A HOUSE ACCURSED:
RECONSIDERING SOPHOCLES' SISTERS, ANTIGONE & ISMENE

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Abstract

Traditionally, Ismene's refusal to help Antigone bury their brother in Sophocles' *Antigone* tends to be regarded only in relation to Antigone's own remarkable bravery. Antigone exists on the heroic level, Ismene on the ordinary; Antigone is courageous, Ismene is timid and submissive; Antigone is an idealist and an individualist, Ismene is convention and herd-bound. Ismene is, in many ways, presented as the antithesis of Antigone and Sophocles does indeed make use of her character as a foil to Antigone, but this thesis will argue that the relation between the two sisters is far more complicated than a dichotomous contrast between 'extraordinary heroine' and 'average woman'. Like Antigone, Ismene is very much a character in her own right, and her emotions, motivations and impulses are every bit as realised and compelling as Antigone's own. Both sisters have been deeply affected by the tragic misfortunes of their family, but their sad history affects each sister quite differently. Whereas Antigone's instinctive reaction to Creon's edict is a furious determination not to tolerate any further dishonour, Ismene's equally instinctive reaction is to avoid the pattern of self-destructive inwardness that has plagued their family for generations. By offering a comprehensive re-examination of the key passages that have informed our critical reception of Ismene and the nature of her relationship with Antigone, this study aims to disrupt the established, and largely prejudiced, reading of Ismene as a model of feminine timidity and submission. Although Ismene is certainly no grand tragic heroine, titling the theoretical focus away from the death-oriented extremism of

Antigone towards a more balanced consideration of the so-called 'weaker sister' not only allows for new insights into the nature of Sophoclean tragedy, but also challenges the very basis on which Ismene has so often been dismissed in favour of her more intrepid sister: the pervasive assumption that Sophocles has only given us *one* sister who is willing to risk her life for a principle.

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He has all the virtues I dislike and none of the vices I admire.

Winston Churchill
(on British Labour politician Stafford Cripps)

Introduction

Sophocles' *Antigone* is arguably one of the most widely read of all Greek tragedies; it also happens to be the most widely performed play of all time.[1] Much of its popularity stems from the powerful appeal of its eponymous heroine, the courageous young woman who risks her own life by defying a king's edict to bury her brother. Antigone has long been praised as "an inspirational defender of higher truths", "that noblest of figures that ever appeared on earth" and "one of the most compelling characters in the history of Western drama".[2] But what of her sister, Ismene? Hegel defined 'good tragedy' as "the collision of different interests", of which he considered the opposition between Antigone's insistence on the claims of the family and Creon's insistence on the claims of the *polis* the "supreme example".[3] Hegel never mentions Ismene, and scholarship on *Antigone* has largely followed in his wake, focusing almost exclusively on the central conflict between Antigone and Creon: centuries of critical debate dedicated to the question of who was right and who was wrong – or whether in fact both were equally right *and* wrong – and who is most deserving of the title 'tragic hero'.[4] Creon, however, is not Antigone's only antagonist; nor is he, necessarily, the most important one: Bernadete believes that "Ismene stands next to Antigone as the most important figure in the play", and Mulroy that "the critical ethical conflict is not between Creon and Antigone but between Antigone and Ismene."[5] Neither scholar offers much in the way of an explanation for these somewhat bold assertions, and their views also happen to be decidedly rare. Most scholars in the field of Greek drama have tended to disregard Ismene's role in the play as being little more than that of a foil against which to view her eminently more remarkable sister:

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[1] Griffith 1999, Tóibín 2018, Taplin 2020: 4.

[2] Griffith 1999: 29; Hegel 1892: 1:441; Carter 2012: 128.

[3] Carter 2012: 116. For Hegel's views on tragedy, see Paolucci 2001.

[4] Cairns 2016: 29: "Much of the older scholarship on the *Antigone* is unduly concerned with the issue of identifying the play's main character, a search that is governed by an unwarranted assumption that there must be *one* main character."

[5] Bernadete 1999: 11; Mulroy 2013: xlix.

