Zeitschrift: Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique
Herausgeber: Fondation Hardt pour l'étude de l'Antiquité classique
Band: 29 (1983)

Artikel: Sophocles and women
Autor: Winnington-Ingram, R.P.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-660951

VII

R. P. WINNINGTON-INGRAM

SOPHOCLES AND WOMEN

I have chosen this title and not "Women in Sophocles"—though whether the difference will prove to be material remains to be seen.

There is something that used to be called "the woman question". In my young days in England it was focused on the vote, on political status: there were suffragists, constitutional or militant, and the militants were known as 'suffragettes'. After the First War the vote was obtained, but the question did not go away. Women still felt, with considerable reason, that they were discriminated against, treated as 'the second sex'; and so we have the Women's Liberation Movement, or Women's Lib., a phenomenon which is almost world-wide. But what relevance, you may ask, does this have to the Greek world, to Athens in the fifth century? And is there any sense in asking whether a dramatist like Sophocles had a point of view towards women *as such* and their place in society—a point of view, that is, with any interest and significance?

You will be relieved to hear that I do not propose to discuss the position of Athenian women at length. It was strictly subordinate to the male in almost every respect, legal and social. Their lives were restricted; their place was the

house, the home; their primary function to raise male heirs to the family property, but also of course to spin and weave, to cook and clean, to look after the children, with or without the help of slaves. For male society they had their husbands and male relatives, when these had time to spare for them, but most of their lives was spent in the company of other women, of children and of slaves. They were uneducated and unpolitical. That is the conventional picture and, though it needs qualification at many points [1], it has enough truth to stand, both as a broad statement of the facts and as evidence for the male attitudes which it reflects. For what we do not possess is direct evidence of how the women felt. Did they resent their lowly status? Did they—the respectable married women—envy the greater freedom which seems to have been enjoyed by the higher reaches of the demi-monde? Or did a majority of women just accept their lot, grateful for the degree of protection they enjoyed under Athenian law? No doubt reactions varied according to class, intelligence and character. We cannot say, for the woman's voice is silent: Clytemnestra and Melanippe and Medea seem to speak, but it is a man who writes their lines; and the same is true of Lysistrata and Praxagora. Which brings me to my question: is there any sense in asking whether Sophocles had a point of view towards women as such and their place in society? And my answer is yes, if the same question can be asked—and, within limits, answered—of Aeschylus and Euripides.

Euripides is easy. Euripides was *sophos*, an intellectual, avant-garde, and given to trailing his coat. He reflects 'modern' movements. Let me quote Bernard Knox [2]: "There are many signs that in the intellectual ferment of late fifth-century Athens, the problem of women's role in society

[1] Cf. J. P. Gould, in *JHS* 100 (1980), 38-59.

[2] B. M. W. Knox, in *YCIS* 25 (1977), 219; 222.

and the family was, like everything else, a subject for discussion and reappraisal". Melanippe's speech [3], such of it as remains, is not very significant: women are better than men, she says (which is promising!), but the evidence she gives is their expertise in household management and various religious functions; and these are hardly controversial points. Medea is more interesting [4], because she stresses the weak position of the woman in marriage; and this appeals to her Chorus of potential feminists. Faced with Creon, on the other hand, she seeks to convince him that, clever as she is thought to be, her cleverness is nothing to be feared. But she *is* clever, and her lines—again I quote Knox—are "the complaint of a woman of great intellectual capacity who finds herself excluded from the spheres of power and action". Now this is important and directs our gaze forward to Plato and backward to Aeschylus. Plato, refusing to recognise a distinction between the sexes in point of intelligence and ability, included women along with men in the selection, education and functions of the guardian class. This was the second paradox in his famous *trikumia* and the full credit for it may belong to him. It is not unlikely, however, that such a point of view was already current in the late fifth century.

That was indeed a period of 'intellectual ferment', during which the appearance of *any* idea need not surprise us too much. What, though, of 458 B.C.? What of that sturdy old Marathon-fighter Aeschylus? Leaving on one side the doubtfully authentic *PV*, treating the *Oresteia* as a single drama, it is a remarkable fact that, out of four surviving dramas, two are concerned with the place of women in society (and I believe there are traces of this theme in a third). Why this should be I have no idea, for there is no reason to

[3] To be found conveniently in D. L. PAGE (ed.), *Select Papyri* III: *Literary Papyri, Poetry* (London/Cambridge, Mass. 1941), p. 112.

[4] Eur. *Med.* 230 ff.; 292 ff.

suppose that the relationship of the sexes was a burning issue in the first half of the fifth century, but it is a fact. Naturally, anyone dealing with the story of the Danaids had to treat the theme of marriage. Our trilogy is incomplete, but it does seem that marriage was treated as an honourable estate to which women must be reconciled, but in which there should be a certain mutuality of respect: marriage by capture, the rape of the bride, are replaced by the persuasive power of sexual attraction working on both parties. Turning to the *Oresteia*, though, was there any compelling reason why Aeschylus should have handled the story of the house of Atreus in terms of male domination? Yet that theme runs right through the trilogy culminating in the acquittal of Orestes on Athena's preference for the male. And who threatens male domination? It is the woman of the *androboulon kear*. There was no compelling reason why Aeschylus should have given Clytemnestra this characteristic, but he did. The poet has portrayed a dangerous woman, disruptive of society, and in the outcome the necessary male prevalence is restored. But also (if I am right) he has revealed the tragic predicament of a woman of exceptional powers in a male-dominated society. An Artemisia (should one say?): and, thanks to Herodotus VIII 93, we know what the Athenian navy thought of *her*! A Medea. A potential Guardian. For the feminist case, if one may use the term, has two aspects: there is the predicament of the average wife, there is the predicament of the gifted woman debarred an outlet for her gifts.

