax laments that, "I feel the pity of leaving her a widow (*chēra*) and the boy an orphan among my enemies" (653), which is a tacit admission that she will become a widow.⁵⁴ Line 653 is similar to Teucer in line 1169, as both Ajax and Teucer tacitly endorse Tecmessa's status as wife. Tecmessa's position is ambiguous, but by the end of the tragedy, she is given full familial rights within Ajax's *oikos* as his wife.

Tecmessa displays the marital virtues of affection and reverence toward her husband, Ajax. Tecmessa wholly depends on Ajax, for she states that her fate depends on his (203-204, 392-393, 791). Despite the violent nature of her kidnapping, Tecmessa cares deeply for Ajax, as she is genuinely hurt by his great sadness when his madness ceases (259-261, 264-266) going so far to state that she cannot live without him (392-393). Her affection for Ajax may be genuine, but one could ponder the marriage's psychological aspect. Tecmessa's love her captor may have

⁵³ Ormand, *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy*, 113-115.

⁵⁴ Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, 91.

a practical aspect, as experts believe that a bond between captor and victim increases the latter's chances of survival.⁵⁵ Regardless, Tecmessa's affection for Ajax is strongly felt throughout the play, as it is evident that she loves him. She obeys Ajax's commands when he tells her, "Woman (Wife?), silence brings adornment for women" (293). Tecmessa dutifully follows this command as she silently goes inside the house on more than one occasion (529, 684-686). However, there is one moment where she cannot remain silent, upon finding Ajax's body. Tecmessa laments loudly after finding Ajax deceased, which draws in praise and sympathy from the chorus despite her having failed to convince him to live.⁵⁶ By mourning Ajax and passing control over of his body to the new *kurios* of the *oikos*, Teucer, Tecmessa has appropriately laid to rest her previous *kurios*. Tecmessa embodies the obedient and loving wife, as she properly fulfills her duties in life and death to her husband.

Hippodamia

Hippodamia is an example of a female character fitting in one category, daughter, as "bad," but in another, wife, as "good." In *Oenomaus*, Hippodamia chooses to aid her future husband Pelops in a chariot race for her hand, but her father Oenomaus is killed during the race. In a line not ascribed to any play, Sophocles writes, "Men madly eager toward women are most intense" (Soph. *Fr.* 842). The opposite is also true, as Hippodamia's love leads her to Pelops, regardless of the cost. In Sophocles' lost tragedy, Hippodamia's loyalty is divided between husband and father, as she must betray one to save the other. Out of compassion and love for

⁵⁵ Scodel, "The Captive's Dilemma: Sexual Acquiescence in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Troades*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 98 (1998): 137-154, <https://doi.org/10.2307/311340>, 140-141.

⁵⁶ Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, 91.

Pelops, Hippodamia justifies her decision to abandon her first *oikos* to save the *kurios* of her new one:

...Τοίαν Πέλοψ ἴγγα θηρατηρίαν
ἔρωτος, ἀστραπὴν τιν' ὀμμάτων, ἔχει;
ἢ θάλπεται μὲν αὐτός, ἐξοπτᾷ δ' ἐμέ
ἴσον μετρῶν ὀφθαλμόν, ὥστε τέκτονος
παρὰ στάθμην ἰόντος ὀρθοῦται κανών...

Pelops has such a hunting charm
of love, a kind of lightning of the eyes;
for he himself is warmed by it, and I am inflamed by him
while he measures with an equal eye, as when a craftsman going
along his line sets the rod straight...

Oenomaus, Fr. 474

While Hippodamia betrays and destroys her father, she does so to save her new husband, Pelops. One theory about *Oenomaus*' plot is that Hippodamia offers a bribe to Myrtilus, possibly sexual, to secure Pelops's victory.⁵⁷ The offer of a sexual bribe to Myrtilus is a desperate act and demonstrates a woman willing to go to an extreme for her love. If Hippodamia did offer a bribe to Myrtilus, she is responsible for saving Pelops' life, though at the possible cost of her honor. However, Pelops kills Myrtilus before he can collect his payment, saving his *oikos*' honor. Her story is comparable to Medea's, in which the princess saves Jason and flees with him, killing her brother. Hippodamia goes to extreme lengths to save Pelops as she is partly responsible for her father's death, but she demonstrates great courage for saving her new *kurios* from his own death.

Bad Wives

⁵⁷ Sommerstein, *Female Characters in Fragmentary Greek Tragedy*, 66.

Clytemnestra

Undoubtedly the most infamous woman in all of Greek mythology, Clytemnestra is generally regarded as the opposite of a good spouse. Her only appearance in extant Sophoclean drama is in *Electra*, although there is a now-lost play bearing the name *Clytemnestra* and an appearance in the fragmentary *Iphigenia*. Nothing is known of the plot of *Clytemnestra*, and only a single uninformative line survives (Soph. *Clytemnestra*, Fr. 334). Regardless, her appearance in the tragedy *Electra* provides a clear picture of her villainy. She has committed the ultimate crime by murdering her husband Agamemnon and bringing a new lover into the *oikos*. The play centers around the conflict over the justifiability of the murder, for which Clytemnestra lacks justification. Clytemnestra also represents a deep-rooted fear within the male audience's psyche that their greatest enemy could be sleeping next to them. Clytemnestra has killed her *kurios* for revenge and out of love for her new Aegisthus, which is morally outrageous by any measure.

Clytemnestra's act of murder is contrasted with that of her son Orestes, the person tasked by the gods to avenge Agamemnon. She is unrepentant in her crime, while Orestes, a noble figure within the play, wrestles with the decision to kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, even though they are the murderers of his father.⁵⁸ She excuses her actions as justifiable because Agamemnon had sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia (Soph. *El.* 525-547). However, Agamemnon's murder is depicted as sacrilegious, as Orestes receives a divine oracle commanding him to kill his mother, and Clytemnestra is stricken with a divine madness (34-41, 275-276). Orestes and Electra are viewed as righteous throughout the play, while it is denied to

⁵⁸ Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, 205.