> For the most part Ismene has garnered comparatively little attention and scant professions of admiration. Often staged as the pale, hollow counterpart to the dark intense figure of Antigone, Ismene has been eclipsed, even forgotten… Even when attention has been paid to her, Ismene typically comes up short in comparison to her intrepid and valiant sister… To use the word most commonly associated with her, Ismene is weak.[6]

It is not simply that Ismene has not been given enough attention, but rather that the critical tradition has itself frequently obscured and even precluded a deeper and more nuanced appreciation of her character. Richard Jebb has perhaps had the single greatest impact on our reading of Sophocles' plays, his commentaries proving uniquely influential in the field of Classical scholarship.[7] Blondell has shown how, of all Sophocles' extant works, it was the *Antigone* that most captured Jebb's romantic and religious sensibilities, and how it was the character of Antigone in particular who earned his staunch and unfailing admiration, ultimately affecting both his translation and his perception of the play.[8] Given his idealised conception of Antigone, it is little wonder that Jebb did not have much regard for Ismene. It is not that he is expressly critical of Ismene, but he does display a distinctly limited and prejudiced appreciation of her character, both in his commentary and his translation, reducing her role in the play to little more than a one-dimensional foil. In comparison to Antigone – "a true heroine… most courageous and steadfast" – Ismene is not only "the average woman",

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[6] Kirkpatrick 2011: 402.

[7] Easterling 2004: 7: "Richard Jebb's commentaries on Sophocles are unique: a series of editions of one of the most intensely studied of all ancient poets, which have never fallen out of regular use since they were first produced (1883-96). No one studying Sophocles and making any serious engagement with the original Greek can afford to neglect them; they are still quoted as often and with as much sense of their current relevance as any modern edition, and 'dated and flawed as in some respects they may be, [they] remain the yardstick by which all subsequent ones are measured' (Dawe 1990: 241)." See also: Goldhill 1997: 330, and Markantonatos 2012: 4-5.

[8] Blondell 2004: 31-33: "For Jebb, she is unproblematically analogous to a Christian saint, more specifically, a martyr in the Roman arena (xxv; cf. also xxxiii-ix)… At the same time, his Antigone is the essence of Victorian womanhood. Her most fundamental quality, besides 'enthusiasm… for the performance of her duty', is an 'intense tenderness, purity, and depth of domestic affection' (xxvii)… Jebb allowed his translation to be coloured by his interpretive assumptions, thus allowing it to serve – quite consciously – as a further mode of commentary".

but also the 'false' sister who "repulsed" Antigone's call for aid, who failed in both her domestic affection and her religious duty, and whose later attempt to share in her sister's death is nothing but a "sentimental… after-impulse".[9]

As the Victorian era came to an end, the fiercely idealistic, romantic vision of Sophoclean drama held by scholars like Jebb and Lewis Campbell[10] began to give way to a more balanced consideration of the so-called 'Sophoclean hero',[11] and criticism in the latter half of the 20th century was dominated by a debate between the 'hero-worshippers', "those who admire the stubborn, self-directed protagonists", and the 'pietists', those "who claim that we should perhaps pity, but clearly recognise the folly of, characters who ignore their proper limits and defy the gods".[12] As with Hegel's restricted emphasis on the central conflict between Creon and Antigone, however, the theoretical focus of Sophoclean scholarship remained firmly tilted in favour of the main protagonists. Sourvinou-Inwood cautioned against reading *Antigone* with the assumption that "Antigone is right" because such prescriptive approaches greatly reduce, and even conceal, the play's various "complexities and ambiguities", ultimately "collapsing its meanings into a straightforward… monosemic message" which privileges certain aspects of the text and ignores others.[13] But while modern scholarship has indeed seen "a stripping from Antigone's character of Jebb's sentimental veneer",[14] allowing for new interpretations and insights into the nature of

[9] Jebb 1888: xxvii-xxxiv.

[10] Although Campbell's work did not prove anywhere near as influential as Jebb's, he shared the same conception of Antigone as the "perfect woman" (1871: 393).