It is time we turned to Sophocles—a Sophocles who was writing tragedies a decade before the *Oresteia* and still writing till shortly after the death of Euripides. It is time we looked at his women, though I have little new to say and can promise no sensational conclusions. (I shall, of course, avoid the 'character-sketch' and concentrate on those points which relate, specifically, to their femininity.)

And I suppose that, at the risk of raising false hopes, I should begin with Fr. 583 Pearson. In *Tereus* a female character, presumably Procne, generalizes (like Medea) about the fate of the woman in marriage—how, after an idyllic childhood, she is thrust out from her father's home to live with boring or censorious strangers, even (as in her case) with barbarians. The fragment does admittedly have a slight Euripidean smack, but there is no good reason for denying it to Sophocles. The date of *Tereus* is uncertain, though prior to 414 B.C., and one might be inclined to place it relatively late, at a period when Sophocles occasionally shows the influence of Euripidean argumentation. There is no lack of appropriateness to the dramatic situation, but we do not have the context and cannot say whether this speech bore on the total picture of the heroine. We had better turn to extant plays.

In six plays (*Philoctetes* is all-male) there are ten female characters with speaking parts. And perhaps the first thing to say is that they are all placed firmly within the context of their femininity. There are major and minor characters; and of the latter some might be described as foils insofar as it is their main function to illuminate another personage. The most obvious cases are those of Ismene in *Antigone* and Chrysothemis in *Electra*, both of whom play the submissive feminine role by contrast with a rebellious heroine. I do not wish to enter into controversy as to their relative merits and attraction, but will simply state the view that Ismene is infinitely more interesting, subtle and attractive than the time-serving Chrysothemis. I shall come back to them briefly later on.

Of course, by using words like 'interesting' and 'subtle' I am writing a gloss on the word 'foil'. Sophocles does not use mere foils. Is Tecmessa a foil to Ajax? Perhaps: who is not? But she also stands in a significant relation to the Chorus, who are obtuse and narrow-minded as she is intelligent and sensitive. A slave who was once a princess, she is one of the

most attractive characters in Sophocles; and the contrast between slave and master, between hero and concubine, is brought out most clearly in her long speech of appeal at 485 ff. (one of the most complex rhetorical structures in Sophocles). I pick out one point alone. She asks him to show *aidos* towards his parents and pity towards his child: for herself, she appeals to him in terms of their sexual relationship. The appeal is prepared, subtly, at 490 ff., where, having said that she came to join him in bed (ξυνῆλθον), two lines later she invokes the bed in which he was joined to her (συνηλλάχθης). We are thus prepared for the final eloquent and touching appeal to the memory of pleasure and the obligation which it imposes, in which she finds a touchstone of nobility. It was a relationship as lacking in symmetry as that of Deianira to Heracles, not perhaps because she was a slave, but because she was a woman. When, for that matter, she is told (586) to be *sophron*—to keep her mouth shut in fact—it is addressed not to the slave but to the woman (580). Her role, as her tragedy, is all feminine. I shall have occasion to return to her, briefly.

Jocasta enters to two quarreling males, her husband and her brother, and scolds them almost as though they were naughty children. (At this point one should perhaps say that the age-difference between husband and wife is disregarded, and it is a mistake to look for *motherly* concern. Similarly, the fact that Creon was presumably a good deal older than Oedipus is, here and in *OC*, disregarded: the suggestion is rather of three co-evals sharing the palace.) She scolds them, but it is in fact the Chorus—the political Chorus, not the un-political woman—that induces Oedipus to let Creon go. When he has gone, the Chorus say to Jocasta: why don't you take Oedipus indoors? [5] And that is where the following

[5] *OT* 678 (sung in fact, not said). An interesting glimpse into the possible functions of a wife!

scene would have been played, if staging had allowed. In it and after it, her one concern is to set her husband's fears at rest. If you will allow me to quote myself: "Jocasta is governed by her affections and will use any means, whether it is denial of Apollo or [in the following scene] prayer to Apollo, if she can calm his disturbed mind". There is nothing intellectual about her (perhaps too much advertised) scepticism, except that she argues from apparent facts quite logically and comes to a conclusion which happens to be blasphemous but is consoling to her husband. (Euripides in *Phoenissae*, by some quirk of his own, made a 'sophist' of his Jocasta, as he sometimes did of incongruous characters.) No, hers is an essentially feminine role; and when the truth comes out she commits suicide in the approved feminine way—approved, I mean, by Dr Devereux![6] We are now approaching the three great female roles: Deianira, Antigone and Electra.