Clytemnestra.⁵⁹ She is unrepentant and uses revenge as a motive to kill her husband. She does this, according to Electra, at the behest of her lover Aegisthus. Aegisthus was the enemy of Agamemnon and used Clytemnestra to gain access to his house and murder him after the king returned to Troy.⁶⁰ At her end, there is no denial or repentance by Clytemnestra, she only begs for her life (1404-1415). Clytemnestra's crimes are evident: murdering her husband and sleeping with his enemy, effectively replacing him within the *oikos* with an outside enemy.

Deianeira

Deianeira, though labeled as “bad,” is a tragic figure as she unwittingly causes the death of her husband, Heracles, and then kills herself when she realizes what she has done. The etymology of her name is of particular note, as in Ancient Greek it would literally mean “husband-destroyer.” The tragic irony is that Deianeira never planned to kill her husband, but her plot to win his love back causes both his and her own death. While Deianeira does not act with unrepenting malice, she operates outside the wishes of her *kurios*, resulting in his death.

Deianeira's situation is this: husband has returned home from a long war with many slaves, including one girl, Iole, who has been taken to be his lover. This situation in one regard closely mirrors Clytemnestra, whose husband brought home the Trojan Cassandra as a concubine. However, Deianeira's situation differs in two crucial ways. Firstly, Deianeira had not held a longstanding affair with one of Heracles' enemies but remained faithful during his absence (Soph. *Trach.* 27-30). Secondly, Deianeira did not murder Heracles intentionally but sent him a cloak smeared with what turned out to be deadly poison rather than a love charm (693-700).

⁵⁹ Wheeler, “Gender and Transgression in Sophocles’ “Electra,”” *The Classical Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2003): pp. 377-388, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/3556209>, 380.

⁶⁰ Jouanna, *Sophocles: A Study of His Theater in Its Political and Social Context*, 354.

Unrestrained love is the true villain of this play, as Heracles' and Deianeira's unbridled passions destroy many lives. Love causes Heracles to sack a city and kidnap a girl for sexual slavery, while Deianeira's actions cause the death of Heracles and herself.⁶¹ Deianeira responds to a perceived challenge to the social hierarchy of the *oikos*, although her position is unlikely to change. It is doubtful that Deianeira would be replaced as the head woman of the *oikos*.⁶² Deianeira is instead afflicted by jealousy, as a younger woman has become the center of Heracles' attention (530ff.). She allows this jealousy to consume her and accidentally murders Heracles. By taking action, she steps into the masculine world, where she has no justification to enter, and this step from feminine to masculine coincides with the tragedy.⁶³ Overall, Deianeira oversteps her role as a head woman, and her passion destroys the *kurios* and the man she wished to win back.

Eurydice

Eurydice is the wife of Creon, with her only known appearance in Sophoclean drama being in the extant play *Antigone*. Considered "bad," she is a tragic figure herself, and will be considered "good" in the next chapter. She spends much of the play inside behaving as an excellent woman by Athenian standards, but she also experiences considerable tragedy in *Antigone*.⁶⁴ In the course of the play, Creon inadvertently causes the suicides of their son Haemon and their future daughter-in-law Antigone. Eurydice also cries that Creon was to blame for the death of their son Megareus. Like Jocasta, she commits suicide near the end of the play; however, her suicide is meant to punish Creon for his actions. A messenger reports to Creon that with her dying words Eurydice lamented her dead sons and cursed him for being a filicide (*Ant.*

⁶¹ Segal, *Sophocles' Tragic World: Divinity, Nature, Society*, 32.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁶³ Ormand, *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy*, 50-51.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

1302-1305). Eurydice's suicide reverses Creon's gains at the beginning of the play over Antigone. She has turned the act of lament, equated with defeat, from Antigone to Creon.⁶⁵ Eurydice's suicide, coupled with her children's deaths, has defeated Creon by making him grief-stricken (1328-1330). She has unwittingly become Antigone's agent, widowing Creon as he denied marriage to Antigone. Eurydice's suicide is a punishment to Creon for his actions, leaving him thoroughly alone in the *oikos*.

Phaedra

Phaedra's wrongdoing is similar to Hippodamia's, but instead of feeling passion for her future husband, her unbridled lust for her stepson Hippolytus leads to tragedy in her *oikos*. Phaedra's story is best known through the two ancient tragedies, both named *Hippolytus*, one by Sophocles' younger contemporary Euripides and the other by the Roman statesman Seneca. Both of these plays center around Phaedra's infatuation with Hippolytus but differ in their portrayal of Phaedra. Euripides depicts Phaedra as an unwilling tool manipulated by Aphrodite to take revenge on Hippolytus, while Seneca portrays Phaedra as active in trying to seduce her stepson and being fully aware of the impropriety of her attraction. These two depictions are the dominant ancient representations of Phaedra, but it is unclear which option Sophocles chose to use in his lost *Phaedra*. I propose that Sophocles' *Phaedra* was similar to Euripides' *Hippolytus*, based on a line which I believe Phaedra spoke to the chorus: "Agree and keep silence; for it is necessary for a woman to cooperate in covering up what is shameful for women" (Soph. *Phaedra*. Fr. 679). I believe that this statement shows that Phaedra is aware of the inappropriateness of her attempted seduction of Hippolytus. Attempting to cover up a deed is an admission of guilt, and Phaedra's statement surely expresses guilt.

⁶⁵ Segal, *Sophocles' Tragic World: Divinity, Nature, Society*, 121.

Again, the theme of destructive love is omnipresent within a Sophoclean play. One character, whose identity is unknown, relates this fact in a fragment which is similar to Fragment 941 from the previous chapter;

Ἔρως γὰρ ἄνδρας οὐ μόνους ἐπέρχεται
οὐδ' αὖ γυναῖκας, ἀλλὰ καὶ θεῶν ἄνω
ψυχὰς ταρασσει κάπι πόντον ἔρχεται
καὶ τόνδ' ἀπείργειν οὐδ' ὁ παγκρατῆς σθένει
5 Ζεὺς, ἀλλ' ὑπεῖκει καὶ θέλων ἐγκλίνεται.