[11] Blondell 2004: 34-35. For studies on the nature of the great Sophoclean heroes see, for example: Whitman 1951, Kirkwood 1958, Knox 1964, and Reinhardt 1979.

[12] Scodel 2005: 235: "This debate," Scodel continues, "is not worth continuing… Each side has to ignore something. Hero-worshippers tend to dismiss choral moralising as ethically trivial, mere conventionality. Pietists tend to ignore the plays' emotional weight and moral complexity… The extreme differences of opinion show just how tricky this author is." See Goldhill & Hall (2009: 1-24) for a discussion on the history of Sophoclean scholarship, and Blondell (2004: 31-54) for the history of scholarship on *Antigone*.

[13] Sourvinou-Inwood 1989: 135.

[14] Blondell 2004: 34. Cf. Whitman 1951: 85-86; Knox 1964: 65, and Winnington-Ingram 1980: 128-138.

Antigone's character, the prevailing consensus on Ismene's "relative lack of dramatic interest"[15] has largely precluded her from the same opportunity.

In 1911 Rouse commented: "No one took any notice of Ismene… In two thousand years no one has taken any interest in Ismene."[16] Not much has changed in the last century:

> Antigone calls Ismene forth; and will dismiss her. And she remains a silenced, despised figure in the critical tradition… As merely a 'woman', Ismene is indeed scorned not merely by Creon, but also by Antigone and by critics. She becomes at best a foil for her sister… This silencing is all too often repeated, rather than analysed, by the critics.[17]

Whether Antigone is regarded as the embodiment of "natural love and common humanity"[18] or "a 'little fascist' hellbent on annihilating everything in her path",[19] the hierarchical distinction between other-worldly heroine and ordinary woman has now become so firmly entrenched in the critical tradition that it continues to inform and even predetermine our perception of Ismene's character. Her 'failure' to answer the call to action still tends to be regarded only through an Antigone-centric viewpoint. As Neeser Hever phrases it: "Ismene is only definable as *that which is not Antigone*."[20] Antigone exists on the heroic level, Ismene on the ordinary; Antigone is courageous, Ismene is timid and submissive; Antigone is an idealist and individualist, while Ismene is weak and herd-bound. Bongie is the first scholar to explicitly challenge the established view that we are automatically expected to condemn Ismene:

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[15] Griffith 1999: 62.

[16] Rouse 1911: 42.

[17] Goldhill 2006: 141-142; 157. See also García 2018: 15: "Antigone, as one of the greatest characters in Greek Tragedy, has attracted great attention throughout history. Other characters in the homonymous tragedy by Sophocles have not attracted the same attention though. This is especially surprising in the case of Ismene, – the sister of Antigone –, who faces the same problem as her and, consequently, has the opportunity of becoming protagonist along with Antigone, changing in the process the very title of the play and even its tragic character"; and Wauke 2020: 81: "the overwhelming tradition of ignoring Ismene's actions and agency as a sister".

[18] Kitto 1956: 158.

[19] Copjec 2002: 41.

[20] Neeser Hever 2024: 4.

> It is quite incorrect to accuse Ismene of timidity and cowardice; to do so is to imply that Antigone's evaluation of the situation is the only possible one, and it is doubtful indeed that Sophocles meant to imply any such thing.[21]

For the most part, however, the oversimplified dichotomy between the two sisters has persisted through the 20th and into the 21st century, assuming a simplicity and straightforwardness to Ismene's character which is in stark contrast to the wealth of detailed scholarly investigation into every facet of Antigone's psychology: Tycho Wilamowitz, for example, claimed that Ismene barely classifies as a 'character' at all; Bowra that "Ismene is moved not by principles but by timidity"; Whitman that she is "as passive and obedient as a world of men could wish her to be"; Griffith that her only role is "to articulate 'normal', conventional female attitudes and expectations"; Tyrrell & Bennett that she is "a paragon of obedience to male authority"; and Roisman that she has a "temperamental incapacity to disobey".[22] These reductive attitudes have filtered down into areas beyond the traditional bounds of Classics. As Steiner notes: "Iconography and staging have not been kind to Ismene. She is the blonde, hollow one."[23] In Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* (1944), for example, Ismene is the conventionally beautiful and feminine older sister who defines herself as "an awful coward" who does not "want to die", and who sides with Creon over Antigone: "Oh, I know it's horrible. And I pity Polynices just as much as you do. But all the same, I sort of see what Uncle Creon means… Uncle Creon is the king. He has to set an example!"[24] In

[21] Bongie 1974: 252-253. Cf. Winnington-Ingram 1980: 133: "There are few things more irritating in the criticism of Greek tragedy than the prim disparagement of Ismene we sometimes read – as though we were all heroes."