I hope I need not argue against the view that Deianira is a minor character (a foil to Heracles!): it should be enough to point out that if, in a play, there is only one person who takes a tragic decision (and pays for it), then that person cannot possibly be regarded as a minor character! In any consideration of "Sophocles and women" Deianira is a crucial—and paradoxical—case. No woman in Sophocles is more firmly set in the context of her own femininity than she is. Patient of her husband's neglect, tolerant of his amours, submissive and devoted, a mother of children, she has all the merits a wife should have by the strictest standards of fifth-century convention. And yet, out of that very devotion, by an act of *tolma* (cf. 582 f.) she causes her husband's death. But her very act of *tolma* was characteristically feminine, if widely disap-

[6] G. DEVEREUX, *Tragédie et poésie grecques* (Paris 1975), ch. V. See below on Deianira.

proved—the use of a love-charm. And it arose out of a specifically feminine situation. She acts as a woman, in a domestic context, to restore her position as a woman. There was a point beyond which her tolerance could not be stretched, and with the introduction of Iole into the household—no, into the marriage-bed—that point had been reached. She departs from her ideal, whereupon her very simplicity and inexperience ensure that through sheer incompetence she will bring about the opposite of what she intended. She commits suicide. She did not hang herself as women in tragedy often do, as Jocasta did (though not Eurydice!), but stabbed herself to death upon the marriage-bed. The central unifying theme of *Trachiniae* is the power of sex, and over the play Aphrodite presides working fatally, if in different ways, upon the man and upon the woman. Upon the man, obviously: the great male hero is defeated and destroyed through his lust for Iole. But Deianira's destruction is no mere bye-product of her husband's sexuality. Female sexuality used not to be much spoken of—or written about—in polite circles. As a Greek theme, it seemed proper to Aristophanes, the excessive demands of women being a staple of Old Comedy, gross and laughable; or else it was found, viewed pathologically, in Euripides with his notorious *pornai*, who so shocked the Aristophanic Aeschylus. No wonder scholars, "anxious" (in the words of Mrs Easterling) "to make Deianira respectable", were reluctant to admit that this middle-aged wife and mother was still in love with Heracles. Yet Sophocles has provided plenty of evidence to show that she was. "Eros rules the gods as he will", she says (443 f.), "yes, and me also". It was the threat of the *mia chlaina* (539 f.) which turned the scale; and it was on the bed of Heracles that she stabbed herself to death. To have taken the sexuality of a normal woman and made it a motive force in tragedy could be one of the most original things Sophocles ever did.

Deianira acts as a woman to retrieve a domestic situation; it is a bold act, deplorable and silly, but a feminine act (at which her innocent companions of the Chorus connive). Antigone acts—and Electra proposes to act—in a public context. Both are offending against the recognized code of womanly behaviour. These are the two great 'active' heroines; and they have sometimes been used as evidence against the prevailing view about the place of women in Athenian society. If women were indeed so passive, so secluded, could they have been shown upon the stage in such dominant roles as those of Antigone and Electra (not to mention Clytemnestra!)? This was never a very good argument, I fancy. Athenians may have known less about the Bronze Age than we do, but they did know Homer and could see traces there of a more equal relationship of the sexes, a greater freedom of coming and going. Perhaps the remarkable thing, though, is how little this is reflected in tragedy, where the male reactions and assumptions are, almost exclusively, those of the fifth century. In *Ajax*, for instance, Sophocles has deliberately recalled the scene between Hector and Andromache which shows Homeric man and woman at their best and most humane: he has recalled it to contrast the attitudes of Ajax. The main point is of course that Ajax is *not* like Hector: the fact remains that his attitude to the woman is consistent with fifth-century ideas. As for coming-and-going, the Athenian audience, if they bothered to think about it at all, were intelligent enough to realise that if, thanks to the staging, all conversation had to take place in the open air, women could not participate in it without coming out-of-doors, and for that matter, if you were to have female choruses, they must be allowed to reach the palace (or whatever) and depart without male protection. The first words of Clytemnestra to Electra are: "There you are again ranging at large" (516). Electra is palace-bound, not however just because she is a woman, but because of the things she is

liable to say if she gets out! That is why she is kept shut up—and in danger of worse, while the 'sensible' Chrysothemis is discreet and lives the life of a fine lady. Let us take Electra first.

In the role of Electra there are two phases (just as there are two scenes with Chrysothemis which bring out the contrast between the two women). This is of course bound up with Sophocles' masterstroke in postponing the Recognition, the movement from phase to phase being brought about by the false report of Orestes' death. In the earlier part of the play interest is concentrated (as throughout) on the heroine, but this is a phase of words and not deeds, dominated by her obsessive devotion to the memory of her father, her obsessive longing for the return of her brother, issuing first in lamentation and then, in the scene with Clytemnestra, in rancour, provocation, and threats. She has asked the Chorus (257) what else a εὐγενὴς γυνή could do, but with her mother she shows herself the termagant, the shameless woman she knows herself to have become. Her complaints of her own plight—unwed, childless—may seem a *topos* appropriate to any virgin in distress, but they are given a sharp edge by the ever-presence of Clytemnestra raising children in the bed of Aegisthus. It is an awful picture of an awful house, brilliant even by Sophoclean standards. But it is all words, and Electra never moves out of her feminine context, though within it she shows the common characteristics of a Sophoclean hero: extremism, imperviousness to argument—and unflinching courage.