For Eros comes upon not only men
nor also to women, but he even troubles the
minds of the gods above and comes to the sea;
even all-powerful Zeus has no strength to keep this one
5 away, but he yields and willingly gives way.

Phaedra, Fr. 684

In the course of the play, Phaedra's love somehow becomes discovered and rejected by Hippolytus, who rejects her. After that, however, the play takes a tragic turn, just like the Euripides' *Hippolytus*. Phaedra falsely tells Theseus that Hippolytus has betrayed him by attempting to rape her or by plotting against him, and Theseus promptly curses his son.⁶⁶ However, Phaedra's lie is revealed, and she commits suicide, but not before Theseus' curse tragically kills Hippolytus. Sophocles may have tried to make Phaedra's guilt lesser by having her repent before her death, but the fact remains that she continued a course that she knew was inappropriate.⁶⁷ Phaedra's passion for her stepson causes her death and led her husband to curse his son, leading to his death, because of her lie and shame.

Procne

⁶⁶ Sommerstein, *Female Characters in Fragmentary Greek Tragedy*, 65.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

As a woman whose infamy for filicide could rival that of Medea, Procne's story is marital strife. In her speech quoted at the beginning of my introduction, Procne laments the misfortune of Greek women (Soph. *Tereus*. Fr. 583). A recently discovered papyrus reveals a surprising development, that Procne had not known of her sister's rape at the time of Procne's speech.⁶⁸ Accordingly, Procne's speech indicates that she was cynical of society's expectation for women. The sisters Procne and Philomela present an interesting dynamic, as they probably agree with each other about their course of action, contrasted with the sisters of *Antigone* and *Electra*. While Procne is a sympathetic character who avenges her sister's rape, she destroys all relationships with male members of her marital *oikos*.⁶⁹ In *Tereus*, sisterhood is representative of the bond of shared experience between all women but turns the bond dangerous.⁷⁰ While Tereus' crime is utterly terrible, Procne takes it further by murdering her son and feeding him to his father. The situation is morally complex, as both husband and wife commit acts of horrible, irredeemable violence. Procne's actions are explicitly condemned within *Tereus*, by a character, presumably the god that turns the three main characters into birds:

ἄνους ἐκεῖνος, αἱ δ' ἀνουστέρ<ω>ς ἔτι
 ἐκεῖνον ἠμύναντο <πρὸς τὸ> καρτερόν.
 ὅστις γὰρ ἐν κακοῖσι θυμωθεὶς βροτῶν
 μεῖζον προσάπτει τῆς νόσου τὸ φάρμακον
 5 ἰατρός ἐστιν οὐκ ἐπιστήμων κακῶν

That man is mad; but still, these women even more
 madly avenged against that violence.
 For whomever of the mortals, having been made angry in their suffering,
 bestows a drug greater than the disease
 5 is a doctor not knowing the evil.

⁶⁸ Finglass, "Suffering in Silence: Victims of Rape on the Tragic Stage," in *Female Characters in Fragmentary Greek Tragedy*, ed. Patrick Finglass and Lyndsay Coo, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 87-102, 94.

⁶⁹ Coo, "Greek Tragedy and the Theatre of Sisterhood," in *Female Characters in Fragmentary Greek Tragedy*, ed. Patrick Finglass and Lyndsay Coo, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 40-61, 49.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

These lines condemn all three's actions but more strongly condemn the sisters' actions. They represent a danger to their *oikos* and the entire Athenian societal order. It is much easier to guard against threats from outside an *oikos*, but one rarely sees danger from within. Sophocles depicts marital perversion at its most extreme in *Tereus*, as Procne turns her husband into a cannibal of his own son, who she had murdered.

Eriphyle

Eriphyle is a name synonymous with betrayal in Greek mythology, as she betrays her husband Amphiaraus for the Necklace of Harmonia. She was bribed by Polynices, son of Oedipus, to convince Amphiaraus to join the war between Argos and Thebes. In the Roman poet Statius' *Thebaid*, about the Argive-Theban War, Eriphyle appears and her desire for the necklace is one of the war's causes (Statius, *Thebaid* 2.265-305, 4.188-213). Her only known appearances in Sophoclean drama are in *Epigonoι*, or *The Offspring*, and *Eriphyle*. Lloyd-Jones states that both plays were identical and that they possibly were the same play. For this section I will use only the fragments ascribed to *Epigonoι* in assessing Eriphyle, as there is nothing in fragments assigned to *Eriphyle* that detail her character. *Epigonoι* could possibly follow the same structure as *Electra*, as in both cases a woman is killed by her son to avenge his father. One fragment reads as a condemnation of Eriphyle, probably spoken by her son Alcmaeon, reads:

ὦ πᾶν σὺ τολμήσασα καὶ πέρα γυνή,
κάκιον ἄλλ' οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδ' ἔσται ποτὲ
γυναικὸς ἢ 'πὶ πῆμα γίγνεται βροτοῖς...

O woman, having undertaken every cruelty even further,
but there is not nor will ever be worse than a
woman begetting misery for mortals...

Alcmeon's levels a heavy, yet common, charge against his mother: the charge of mariticide. In his own words, Alcmeon tells his uncle Adrastus, "You are the brother of the husband killing woman!" (Fr. 187). Perhaps this charge was leveled against Eriphyle to her face, as she says, "Wretched of children, have you spoken such a word?" (Fr. 185). Normally, women would not be guilty of their husbands' death should he die in battle, but Eriphyle is different. The reason that the charge of murder is put to Eriphyle is because she knew that Amphiaraus would die in the battle. Amphiaraus did not intend to fight in the war because an oracle prophesized his death, but Eriphyle convinces him to fight in spite of his better judgment. Eriphyle did not want Amphiaraus to fight for pure patriotic reasons, but only because she was bribed by Polynices.⁷¹ Combining available evidence and outside sources, it is evident that Eriphyle was the villain of Sophocles' *Epigonoï*, having greedily sent her husband to his death for a piece of jewelry.

⁷¹ Cowan, "When Mothers Turn Bad: The Perversion of the Maternal ideal in Sophocles' *Eurypylos*," in *Female Characters in Fragmentary Greek Tragedy*, ed. Patrick Finglass and Lyndsay Coe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 139-161, 144.