[22] Wilamowitz 1917: 42: "gar nicht was wir einen Charakter nennen"; Bowra 1944: 79-80; Whitman 1951: 86; Griffith 2001: 129; Tyrrell & Bennett 2008-2009: 5; and Roisman 2018: 70. To these can be added: Campbell 1871: 393; Jebb 1888: xxviii; Schlesinger 1947: 209; Kirkwood 1958: 120; North 1966: 54-55, 65; Webster 1969: 75, 85; Pomeroy 1975: 99-100; Sorum 1982: 206,209; Fagles 1984: 50; Steiner 1984: 144; Wilkins & Macleod 1990: 21; Griffith 1999: 10, 35, 53, 62; Foley 2002: 198-199; Scodel 2005: 241; Carter 2012 120; and Taplin 2020: 5.

[23] Steiner 1984: 144.

[24] Anouilh 1958: 11-12. Cf. Schlesinger 1947: 209: "The difference between the ancient and the modern Ismene is of some interest. Both represent the ordinary level, contrasting with the heroic. But Sophocles' Ismene is not a physical coward – she can die with Antigone… Anouilh's Ismene *is* a physical coward;

many theatrical adaptations, however, Ismene is simply left out altogether, as in Alfieri's 1782 *Antigone*; Reboul's 1843-1844 *Antigone, tragédie inédite*; Hasenclever's 1917 *Antigone*; Theodorakis and Cranko's 1959 ballet production; Fugard, Kani & Ntshona's 1973 *The Island*; Gurney's 1987 *Another Antigone*; Bemba's 1990 *Black Wedding Candles for Blessed Antigone* (original: *Noces Posthumes de Santigone*, 1988); Sewell's 1995 *Antigone in Warsaw*; Glowacki's 1997 *Antigone in New York*; and Macintyre's 2009 *Irangani*.[25] Scholars in the fields of political and feminist philosophy, for whom Antigone has become an icon of rebellious resistance against patriarchal and political oppression, have also dismissed Ismene as a model of compliance and submission: Elshtain, for example, argues that Ismene "embodies 'traditional womanhood'" and "has no stomach for a rebellious act"; Johnson that she "is the 'normal' Greek girl living within the limits and laws of the *polis*"; Diprose that she "appears to be little more than a passive fool"; and Irigaray that she "seem[s] almost [a] caricature… indisputably a 'woman' in her weakness, her fear, her submissive obedience".[26]

And yet it precisely from those outside the discipline of Classics, as Coo notes, that a "consciously rehabilitative impulse" has more recently been directed towards her character.[27] Colm Tóibín (*Pale Sister*, 2019) and Emma Goldman-Sherman (*Antigone's Sister*, 1995), for instance, have both reimagined the play from Ismene's perspective. In her 2001 adaptation of the play, Nancy Keystone not only expands Ismene's role considerably, she also uses her character to give voice to contemporary issues surrounding mental health awareness and gender inequality; Keystone even has

she shrinks from suffering, and has to be desperate to face it." For further discussion on how Anouilh's adaptation differs from Sophocles' play, see also Conradie 1959 and Steiner 1984.

[25] Pounds-Williams 2017: 69-81. Although she is referred to in Gambaro's 1986 *Furious Antigone*, Ismene does not make an actual appearance in the play; in Sanchez's 1966 *La Pasión según Antígona Pérez* and Wellman's 2001 *Antigone* her role is significantly reduced.