The lying tale of the Paedagogus brings about a transformation in Electra. Believing that Orestes is dead, now she will act; now she will take on the male role and display the full range of a heroism—which is never put to the test. It is hard to know how much importance should be attached to that fact. Are these *more* words? Is there an element of fantasy? There is certainly a sheer lack of realism

in her great speech to Chrysothemis which might justify the term. It is interesting to observe how vengeance for the father—and εὐσέβεια as a motive—drop rather into the background [7]. All the emphasis falls upon her personal grievances and humiliation: deprivation of wealth, an old age of spinsterhood. In place of which she paints a bright picture of freedom restored, a worthy marriage achieved, universal acclaim for two sisters who will be greeted wherever they go, honoured at feasts and meetings of the people—οὕνεκ' ἀνδρείας (983), for their manly courage. Fantasy perhaps, yet we can be sure she would have made the attempt and met the fate her sister dreaded.

The lack of effective action on the part of the heroine has sometimes been seen as a defect in the play, but this is due to a failure to perceive that the essence of the tragedy is not what Electra does, but what she is, what she has become, what she has been made. She usurps—or seeks to usurp—the male role. When this was done by the Aeschylean Clytemnestra it was a danger to society; when it is done by the Sophoclean Electra it is the climax of a personal tragedy.

Of all the women in extant Sophocles only two display the common characteristics of Sophoclean 'heroes' (so well defined by Bernard Knox): Electra and Antigone—so like in some respects, so unlike in others. The two plays in which they appear may have been separated by up to thirty years, but it is hard to believe that, when Sophocles wrote *Electra* he did not have *Antigone* in mind. (Indeed the Chrysothemis in the later play, not traditional to the legend, may owe her dramatic existence to the proved utility of Ismene in the earlier.) Like and unlike. Formidable women, who refuse to accept the limitation imposed by their sex: the point is made against Electra by her sister and against Antigone by hers (61 f.), but comes out more insistently in her scenes with

[7] They do not of course drop out: cf. 955 ff.; 968 f.; 980.

Creon (484 f.; 525; cf. 740 f.), for whom it is the cardinal offence that his authority is challenged by a woman. Formidable women who insist on behaving like male heroes: obstinately determined to carry their principles to the point of self-immolation. But what are those principles? In both cases it is a matter of family, of a duty thought to be dictated by kinship. In the case of Electra it is the duty to avenge, to abet Orestes and, Orestes 'dead', to carry out the deed herself. With her decision to act she seems to take over the whole scheme of male values associated with a revenge-killing.[8] Do we not feel that, as her whole personality has been degraded by the long years of grief and rancour, so by the final change of role her essential femininity is violated? In the outcome she is not called upon to strike the blow, but her horrible παῖσον, εἰ σθένεις, διπλῆν (1415) is still to come, before the play ends with the hollow triumph of the Pelopidae.

Antigone is different. *Her* duty is to bury. Now burial rites were of course, in normal circumstances, the responsibility of men, but women as mourners were closely associated with those rites, so that we can surely say that *her* heroism, unlike Electra's, is directed towards an objective proper to a woman. Her absorption in personal relationships, her indifference to politics might be regarded as characteristically feminine. It is her defiance of authority that marks her out. To what extent this insubordination would, for a fifth-century audience, have counteracted the favourable response which humanity and decency will have prompted is a complex matter which cannot be dealt with here. Certainly, her behaviour was not that of a normal woman. But what sort of a woman was she? For one thing, she was her father's daughter (471 f.). What sort of a father? We do not know,

[8] It may not be accidental that the theme of honour is reserved for this point (973 ff.), to be picked up in the following ode (1082 ff.). It is not of course the preoccupation with honour that is significant (cf. e.g. *Ant.* 502 ff.), but the means by which it is to be won.

since *OT* had not been written and we have lost the Aeschylean Oedipus. But he was ὠμός, and she is ὠμὸν γέννημα. And indeed we can see the vein of harshness in her, not least in her dealings with Ismene. Yet she says of herself in a famous line (523) that it is her nature to join in love and not in hatred: συμφιλεῖν, not συνέχθειν. The polarity of φιλία and ἔχθρα runs throughout the play, but is complicated by ambiguities: *philoi* as kin, *philoi* as friends; friendship and enmity as a political and as a personal relationship; *philia* as affection. The dead brothers were at the same time kin and bitter enemies. Antigone carried out the burial as a duty owed to kinship, but it would be absurd to deny the tone of deep affection in which she speaks of Polynices—and later of the father, mother and brother with whom she hopes to be reunited in the world below (897 ff.) [9]. Just how remarkable a hope this was has perhaps not always been recognized. The father who cursed his sons; the mother of children incestuously bred; the brothers who killed one another. The very prototype of a divided family. Yet Antigone insists, in the teeth (one might say) of normal Greek belief, that death ends all that and in the world below the family can be reunited in love. I have suggested elsewhere [10] that it is part of the obstinate heroism of Antigone to believe—to insist on believing—that the terrible past can be abolished by her act of love. This is συμφιλεῖν indeed. What, then, of Ismene who loved Antigone so much that she wished to share her death? She would not share in her heroic act, she is left out, written off, condemned to live. She is ἐχθρά, hostile to the beloved brother and thus to Antigone (93 f.). But is this not συνέχθειν? It is—and this is where the irony of Sophocles comes in, that Antigone is still the victim of the heroic

[9] The lines surely imply a community of affection, if focused upon Antigone herself. I take the brother of 899 to be Polynices, not Eteocles.

[10] *Sophocles. An interpretation* (Cambridge 1980), 132 f.

polarity of friends and enemies. For an all-loving Antigone we wait for *Oedipus Coloneus*.