Chapter 3: Mothers

Mothers in Sophoclean drama are the final protectors of children when their well-being or place in the *oikos* are threatened. Although a father or male relative is typically the primary defender of children, the mother can assume this role. If all male relatives become killed or become the perpetrators themselves. Becoming a mother itself was a brave thing for a woman in Athens, as birth in antiquity was dangerous for mother and infant alike. Mother's anxieties about childbearing are present in Sophocles' tragedies. In one fragment, Sophocles wrote about women being torn over having their own children to love and the risks present in childbirth:

... ὄρκοισι γάρ τοι καὶ γυνὴ φεύγει πικρὰν
ὠδῖνα παίδων• ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ λήξῃ κακοῦ,
ἐν τοῖσιν αὐτοῖς δικτύοις ἀλίσκεται
πρὸς τοῦ παρόντος ἡμέρου νικωμένη...

... For in truth, a woman swears she flees the bitter
birth pangs of children; but when she stops this hardship,
she is taken in the same nets
conquered by the wish of the moment...

Soph. *Fr.* 932

This quote demonstrates the double-sidedness of childbearing: mothers are extremely anxious about the dangers of bearing children, but once the child is born, they love him dearly. Once children became older, they faced new dangers within their *oikos*. Good mothers ensure their children's safety above all else to ensure the *oikos* survives with another generation. They are willing to defend their children against any threat to their safety or status, even against other family members. Bad Sophoclean mothers typically disregard their children's interests and use them as pawns for their own interests. Mothers could use children as tools to exact revenge, typically against their husbands to punish them. Children of both sexes are vulnerable to physical

threats, but only male children are at risk of having their position challenged. Should a father have another son with another woman, this illegitimate son could attempt to usurp his half-brother and take his place as *kurios*. A son's position as *kurios* could potentially be threatened by an ambitious brother, half-brother, or cousin. Greek mythology has many examples of familial usurpation, two significant examples being Aegisthus and Eteocles. Overall, good Sophoclean mothers keep their children safe so that the *oikos* and their relations may survive; bad mothers are indifferent or actively participate in their children's suffering.

Good Mothers

Deianeira

Deianeira's incidental murder of Heracles is not great for him, but it indirectly benefits her son, Hyllus. In *Women of Trachis*, Heracles and Hyllus mention Hyllus' siblings but are they absent throughout the tragedy and outside the scope of this paper (Soph. *Trach.* 1143-1156). Heracles is about to bring another woman into the *oikos*, the captured princess Iole, solely for having sex with her. Heracles and Iole's relationship would likely result in childbirth, leading to the birth of possible rivals to Hyllus' assumed position as Heracles' successor of the *oikos*.⁷² However, Deianeira kills Heracles before he can foster any children with Iole, which elevates Hyllus to *kurios*. Brotherly rivalry is dangerous in Sophoclean drama, an example being Oedipus' sons, Polynices and Eteocles, who fight over their right to rule their *oikos* and the Theban throne. Should Iole and Heracles foster a son, he would be a *nothos*, the child of a citizen and non-citizen, and entitled to virtually nothing from his father's *oikos*.⁷³ This hypothetical

⁷² Segal, *Sophocles' Tragic World: Divinity, Nature, Society*, 90.

⁷³ Raphael Sealey, "On Lawful Concubinage in Athens," *Classical Antiquity* 3, no. 1 (1984): 111-133, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25010809>, 112-113.

son's lack of guaranteed place in society could cause an unstable relationship between himself and Hyllus, as they might vie for position. The *nothos* could feel the need to remove Hyllus from the *oikos* to assert himself and claim a place in the world. Deianeira's killing of Heracles stops this potential feud and provides Hyllus with a bride in the process, as Heracles bequeaths Iole to Hyllus as he lies dying (1221-1229). Inadvertently, Deianeira has saved Hyllus from a potential dynastic feud and provided him with a wife, leaving her son as the *kurios* as she and Heracles die.

Tecmessa

Tecmessa protects her son with Ajax, Eurysaces, from several different threats, within and outside the *oikos*. The most immediate threat is Ajax's madness, which has caused him to kill the flocks, which he thinks are scores of men, which leads Tecmessa to fear for his next move (*Aj.* 315-316). Ajax is delusional and homicidal, so Tecmessa keeps Eurysaces out of Ajax's reach (538-551). Tecmessa has done this out of fear for Eurysaces' safety, as Ajax may turn his rage and blade at his son.⁷⁴ Tecmessa concedes to allow Ajax to see Eurysaces only after she is sure he will pose no threat to his son. Though Tecmessa cannot save Ajax, another man replaces him as Eurysaces' *kurios*. Teucer, Ajax's half-brother, takes the place of surrogate *kurios* of Ajax's *oikos*.⁷⁵ Ajax himself bequeaths Tecmessa and Eurysaces to Teucer's care (699-689). Tecmessa makes no fuss at being placed under Teucer, perhaps comforted by the security a stable *kurios* brings. Agamemnon and Menelaus pose a potential threat, since they could punish young Eurysaces for his father's actions, as they and Odysseus were the intended targets of Ajax's rage. By passively accepting Teucer as her and Eurysaces' *kurios*, Tecmessa secures that

⁷⁴ Jouanna, *Sophocles: A Study of His Theater in Its Political and Social Context*, 215.

⁷⁵ Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, 92.

she and her son will have a greater chance of survival in the hyper-masculine environment of a Greek army camp. Tecmessa's actions ultimately benefit Eurysaces and keep him safe from his father and his father's enemies.