[26] Elshtain 1989: 228, 223; Johnson 1997: 385; Diprose 2005: 46; and Irigaray 2010*b*: 102. To these can be added: Mills 1986: 141; Paul 2007: 433; Cavarero 2010: 51; and Holland 2010: 43 n. 23.

[27] Coo 2021: 91.

Ismene come on at the end of the play and directly refer to her own critical reception as a comment on the paternalistic silencing of women by men.[28] Playwrights Jeremy Menekseoglu and Lot Vekemans have also challenged the previous neglect afforded to Ismene's character by bringing her to the forefront of their adaptations. In his play *Ismene* (2004), Menekseoglu recasts Ismene as the main protagonist who represents a newly defined form of heroism which embraces reason over emotion, life over sacrifice, and hope over morbid obsession. Vekemans goes even further in her 2005 adaptation *Zus van* (*Sister of*), where the entire play is composed of a monologue in which the previously marginalised Ismene presents her side of the story.[29] Legal theorist Aurelio de Prada García (2018) has explored the shifting nature of Antigone and Ismene's identities as 'sisters' *versus* 'individuals' in relation to the conflict between 'natural' and 'positive' law.[30] Political theorists Jennet Kirkpatrick (2011) and Bonnie Honig (2011) have both argued that Ismene performed the first burial and that she is "an archetype of undaring defiance".[31] Goldhill (2006), Moro (2021), and Coo (2013b, 2020, 2021) have all explored the emerging construct of 'sisterhood' in Sophocles' *Antigone, Electra* and *Tereus*.[32] Pounds-Williams (2017) has examined the dramatic function and critical reception of the 'forgotten figures' Ismene, Chrysothemis and Tecmessa in relation to various theatrical adaptations.[33] And

[28] Pounds-Williams 2017: 81-95.

[29] Vekemans, *Zus van*, 2005: 12: "Maar dan wil ik wel mijn verhaal doen / Mijn verhaal / Precies zoals IK het heb meegemaakt / Niets meer en niets minder." For a comprehensive discussion of *Ismene* and *Zus van*, see Neeser Hever 2024.

[30] García 2018, "The Heads of Justice: 'Antigone-Ismene'?, 'Antigone and Ismene'?, 'Antigone-'?, '-Ismene'?..."

[31] Kirkpatrick 2011: 403, "The Prudent Dissident: Unheroic Resistance in Sophocles' *Antigone*"; Honig 2011, "Ismene's Forced Choice: Sacrifice and Sorority in Sophocles' *Antigone*". Harry (1911) and Rouse (1911) also proposed that Ismene was responsible for the first burial.

[32] Goldhill 2006, "Antigone and the Politics of Sisterhood"; Moro 2021, "Sailing Together: The Agonistic Construction of Sisterhood in Sophocles' *Antigone*"; and Coo 2013b, "A Tale of Two Sisters: Studies in Sophocles' *Tereus*", Coo 2020, "Greek Tragedy and the Theatre of Sisterhood", and Coo 2021, "Shifting Sisterhood: Electra and Chrysothemis in Sophocles' *Electra*". Moro focuses primarily on *Antigone*, Goldhill on *Antigone* and *Electra*, and Coo on *Electra* and the fragmentary *Tereus*.

[33] Pounds-Williams 2017, *Forgotten Figures: The Rhetorical Function of Tecmessa, Chrysothemis, and Ismene in Tragedies of Sophocles and Selected Adaptations.*

comparative literary theorist Neeser Hever (2024) has analysed the shifting reception of Ismene's character in contemporary literature.[34]