Of this summary survey of Sophoclean women (still incomplete) no summary is possible and from it no obvious generalisation emerges. I must confess that, until I engaged upon this paper, I did not fully realise what a wide spectrum of female characters the seven (or rather six) plays present—of female characters and situations and reactions. Women in Sophocles. But Sophocles and women? That is another matter; and as so often he retreats behind the barrier of his plays, with a *noli me tangere*. "There is my play: make of it what you will." With Aeschylus and Euripides, it is possible to discern an attitude towards women as a social phenomenon—an attitude which in Aeschylus is a fundamental concern and which in Euripides is discernible from time to time amid the scatterings of his sophistication. In Sophocles, what do we find? Social assumptions, whether expressed by men like Ajax, Creon in *Antigone*, the Colonean Oedipus, or by women like the two submissive sisters, which are broadly the male-dominated assumptions of fifth-century Athens. The only women who depart from modes of behaviour proper to the female are, with the doubtful exceptions of Deianira and Clytemnestra, Antigone and Electra. I call Deianira a doubtful exception, because her one lapse from propriety is a feminine act, Clytemnestra, because her notorious crime is (apart from its effect on Electra) left largely *exo tou dramatos*, while her subsequent outrageous behaviour takes place in the domestic setting of a palace where she lives in proper subordination to her sexual partner Aegisthus. Antigone's independence is disapproved by the Chorus, shocks Ismene and infuriates Creon, but she is not in revolt against the limitations of her sex, which she chooses to disregard in her determination to carry out a duty that her feminine instincts dictate; her very indifference to 'politics' is characteristically feminine. Electra does indeed decide to

usurp the male role of violent avenger, but this is part of her personal tragedy and is not represented as a threat to society.

Perhaps, however, there is another angle from which the subject can be approached. We are in trouble, of course, with differences of vocabulary. It makes sense for us to ask if women have characteristic 'virtues'. Ask a Greek about the *arete* or *aretai* of women, and he has no difficulty in answering. *Arete* is being good at something: women are good (if they are) at household management and so on, good perhaps at doing what their husbands told them. (*Arete* is, in any case, not a useful word in the criticism of Sophocles: he uses it so seldom and in such a narrow sense.) We use 'virtue' in a wider sense. To take another word (which the classical Greeks did not use at all), we can speak of women as having a 'heroism' of their own. I have been reading an interesting paper by Mary Lefkowitz on "female heroism" [11]. First in Homer and then in Euripides, she seeks to identify, along with the active—and essentially destructive—heroism of men, a passive heroism imposed upon women by the conditions of their existence. It is not merely, however, that those conditions demand from them a courage and endurance to which Greek men might well pay tribute. It is also that the very nature of their experience gives them an insight into the working of things denied to their active 'heroic' male partners—gives to the weak what is denied to the strong, to old Priam and the Trojan women what is denied to Hector. I hope I have not distorted Ms Lefkowitz's argument. Does it work with Sophocles? Does it work with Tecmessa? Yes, in the sense that she has a *sophrosune*—an acceptance of her destiny, the capacity to make a new life—denied to a heroic

[11] Mary R. LEFKOWITZ, "L'héroïsme de la femme", in *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* 1981, 3, 284-92. English version in *Heroines and hysterics* (London 1981), 1-11.

Ajax and calculated to evoke a sympathy which he harshly forbids. But, brightly though her intelligence and sensibility shine by contrast with a singularly obtuse Chorus, it has its limitations. It is to Antigone that we must look—not to the famous Antigone, but to that namesake who has so much better claim that it is her nature to join in love and not in hatred.

When Ismene arrives at Colonus, Oedipus proceeds to grumble away about the neglect of his sons: they are like Egyptian men who keep the home while the women go out and do the hard work. And indeed Ismene has just made, not for the first time, a hazardous journey attended by a solitary faithful male slave. Antigone has undergone every hardship, and, although she has been in the company of her natural male protector, it is she who has to look after him (γεροντᾰγωγεῖν, 348) and we see her doing it to the best of her ability. The normal sex-roles are indeed up to a point reversed, and yet there is nothing essentially unfeminine in the behaviour of the daughters. Ismene's part is brief and her role in the story left rather vague. Antigone is with us from beginning to end of a play which in fact ends, ironically, by foreshadowing her death. She is an important character. In what does her function consist? To tend, to guide, to inform the blind man. To advise and to persuade. The crucial case is 1181 ff. Oedipus does not expect long speeches from a girl (1115 f.) "At your age a short speech is enough". "I may be young", says Antigone, 65 lines later, "but take my advice"—and goes on to make her longest speech in the play. He takes it (it is the advice of Theseus too). He takes it in respect of granting audience to Polynices. But Antigone's words went far deeper that that: she set out the reasons why he should *not* retaliate, why he should *not* give way to his *thumos*, why in effect he should *not* behave like the *heros* he is about to become. With those scholars who hold that, being a woman, she was incapable of appreciating the true nature of

divine justice, etc. etc., I am so completely out of sympathy that I prefer not to argue the case, but will merely state that the lesson she the woman tries to teach is one which he the man is not capable of understanding. She fails to persuade—fails with the Chorus, fails with her father, fails with Polynices, and, in a final attempt at reconciliation, goes to her death.