Eurydice

Eurydice reverses actions of her husband Creon against him in *Antigone* to humiliate him and punish him for the death of their children, which she blames on him. Her death is a punishment for Creon, as he loses another beloved family member because of his cruelty. Eurydice recounts screams and faints after learning of Haemon's death the first time (*Ant.* 1188-1189). After confirming Haemon's death, she walks promptly into the house and commits suicide. Eurydice's suicide is a tool to punish Creon and avenge her sons' deaths. Eurydice's suicide, relayed by a messenger to Creon and the chorus, is depicted as a noble act, just as a hero plunges a knife into a monster (1301-1305). Eurydice evokes her two dead sons, Megareus and Haemon, and places Creon responsible for both (1301-1308). Eurydice's also curses Creon, which calls to mind his denunciation of family earlier in the play, directed towards Haemon, who wishes to reason with his father.⁷⁶ Eurydice holds Creon's actions against him by her death another way, as he cannot publicly mourn his wife's death by his own decree, thus making him appear foolish. Earlier in the tragedy, Creon had declared a ban on public mourning in order to keep Polynices' corpse unburied (204-205). Eurydice's death strikes the egotistical Creon deeply, as he must either rescind his ban or break his own law.⁷⁷ Another blow to Creon's pride is having to mourn at all, considered womanly, as he has shown himself to be deeply misogynistic in his earlier confrontation with Antigone. Eurydice attacks Creon's worst attributes

⁷⁶ Segal, *Sophocles' Tragic World: Divinity, Nature, Society*, 127.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

combined with her suicide to punish her husband and left him alone and guilt-ridden at the end of *Antigone*.

Danae

The fragmentary tragedy *Acrisius* does not provide much information about Danae's motherhood but gives evidence of her courage. The conflict stems from Danae's impending motherhood, as her father Acrisius wishes to kill her child and possibly Danae herself because the child was fated to kill him. In an incomplete play – Lloyd-Jones titles *Danae* but believes that it and *Acrisius* are probably the same play – there are two lines attributed to Danae possibly speaking to the chorus or an unknown character: “I do not know your endeavor, but I know one thing; / if this child lives, I am destroyed” (*Danae*. Fr. 165). Danae exhibits a great fear about herself and her baby in these lines, as her child's life could be fatal to itself and its mother. Nevertheless, Danae does gather courage and possibly does have support within the tragedy from the chorus and other characters. My evidence for Danae having support from other characters stems from two lines in the play, probably spoken to Danae, read, “Take courage, lady! The majority of the terrible things, / that have drawn breath in a dream during the night, are lessened during the day” (Fr. 65). If this was spoken to Danae, the words proved effective, as Danae and her child, the hero Perseus, survive Acrisius and live far away from him. Danae is more than likely Perseus' only mortal protector, as Acrisius' royal status makes it unlikely that he had an open challenge to his authority. While the specifics are in doubt, what is clear is Danae's courage to stand up for her son and ensure that he survives his grandfather.

Cyllene

Cyllene's status is different than the other mothers, as she not only raises the god Hermes on behalf of his actual mother, the nymph Maia, but is also a deity herself, the nymph of Mt. Cyllene in Arcadia. Cyllene's only known appearance in Sophoclean drama is in *Ichneutae*, or *The Trackers*, which Lloyd-Jones believes was a satyr play featuring a humorous plot concerning a young Hermes stealing Apollo's cattle, as a group of satyrs attempts to find the missing cattle and return them to Apollo. Cyllene explains the situation:

... κατὰ σπέ]ος δὲ παῖδ' ἐρίτυσεν μόνον.
 τοῦτον δὲ] χερσὶ ταῖς ἐμαῖς ἐγὼ τρέφω•
 μητρὸς γ]ὰρ ἰσχυρὸς ἐν νόσῳ χειμάζεται.
 κάδεστ]ὰ καὶ ποτῆτα καὶ κοιμήματα
 275 πρὸς σπ]αργάνοις μένουσα λικνῖτιν τροφήν
 ἐξευθ]ετίζω νύκτα καὶ καθ' ἡμέραν.
 ὁ δ' ἀ]ὔξεται κατ' ἡμᾶρ ἐπεικότα
 ἀγα]στός, ὥστε θαῦμα καὶ φόβος μ' ἔχει.

... and in the cave, Zeus begat only a son.
 But I am rearing this child in my arms;
 for his mother's strength is storm-shaken from sickness.
 Staying near his cradle night and day,
 275 I set in order his needs
 for food and drink and sleep.
 But he grows daily, in an unseemly way
 amazing, so that wonder and fear hold me.

Ichneutae, Fr. 314, 271-278

Cyllene demonstrates her care for Hermes and, judging by her parental habits, behaves as would be expected a good mother. Hermes is growing heartily and safely under Cyllene's care, which makes sense as Cyllene is a god herself. Cyllene's first known appearance in *Ichneutae* is to reprimand the boisterous satyrs outside of her cave and to rebuke them for accusing the young god of stealing Apollo's cattle (221-242). After arguing with the satyrs about Hermes' guilt, she then goes into a further reproach, threatening them with divine punishment should they continue

harassing her (352-370). The fragments end before the matter is resolved, but she becomes more vehement in her defense of Hermes and is most offended by the slandering of a divine child. She twice orders the satyrs to stop slandering a son of Zeus and Zeus himself for their outrageous accusations (358-359, 401). The play's irony is that Cyllene does not know that the satyrs' allegations are true, but she defends Hermes. While the ending is uncertain, the truth is probably revealed, and Hermes is given gifts and praised by Apollo, another of Zeus' sons, as told in the *Homeric Hymns*. Cyllene raises Hermes to be a vigorous man and defends him from shameful, though true, accusations from the uncouth satyrs.