As invaluable and exciting as these more recent perspectives are, however, we should be mindful of a major shortcoming: many of these interdisciplinary scholars, with little to no knowledge of Ancient Greek, are forced to base their analyses on translations of the play, which means that their own interpretations are in large part founded on the translator's reading of the text: Honig (2011), Kirkpatrick (2011), Pounds-Williams (2017), García (2018) Moro (2021) and Neeser Hever (2024) for instance, all use English translations; Moro and Neeser Hever both use Jebb. Although Pounds-Williams might claim that a "gold standard" translation such as that of Hugh Lloyd-Jones renders any engagement with the original Greek text "unnecessary",[35] there is of course no such thing as a 'neutral' translation; all translations are to some extent governed by the individually and culturally determined assumptions of the translator. However, when it comes to reading Ancient Greek texts in translation these issues are compounded by the lack of direct English equivalents for such grammatical features as the dual form, μὲν-δέ constructions, personal endings, particles as indicators of tone and veracity, and the characteristic use of opposing value-laden terms like *philos* and *echthros* – all of which play a significant role in Sophoclean tragedy. In addition, because Sophoclean language is notoriously ambiguous and difficult to pin down,[36] it naturally lends itself to a greater degree of interpretative assumption on the translator's part.

Within the traditional field of Greek literary studies, the character of Ismene has yet to undergo the same level of re-assessment based on a full-scale engagement with the

[34] Neeser Hever 2024, "Minor Characters, Genre, and Relationality: Antigone's Sister in Contemporary Literature".
[35] Pounds-Williams 2017: 44.
[36] Budelmann 2000.

original Greek text in a systematic, scholarly manner. Ismene may only be a minor character,[37] and Sophocles does indeed make use of her character as a foil to Antigone, but it is widely accepted that Sophoclean characterisation is far from being merely schematic. Indeed, even in antiquity Sophocles was acknowledged as one of the great masters of character portrayal: the anonymous author of the *Life of Sophocles* remarks that 'he can create an entire character out of a mere half-line or a single phrase' (ὥστε ἐκ μικροῦ ἡμιστιχίου ἢ λέξεως μιᾶς ὅλον ἠθοποιεῖν πρόσωπον).[38] In describing his own development as a poet, Sophocles claimed to have changed his style to one that was 'most expressive of character and best' (ἠθικώτατόν ἐστι καὶ βέλτιστον).[39] Although relatively uncomplicated in comparison with the lengthily developed personages of the modern novel, Sophoclean characters are nevertheless distinguished with vivid personalities and psychologies fraught with inner conflict.[40] In addition, as Kirkwood pointed out, it is important to recognise that the tragic action itself in Sophocles is dependent on "the interplay of characters", to a greater degree than in Aeschylus or Euripides, and therefore that "our understanding of Sophoclean drama [rests] to a very large extent on our comprehension of the characters and above all of the character relationships of the plays".[41] And yet, given the scholarly tradition's preoccupation with the central figures, the widespread assumption that it is merely the contrast between the 'heroic' and the 'ordinary' that is of critical

[37] Although the term 'minor character' is used fairly loosely to refer to any character who is not regarded as one of the central tragic figures (see, for example, Neeser Hever 2024), see Yoon (2012) and Zimmermann (2012) on the important distinctions between the named supporting figures (like Ismene, Haemon and Eurydice) and the anonymous figures like Guards, Servants, Nurses, and Messengers.

[38] *Vita Sophoclis* 90-91 Radt.

[39] Plutarch, *De prof. in virt.* 79b Babbitt.

[40] Kirkwood 1958: 99-180; Gellie 1964; Easterling 1977; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 6-9; Budelmann 2000: 61-91; Carter 2005; and Scodel 2005: 240-245. For a more general discussion of 'character' in Sophocles and Greek drama, see Saunders 1934, Beckerman 1970, Gould 1978, Elam 1980, Gill 1986, Easterling 1990 and Valakas 2009: 189-197.

[41] Kirkwood 1958: 100-101. Cf. Winnington-Ingram 1980: 5-8; Gellie 1972: 212 ff.; and Wiersma 1984: 26-27.

significance[42] has not only prevented a deeper and more sensitive reading of Ismene's character, but also of the complex, multi-faceted nature of her relationship with Antigone.