Do we go on to say that Sophocles sees in women, with their patient suffering and their insight into the cruel consequences of male heroic codes, with their pity, with their too often vain attempts to pit persuasion against violence, a mitigation of tragedy which it is their function, supremely, to provide? It would be nice to believe it, but, alas, in Sophocles things are seldom so simple. Pity and persuasion are cardinal themes in Sophocles, but they are not monopolised by women. Is there any essential difference, other than context and mode, between female persuaders like Tecmessa and the Colonean Antigone on the one hand and male persuaders like Odysseus (in *Ajax*) and Neoptolemus on the other. As for pity, there are characters who are capable of it and characters who are not. Deianira has this capacity, and so does the Colonean Antigone: but is there a significant difference between them and the Odysseus who pitied Ajax or the young Neoptolemus, not yet the savage that killed Priam at the altar, who pitied Philoctetes, sought to persuade him and, when he failed, was ready to take him home? Again, Sophocles says: "Look at the play; I have told you all you need to know".

DISCUSSION

M. Taplin: On the 'women problem' in Aeschylus: it may have been only later in the century that this become an open subject for discussion, but the argument of John Gould (*art. cit.*) can surely apply to the earlier period—that drama would present men's anxieties and 'nightmares', even those which had not been explicitly formulated.

M. Knox: This fact of the explosive potential in the situation of women finds remarkable expression in the central stasimon of the *Choephoroe* πολλὰ μὲν γᾶ τρέφει etc. (585 ff.) where the chorus recall the daughter of Thestios, who killed her son, the daughter of Nisos, who killed her father, and the women of Lemnos, who massacred their husbands.

M. Winnington-Ingram: I agree that fear, along with contempt, was a component of male reactions. I am only surprised that it should be dealt with so specifically and on such a scale (and with a degree of sympathy for the woman) by Aeschyus so early in the century.

M. Taplin: I feel that you attributed the presentation of women outside the house too much to mere dramaturgic necessity and did not do justice to the dramatic use made of this. For example, at the end of her dispute with Chrysothemis, Electra vows that she will never go back inside to female subservience ἀλλ' εἴσιθ'. οὔ σοι μὴ μεθέψομαί ποτε (1052). It is even more telling when, at the end of the prologue of *Antigone*, Ismene goes back into the house where women belong, while Antigone goes off by an *eisodos*, off into the dangerous, masculine world outside.

It is worth noting that Clytemnestra's first word of rebuke to Electra at *El.* 516 ἀνειμένη, 'given free rein', occurs also at *Ant.* 579 where Creon says (Dawe's text) ἐκ δὲ τοῦδε χρὴ / γυναῖκας εἶναι τάσδε μηδ' ἀνειμένας.

M. Winnington-Ingram: I fully accept the point.

M. Radt: Here ἀνειμένας even seems to function as a substantival opposite to γυναῖκας—if, that is, one accepts with Dawe the reading ἐκ δὲ τοῦδε: the *varia lectio* and *lectio difficilior* ἐκ δὲ τᾶσδε (which is also in the Leiden palimpsest, a fact not mentioned by Dawe) strongly favours, I think, Engelmann's ἐκδέτας δὲ (which Dain-Mazon put into the text).

M^me de Romilly: J'aimerais soulever une question qui touche à des problèmes dont je m'occupe. Si l'on considère non pas la condition féminine et la façon dont des femmes peuvent montrer des traits inhabituels d'héroïsme, mais l'évolution même de l'idéal héroïque, il est frappant de voir que, dans les œuvres conservées, Sophocle est le premier à avoir incarné l'héroïsme en des femmes. Le grec à l'origine n'avait pas de mot pour désigner une 'héroïne', et l'héroïsme était essentiellement guerrier. Puis l'idéal héroïque évolue; les héros homériques ne sont plus acceptés sans réserve par le V^e siècle; et cela se voit chez Sophocle. Mais, à ce moment-là, l'acte héroïque est confié à des êtres faibles, normalement incapables d'agir. Il relève d'un *courage moral intérieur*. Chez Euripide, il s'agira d'êtres qui n'agissent même plus, mais dont l'héroïsme consiste à accepter librement une mort presque inévitable. La place faite par Sophocle à l'héroïsme féminin marque un moment important, plus intéressant encore du point de vue des valeurs morales que du point de vue de la société.

M. Winnington-Ingram: Part of the difficulty is that 'heroism' is a modern concept. There was certainly a shift in moral values, a movement away from an uncritical admiration of traditional ἀρετή, persistent though the old values were. Both in Aeschylus and in Sophocles the tragedy springs largely from the old codes, which are shown to involve tragic consequences. Both Antigone and Electra accept and act on such a code: Electra in respect of violent retaliation, Antigone in respect of the φιλία-ἔχθρα polarity. In what way is their 'heroism' specifically feminine? Except, perhaps, that such *courage moral intérieur* was not to be expected from a woman? Courage in meeting disaster is another matter, and we see it particularly in some of the women in Euripides, but also in the Aeschylean Cassandra and in Tecmessa. This is a moral value, but not one which is primarily exemplified in the active heroines.

M. Steiner: A question and a remark:

a) Would you agree that in Sophocles' *Antigone* the status of the heroine as child/sister of Oedipus is touched on only very obliquely, and that this profound tact is essential to the economy and meaning of the play?

b) But what of the relation to Eteocles of this woman committed to φιλία? From the Renaissance on, many variants are written and felt in the light of Antigone's preference of Polynices. Master readers and dramatists have oriented their sense of Antigone's problematic and 'dark' nature around this motif (Rotrou, Racine etc. . .). Sophocles gives little guidance. Even Antigone's final reference to Eteocles is somewhat unclear. What, however, are we to feel?