Bad Mothers

Clytemnestra

Dubbed by the chorus in *Electra* a "most wretched mother" (*dustanotatas matros*, 121-122), Clytemnestra's crimes extend from her former husband to her children, as she forbids Electra and Orestes from fulfilling their societal function. She does this because both pose a threat to her lover Aegisthus, as Orestes would take the mantle of his father's avenger, and Electra could birth one. To give Clytemnestra credit, she does express care for one child: Iphigenia, who Agamemnon presumably sacrificed to allow the Argives to sail for Troy (*El.* 530-548). Although Clytemnestra may seem like a monster in Sophocles' *Electra*, she may have been presented as a more caring mother in the lost *Iphigenia*. In *Iphigenia*, the plot is assumed to center around Iphigenia's *faux* marriage to Achilles, which was a ploy to sacrifice her, as stated above. This theory is bolstered by a line attributed to Odysseus spoken to Clytemnestra: "And you, woman receiving the greatest in-laws (*Iphigenia*, Fr. 305). In turn, Clytemnestra probably said these lines as advice to her daughter Iphigenia, as she was under the impression the marriage

was real: “With your husband, take the complexion of a polyp as on a rock / so that you may change your true feeling” (Fr. 307). There are two reasons for the disparity of treatment of her children. The first reason is technical, because the characters in two ancient Greek dramas performed in different years cannot be directly equated, as the poets did not aim for absolute consistency over time. The second, more humane reason is that after her daughter's death, Clytemnestra becomes grief-stricken by her daughter's death and takes steps to avenge her old *oikos*, even by murdering her husband and threatening their children. In Sophocles' *Electra*, Clytemnestra allows her daughter Chrysothemis the possibility of marriage and the ability to live unaffected by the changes to the *oikos* because she does not defy her.⁷⁸ Clytemnestra now believes that she is the *oikos* and *kurios* and that its members' loyalty to both is dependent on her. However, in a tense exchange between mother and daughter, Electra blames Clytemnestra for mistreating her living children in the name of Iphigenia (590-596). If Clytemnestra killed Agamemnon solely to avenge Iphigenia, she might be considered an excellent Sophoclean mother, but instead, she chooses to persecute Orestes and torment Electra.

Turning to Clytemnestra's relationship with Orestes, she has persecuted him since he was a child. She fears that Orestes will grow up to avenge his father by killing her and Aegisthus, so she plots against her young son to preserve herself. However, Electra saves Orestes and gives him to a Pedagogue, who raises him abroad to avenge his father (*El.* 11-16). Clytemnestra has effectively driven Orestes from his home and denied him his birthright as *kurios*. Unlike Deianeira, whose mariticide boosts Hyllus into the *kurios* position, Clytemnestra denies Orestes the same position by bringing Aegisthus into the *oikos*. There are two key episodes concerning Clytemnestra and Orestes' relationship, the first being the announcement of the fake report of

⁷⁸ Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, 150-151.

Orestes' death. While Electra is grief-stricken at the news, Clytemnestra is not ecstatic but breathes a sigh of relief (765-768, 773-787). Clytemnestra is not worried about Orestes' well-being but is more fearful for her own life, which is why his death would be a relief for her.⁷⁹ The second important episode between mother and son occurs near the end, as Orestes confronts and kills his mother. It is clear that Clytemnestra feels no moral impropriety to be relieved by Orestes' death, yet she cynically pleads to Orestes, "Child! Child! Pity your begetter!" (1410). Unlike his behavior toward Electra, Orestes is apathetic toward his mother and is absolved from moral complexity by his mother's antipathy toward him.⁸⁰ Clytemnestra not only denies Orestes his birthright but also feels slight joy in his supposed death.

Moving to Clytemnestra and Electra's relationship, Clytemnestra not only complains about her daughter but is also willing to have her executed for her disobedience. Electra speaks of the abuse hurled at her by her mother, and Clytemnestra admits to doing just that later in the tragedy (288-292, 525). Clytemnestra and Aegisthus have forbidden Electra to marry for fear that her child would be a threat to their lives. Electra bemoans her unwed status several times throughout the drama (164-166, 187-192). She also attributes her virginity to Aegisthus and Clytemnestra's anger that she still reveres Agamemnon and loudly criticizes them.⁸¹ Spite and fear drive Clytemnestra to deprive her daughter of marriage, a severe punishment for a *korē*.⁸² Clytemnestra threatens Electra not only socially but physically as well. Clytemnestra tells Electra twice that Aegisthus will severely punish her for her insolence upon his return (517-518, 626-627). This punishment is the same as Antigone's, as Chrysothemis announces that Electra will be

⁷⁹ Jouanna, *Sophocles: A Study of His Theater in Its Political and Social Context*, 411.

⁸⁰ Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, 158-159.

⁸¹ Ormand, *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy*, 64-65.

⁸² Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, 151.

placed within an underground tomb (374-382). In a sick twist, Clytemnestra is willing to destroy one daughter in the name of another deceased daughter, whose death Electra had nothing to do with. Clytemnestra embodies the idea of a bad Athenian mother: she invites an alien man into the *oikos* and endorses and participates in the oppression of her children.

Jocasta

Jocasta is a tragic figure in her own right in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Still, her actions as a mother to Oedipus and her other children accidentally cause the ruin of her *oikos*. In the previous chapter, I argued that Jocasta did not effectively become Oedipus' mother until the truth was revealed on stage. Using this as a premise, the crimes of Jocasta become not only ones against family members but also against nature itself. Firstly, she abandoned Oedipus as a newborn and doomed him to exposure, fearing a prophecy, and it was only by a stranger's kindness that the boy was saved. Then, it is revealed that her current husband and father of her children is that same child, leading to an unstable *oikos*. After the revelation, Jocasta's *oikos* cannot stay intact, as she has crossed an irreparable boundary by begetting children with her son.⁸³ Jocasta's marriage to Oedipus ultimately results in her suicide, and then Oedipus then maims himself by tearing his eyes out (1268-1272). Jocasta has not only harmed Oedipus but their children as well. Their children will now carry the cloud of being a product of incest, which Oedipus himself laments (1480-1502). For Sophocles and his contemporaries, the charge of incest could be of serious consequences. An infamous example of the charge of incest leveled at Athens is the case of Callias III, a wealthy Athenian aristocrat, whose children, according to a slanderous charge of

⁸³ Stimmel, "The Cause Is Worse: Remeeting Jocasta," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 85, no. 5 (2004): 1175-1189, <https://doi.org/10.1516/t5km-qb06-n5gt-klpb>, 1176-1177.

incest, were illegitimate, as having been born from an incestual union.⁸⁴ The consequences of the charge of incest were not only legal, as one's whole *oikos* could be ostracized from society completely. It is reasonable to assume that Oedipus' children could be given the same ostracization as Callias III's children. While not entirely Jocasta's fault, she does cause the mutilation of one son and deep societal stigma from the later four.

Astyoche

In Sophocles' lost *Eurypylos*, Astyoche's story is comparable to Eriphyle's, as both were bribed with a necklace so that they would send their *kurios* to his death in battle. However, unlike Eriphyle, who sent her husband, Astyoche sends her son Eurpylus instead of her husband Telephus, who had been killed earlier in the Trojan War.⁸⁵ Priam, King of Troy, bribes his sister Astyoche with a golden vine so that she will convince Eurpylus to fight in place of his deceased father. In the fragmentary *Eurypylos*, Priam admits guilt in causing Eurpylus' death:

“οἴμοι, τέκνον, πρ[ο]ύδωκά σ' ἐσχάτη[ν ἔ]χων
Φρυξὶν μεγίστην <τ'> ἐλπίδων σωτη[ρία]ν.”

“Alas, child, I have betrayed you, having the last
and greatest salvation of hope for the Phrygians in you.”

Eurypylos, Fr. 76-77

Priam had hoped that Eurpylus would save Troy, but instead his fighting in the Trojan War caused the opposite.⁸⁶ Astyoche accepts a bribe to send Eurpylus to Troy, but she does so also for an altruistic reason. She, somewhat like Procne, chooses to side with her natal *oikos* over conjugal *oikos* by choosing her brother over her son. However, unlike Procne, Astyoche does not

⁸⁴ Cox, “Incest, Inheritance and the Political Forum in Fifth-Century Athens,” *The Classical Journal* 85, no. 1 (1989): 34-46, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/3297485>, 34.

⁸⁵ Jouanna, *Sophocles: A Study of His Theater in Its Political and Social Context*, 165.

⁸⁶ Cowan, “When Mothers Turn Bad: The Perversion of the Maternal ideal in Sophocles' *Eurypylos*,” 148.

pit herself against her husband and son but instead removes Eurypylus from his natal *oikos* twice.⁸⁷ Astyoche removes Eurypylus from his *oikos* by sending him to the Trojan War and also by fulfilling the prophecy of his death by sending him. Astyoche also admits her guilt in a fragment, cursing the bribe and its giver Priam (Fr. 211, 1-6). This admission demonstrates further Astyoche's decision to commit to Priam over Eurypylus. It also highlights her acceptance of failure as a mother and her immorality in allowing her son to die through her acceptance of a bribe.⁸⁸ Astyoche chose to aid her brother over her son's life, a decision that benefited neither party and ended in tragedy for all involved.

Niobe

Niobe's story is one of hubris, which angered the gods, who is responsible for the death of her children. Two ancient commentaries state that Sophocles' Niobe had fourteen children, split evenly along gender lines, as opposed to Homer's Niobe, who had twelve (*Niobe*, Fr. 446). Regardless of the number, the standard story is that Niobe bragged that she was superior to Leto, the mother of Apollo and Artemis, for bearing more children. After hearing of this slander, Artemis and Apollo cut down Niobe's children in a fit of rage. Sophocles' play *Niobe* dramatizes the murder of Niobe's children and its immediate aftermath, as noted by later authors (Fr. 441a). The loss of her children devastates Niobe as she cries out to the chorus:

ὄλω]λα Φοίβου τῆς θ' ὁμοσπόρο[υ κόταφ.

...

...οἴχομαι,] ἐς δὲ μυχαλὰ Τάρταρα τ[έκνων φροῦδον
ἄγαλμα• π]οῖ πόδα καταπτήξω;...

I am destroyed by the vengeance of Phoebus and his sister.

...

...I am lost! And my children are swept clean away to the caves

⁸⁷ Ibid., 153.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 155.

of Tartarus; where shall I cower? ...

Niobe, Fr. 442, 3, 8-9

Her children's deaths may devastate Niobe, but her own actions caused them. She provoked Artemis and Apollo by slandering Leto, a deadly error. The gods in Sophoclean drama are vindictive if challenged, with the foremost example being Ajax, who was made to look so foolish by Athena that he committed suicide. Niobe should have foreseen that her words would not go unpunished, and her children paid the ultimate price for her sins.

Phaedra

Phaedra's crime is passion, an illicit passion for her stepson Hippolytus, resulting in the deaths of both. Lloyd-Jones argues that the play follows the same subject as Euripides' revised *Hippolytus*, and the plot was probably similar also. Phaedra proposes a relationship to Hippolytus, who rejects it outright, either because he took a vow of celibacy or because of the impropriety of such a relationship. Phaedra loves her children but chooses to throw her life and position away to risk a relationship with her stepson (*Phaedra*, Fr. 685). Phaedra could be just a pawn used by Aphrodite, as she is in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, but she still chooses to act on her desires. Although the ending is unknown, Phaedra probably commits suicide after accusing Hippolytus of rape, as she does in Euripides' version, and Theseus curses Hippolytus but realizes too late that Phaedra was lying. Phaedra's lust causes her stepson's death but also jeopardizes the position of her biological children. In retribution, Theseus could take revenge on Phaedra by marrying again and essentially disowning their children. She has effectively killed his son, so retribution on her children is entirely plausible. Phaedra's uncontrollable desire broke her *oikos*, as it destroyed two key members and left her children without a mother.

Procne

Procne commits arguably the worst crime by a mother in Sophoclean drama. Mothers can hurt their children by being greedy, lustful, and physically and verbally abusive, but no other mother known in Greek mythology murdered her son and fed him to his father. There are two other examples of parents feeding their children to people, but it is two fathers, Tantalus and Atreus, instead of women. Like Astyoche, Procne chooses her natal *oikos* over her conjugal *oikos* and kills her son. After learning of her sister's rape at the hands of her husband, Procne ceases to view herself as a part of Tereus' *oikos* and becomes hostile to all its members. Procne is comparable to Deianeira, in that both women suffer from a woman brought into their *oikos* to be used as concubines.⁸⁹ However, the similarities end there, as Deianeira unwittingly kills her husband while Procne deliberately murders her son and feeds him to Tereus. Procne not only perverts motherhood by killing her son, but the feminine role of cooking as well, as she makes Itys food to humiliate Tereus. Regardless of the crime committed by her husband, it does not excuse her killing of Itys. He is an infant and innocent of any crimes his father and mother may commit. Only after she divorces herself from her conjugal *oikos* does she attack the members within it.⁹⁰ Procne sees Itys as an enemy and a tool to strike back against her husband. While the crime against Procne and her sister is detestable, Procne is cold, killing then spending time cooking her son to make him into a meal. Perhaps the greatest irony of Procne's infamous status is that she is Athenian, like Sophocles and much of his audience. Sophocles' patriotism can spill into his work, such as his treatment of Theseus, King of Athens, as a noble figure in *Oedipus at Colonus*. One can wonder how Sophocles would have fully depicted Procne, an Athenian and a