M. Seidensticker: Es scheint mir, dass die von Ihnen so überzeugend herausgearbeitete tiefe Zuneigung Antigones zu Polyneikes auch das viel diskutierte Problem der Doppelbestattung erklären hilft. Das wunderbare Bild, dass Antigone an der vom Staub gereinigten Leiche des Bruders aufjammert wie eine Vogelmutter, die ihr Nest leer findet (423 ff.), stärkt nicht nur Ihre Interpretation, sondern legt auch den Schluss nahe, dass es die Liebe zu ihrem Bruder war, die Antigone noch einmal zu ihm zurückgetrieben hat (diese These ist kürzlich von G. Held in einer noch unpublizierten Dissertation (Berkeley) mit Nachdruck vertreten worden).

M. Winnington-Ingram:

a) I agree.

b) This is one of the questions which Sophocles has left in obscurity. If he has not told us how to feel, it is not for me to do so! Antigone's deep affection for Polynices, on the other hand, emerges clearly from the play. In which connection M. Seidensticker does well to call attention to the significance of *Ant.* 423 ff.

M. Irigoin: Au v. 902, νῦν δέ porte non pas sur Polynice, interpellé au vocatif malgré sa mort, mais sur τοιάδ' ἄρνυμαι: «Et aujourd'hui, voilà quelle récompense je reçois pour avoir cherché à t'ensevelir».

Ce qui me semble faire difficulté, c'est plutôt le participe présent περιστέλλουσα (v. 903), auquel R. Dawe, dans l'apparat critique de son édition, propose de substituer l'aoriste περιστείλασα. Cet aoriste, qui reprend les aoristes des vers précédents (ἔλουσα, κἀκόσμησα ... ἔδωκα), ne fait que souligner, dans une répétition, le soin qu'Antigone a pris du cadavre de Polynice. En revanche, si l'on garde le participe présent (équivalant à un indicatif imparfait *de conatu*), le cas de Polynice se trouve opposé à celui des trois autres morts (θανόντας ... ὑμᾶς) et κασίγνητον κάρα doit alors désigner Etéocle. Personnellement, je ne corrigerais pas le texte et me rallierais à cette dernière interprétation.

M. Knox: If κασίγνητον κάρα at *Ant.* 899 refers to Polynices, the rhetorical sequence is disturbed: νῦν δέ (902) seems to introduce a contrast, which is impossible if Polynices has already been referred to. The sequence is: father, mother, brother (Eteocles)—since I carried out the funeral rites for you (ὑμᾶς). But now, Polynices, trying to cover (περιστέλλουσα) your body, here are my wages. Furthermore ἔλουσα (901) cannot refer to Polynices: she could indeed claim κἀκόσμησα κἀπιτυμβίους χοὰς ἔδωκα but the washing of the corpse, an important part of the funeral ritus, she could not even attempt.

Second thoughts. According to 23-25 Eteocles was buried with all honors due to the dead by Creon but the phrase ὡς λέγουσι must mean that Antigone was not present. So it looks as if κασίγνητον κάρα must indeed refer to Polynices and not to Eteocles as the scholiast and most editors suggest.

M. Steiner: When we think of Antigone's 'special relation' to Polynices, and of the symbolism of the second burial, how costly does it become to exclude Freudian readings?

M. Taplin: In the final scene of *Seven against Thebes*, as we have it, one half of the chorus goes with Antigone to bury Polynices. It is implicitly clear that Ismene goes with the other hemichorus and the corpse of Eteocles. For myself, I have no doubt that this scene was written *after* Sophocles' *Antigone*.

In her report of Eteocles' burial at *Ant.* 23-5, Antigone's parenthesis ὡς λέγουσι clearly implies that she herself did *not* participate.

M^me de Romilly: L'insistance du vers 899 (σοί, κασίγνητον κάρα), alors qu'un mot aurait suffi, suggérerait plutôt Polynice; mais l'indication est mince et laisse place au doute.

M. Winnington-Ingram: On the matter of 897 ff. I can only state one side of the case as follows:

(i) Without indication to the contrary, κασίγνητον κάρα in this play can only refer to the brother who has been so prominent in it.

(ii) ὑμᾶς in 900 cannot include Eteocles: his burial has indeed taken place (217 ff.), but Antigone knows of it only by hearsay.

(iii) Nor can it include Polynices. In fact the only members of the family for whom Antigone had been in a position to carry out the whole operation were the father and the mother.

(iv) Eteocles is left out!

M. Taplin: I wonder if you are rather too ready to excuse Deianeira in *Trach.* for her 'feminine crime'. The way that she has kept the monstrous potion for all those years in her own dark closet is sinister.

M. Winnington-Ingram: It *is* sinister—this bomb lying in the dark all those years waiting to be detonated. But I should not regard it as an act of sinister intention.

M. Knox: Love charms were evidently something easily procurable in Athens, as we learn from the Antiphon speech Κατὰ τῆς μητρυιᾶς, a case parallel to the action of *Trachiniae*—a poison administered under the impression it was a love-potion.

M. Winnington-Ingram: Comtemporary reactions to the use of love-charms may well have been ambivalent, but Deianeira seems to have had a rather bad conscience about it. What a pity the Nurse was not there to advise her!