⁸⁹ Finglass, "Suffering in Silence: Victims of Rape on the Tragic Stage," in *Female Characters in Fragmentary Greek Tragedy*, ed. Patrick Finglass and Lyndsay Coe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 87-102, 98.

⁹⁰ Cowan, "When Mothers Turn Bad: The Perversion of the Maternal ideal in Sophocles' *Eurypylus*," in *Female Characters in Fragmentary Greek Tragedy*, ed. Patrick Finglass and Lyndsay Coe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 139-161, 144.

murderer, and her husband Tereus, a barbarian and a rapist. Procne commits the most horrific crime detailed in this study, killing her infant son, an innocent bystander, and feeding him to his father.

Conclusion

There are several key takeaways from this thesis that I shall highlight in this conclusion. An important distinction is that, though I label characters as “good” and “bad” based on their relations to their *kurios*, it does not translate into sympathy for said character. Some female characters labeled bad in certain places, such as Deianeira and Procne, can be sympathetic to the reader. Sophocles uses these common themes in his tragedies to develop his female characters. One essential consideration is the difference between the inside and outside of the *oikos*: the outside of the *oikos* is purely the realm of men, and the inside is usually female-dominated. Women do a lot of ordering within their *oikos*, manipulating events from behind the scenes. Another essential theme in Sophocles’ tragedies is unrestrained passion, which can drive characters to commit great and terrible actions if left unchecked. Love is one of these powerful passions, and women who do not keep it in control doom their *oikos* and *kurios*. The last important theme is contrasting heroic women with unheroic women. Sophocles usually puts two or more women at odds with each other, with their ideals clashing throughout the play. In the following three paragraphs, I shall detail the most prevalent attributes for each group of women I have examined.

Sophocles’ good daughter characters display three main attributes. First, Sophocles depicts his good daughter characters acting outside their traditional roles of passivism and acceptance. Good daughters have actions forced upon them by external forces, such as the death or persecution of all good male family members. Flawed daughter characters typically accept their new *kurios*, with the conflict centering around his illegitimacy or wrong actions. Another important theme good daughters display is their willing commitment to a just cause. Good

Sophoclean daughters commit to defying their oppressors and fighting for their legitimate *kurios*. Bad Sophoclean daughters either stay their present course or flip-flop between commitments. An additional common attribute good Sophoclean daughters display is selflessness. Their defiance comes at a heavy price to themselves and their loved ones, usually resulting in death. At the same time, bad daughters avoid harm by accepting their new *kurios* and disregarding their duty to their previous one. Sophocles values loyalty in his daughter characters by making the good ones loyal to their true *kurios* while his bad ones are wishy-washy about their commitment.

Moving to Sophocles' wife characters, they are good or bad depending on their relationship with their husband, who is their *kurios*. Good wives attempt to save their *oikos*' structure from an external threat such as war or a vengeful family member or internal threats such as their husband's lust or rage. On the other hand, bad wives introduce threats that harm their husbands and damage the *oikos*' integrity. Good wives display loyalty to their marital *oikos*, while bad wives side with their natal *oikos* instead. Wives who side with their marital *oikos* are looked upon favorably, as wives who side with their natal *oikos* either accidentally or intentionally destroy their marital *oikos*. The final common characteristic is how each wife responds to a threat to her *oikos* and *kurios*: persuasion and violence. Good wives are artful orators, convincing their husbands to change their destructive ways. Good wives commit violence only when a threat is presented to their *oikos* from the outside, as this threat is entering a wife's domain. Bad wives invert this dynamic as they commit violence against their husband and convince his enemies to invade the *oikos*. Good wives side with their husband and defend his *oikos* despite many threats, while bad wives harm their husband and damage their marital *oikos*' integrity.

Lastly are the mother characters, who are good or bad depending on their protection and love for their children. Good mothers must defend their children from many threats: death, usurpation, exile. Good mothers nurture and provide for their children's needs so they may grow up and become productive members of society. Mothers must be suitable protectors and providers as their community will need both men and women to function. Greek culture required men to govern and fight wars and women to run their *oikos* and create clothing and food. Most importantly, men and women were needed to procreate and ensure that their *oikos* and *polis* survived to another generation. Bad mothers typically side with their lovers or parents over their children. These mothers are depicted as villains in their plays while mothers are portrayed as heroic for choosing their children over their lovers. Bad mothers let their passion, such as greed and lust, overcome them, which leads to their children being killed or persecuted. Good Sophoclean mothers are willing to defend their children at any length so that they may grow up and lead productive lives, while bad mothers disregard their children's needs or actively oppose them.

Women in Sophocles display several common characteristics, regardless of their role. Women's loyalty is always depicted positively when they respond to threats against their *kurios* and *oikos*. Women are also represented positively when they are unselfish, as they value their loved ones' lives over their own gain. Wisdom is another trait valued, when good counsel is necessary to keep a *kurios* level-headed and an *oikos* intact. On the other hand, women who work in their own self-interest are depicted negatively because they value an item or an outside person over their family members. Pride is a negative attribute, as an overly prideful woman can destroy herself and her *oikos*. Finally, passion is an ambiguous attribute, but a woman must keep it in check and use it for good. Passion can lead women to commit heroic acts on par with male

heroes, while women who let their passion get the best of them typically destroy themselves and their loved ones. Sophocles depicts his best women as heroines who stop at nothing when fighting for a just cause, while his worst women are villains who act only for themselves.

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