M. Knox: I would like to take issue with your picture of Jocasta, whose scepticism, you say, has been exaggerated. It is perfectly true that she shifts her ground to suit her purpose, which is to put Oedipus' mind at ease—she says first that the oracle came only from Apollo's priests, then that it came

from the god himself, and so on. But she does this with such unscrupulous flexibility (and she is the first to dismiss the divine oracles—ὦ θεῶν μαντεύματα, ἵν' ἐστέ · 946-7), that, in spite of her prayer to Apollo (911 ff.) she is certainly the spokesman for disbelief in the central section of the play. Furthermore, she is given three lines (977 ff.) which are the most uncompromising claim that the universe is governed by blind chance to be found anywhere in fifth century literature.

M. Winnington-Ingram: I think my point that Jocasta is essentially unintellectual, being governed by her emotion towards Oedipus, will stand. I agree, however, that the issue of scepticism is important for Sophocles and accept M. Knox's criticism if I seem to underestimate it. Jocasta's transition from the apparent failure of one oracle to the sweeping generalization of 977 ff. is facile. What is far more significant, however, is that the Chorus at 863 ff., esp. 897 ff., are desperately anxious not to make such a transition—and desperately afraid that they might have to make it.

M^me de Romilly: Je voudrais présenter une suggestion et poser une question. La suggestion est relative à Chrysothémis. M. Winnington-Ingram a parlé d'une commodité dramatique, employée avec succès dans *Antigone*; je pense qu'il s'y joint une autre fonction: Sophocle, contrairement à Eschyle, aime présenter les réactions, les règles de conduite, les mobiles, auxquels obéissent les personnages. Il ne pratique pas encore l'expression de soi dans le monologue; aussi aime-t-il opposer les personnages, non seulement pour faire ressortir les contrastes, mais pour leur donner l'occasion de s'expliquer et de se justifier: Sophocle est le premier dans les tragédies conservées à avoir introduit la 'nourrice' comme confidente pour ces explications. Une sœur permet à la fois le contraste et la confidence.

La question, elle, a trait aux femmes amoureuses et au mépris de Jason, dans *Médée*, pour ces femmes toujours occupées de leur lit et de leurs amours. Il est de fait que les grandes descriptions de passion que nous avons dans la tragédie sont relatives à des femmes. Cela représente-t-il une

attitude normale dans la société athénienne? Cela pourrait avoir un rapport avec l'orientation des scènes relatives à Déjanire ou Clytemnestre — scènes cependant très discrètes encore, et simplement allusives.

M. Taplin: Heracles' susceptibility to *Eros* is very important in *Trach.*; but it is true that he is not presented on stage as suffering from *Eros*, but from its consequences.

Euripides presented Perseus as falling in love at first sight in his *Andromeda* of 412 B.C. To judge by the parody in *Thesmophoriazousae* next year this was regarded as sentimental.

M. Winnington-Ingram: Certainly the use of character-contrasts is a favourite technique of Sophocles for the revelation of character and motive, as is the use of dialogue arising naturally from the situation. A pair of sisters is not, however, the only possibility. All I am suggesting is that, having used it successfully in one play, he was the more inclined to use it in another. (Sophocles never hesitated to repeat a dramatic device, but never used one twice to precisely the same effect.)

The other question is difficult to answer in general terms. No doubt it was a common (and cheap) male diatribe against women that 'they think of nothing but sex, sex, sex'! There is no description of Deianira's passion (contr. e.g. Fr. 474 Pearson), which is not a matter of the *coup de foudre* (contr. e.g. Phaedra), but an intense and long-continuing passionate physical relationship with one man, which reveals itself only through her actions and the occasional revealing word.

M. Irigoin: Les deux phases que M. Winnington-Ingram distingue et oppose dans le comportement d'Electre avant et après l'annonce de la mort d'Oreste, correspondent à la division de la tragédie en deux grands blocs — les deux premiers épisodes d'une part, les trois derniers de l'autre — que j'ai proposée (voir *supra* pp. 53-54) en tenant compte uniquement de la structure numérique de la tragédie (528 trimètres [12 × 44] et 480 trimètres [12 × 40]).

M. Taplin: The dramatic technique of having Electra outside while the murder is going on inside is unusual. It makes us feel that she is all but enacting it before our eyes.

M. Seidensticker: Mein Eindruck vom Ende der *Elektra* ist, dass Sophokles sie mit dem furchtbaren Schrei: παῖσον, εἰ σθένεις, διπλῆν (1415) gleichsam doch zur Mittäterin macht (die sie auch bei Euripides ist). Der zweite Schlag ist ihr Schlag! Die Szene ist einerseits die durchaus typische Form der Repräsentation schrecklicher hinterszenischer Ereignisse auf der Bühne, zugleich aber doch singulär in der wilden 'aktiven' Teilnahme einer Bühnenperson an der hinterszenischen Tat, auf die sonst nur reagiert wird.

M. Winnington-Ingram: On the 'second-phase' Electra, I note in particular the remarks of Seidensticker and Taplin on the final scene, with its παῖσον, εἰ σθένεις, διπλῆν on which M. Seidensticker remarks, attractively, that "the second blow is her blow". In fact she comes as near to actual participation in the murder as was possible without that physical proximity which we have in Euripides. We h e a r of that when the murderers come out. The Sophoclean technique of bringing her outside may be more subtle, since (as M. Taplin says) "she is all but enacting the murder before our eyes".