Zimmermann, like Aristotle, argues that the crucial factor in determining any character's "importance" is their proximity to the central "tragic theme".[43] Setting aside the possibility that any given play might have more than one such 'central theme', the fact that scholars have spent centuries arguing over the meaning of the *Antigone* and the precise nature of its 'tragic theme' should in itself caution us against discounting the significance of Ismene's character; and yet, as Honig points out, there is "no element of the play's reception history [that] is more settled than the belief" that we are meant to discount Ismene as the sister who "lacks the courage or imagination to act when called upon to do so."[44] Even those scholars who recognise that Ismene is more than just a 'foil' persist in denying her any real depth or individuality. Kitto, for instance, claims that "[w]e have scratched the surface, not much more, when we call Ismene a nicely calculated foil to Antigone", but nevertheless labels her "one of the insignificant majority"; Kamerbeek claims that Ismene is "a personality in her own right" with her own "distinct characterisation", but nevertheless evaluates her character though an Antigone-centric viewpoint, remarking that Ismene would not have hesitated to join in with the burial had her "character [only been] of the same stuff as her sister's"; and Griffith claims that Sophoclean figures display "a degree of coherence, distinctiveness, and immediacy that encourages us to… respond to them as if they were actual persons", but nevertheless reduces Ismene's character to the "embodiment of conformity and subservience to male authority".[45]

[42] North 1966: 53: "inevitably the contrast between the heroic figure and its foils emphasizes the isolated nobility of the tragic soul. But to regard this as the view of Sophocles himself is to do an injustice to the complexity that he found in the nature of man".
[43] Zimmermann 2012: 507.
[44] Honig 2011: 30.
[45] Kitto 1956: 160, 161; Kamerbeek 1978: 9,8; Griffith 1999: 34, 62.

These Ismene-dismissive readings have led to an inadequate consideration of the importance of Sophocles' characterisation of Ismene and the dramatic function of her character in several key areas. Firstly, while it is true that Sophocles is famous for his use of contrasting characters,[46] this type of dichotomising has, on the whole, been too often both oversimplified and overstressed: Antigone is the typical Sophoclean hero, Ismene her more timid, hollow and 'life-loving' counterpart. Not only does this approach greatly limit our appreciation of Sophocles' portrayal of the complex relationship between the two sisters, it also fails to consider just how much Antigone and Ismene ultimately have in common. Secondly, while it is commonly held that the intensity of Antigone's reaction to Creon's edict stems from the tragic history of her family,[47] not enough attention has been given to the consideration that Ismene is no less a 'daughter of a House Accursed' and that her refusal is not simply a 'failure' on Ismene's part, but a conscious choice to opt of out the Labdacid cycle of self-destructive dysfunction. Thirdly, while it has been taken for granted that Antigone is the sister who necessarily deserves the focus of our attentions, there is an essential ambiguity to Ismene's character which not only defies the reductive judgements to which she has traditionally been subjected, but also suggests that Sophocles might have intended that she represent something more than just a "model for how an Athenian woman should act."[48] Fourthly, although Ismene has typically been regarded as an extension of Antigone herself rather than a fully individuated character in her own right, the question is never, 'Will Antigone bury her brother?', but 'Will Ismene join her?'. It is Ismene, not Antigone, who is tested; it is Ismene who hesitates, who questions, who grapples with the tragic forces of their circumstances, and who ultimately reveals another side to herself. As far as I am aware, no one has ever

[46] Kirkwood 1958: 83, 99-101; Webster 1969: 85-93; Scodel 2005: 240.

[47] Adams 1955: 50: "we may think of her as 'daughter of a House Accursed.' We may call it a 'complex' or 'family fixation' or whatever the proper term may be; it is affection concentrated on 'her own'; and when this opportunity to do a service to her dead brother is presented to her it is not a question of choosing between the laws of the gods and the laws of man. She has no choice."

[48] Tyrrell & Bennett: 1998: 77. Cf. Sorum 1982: 206: "an onstage reminder of those virtues admired in women".

suggested that it is Ismene's characterisation that might be the more complex of the two sisters. Lastly, the character Ismene is most often likened to is Electra's sister, Chrysothemis: "Antigone and Electra risk their position for the cause of right… whereas Ismene and Chrysothemis are… their contrasts."[49] As with the overemphasis on the distinction between Antigone and Ismene, this persistently weighted focus on the assumed similarities between the two 'weaker' sisters has too often failed to allow for a more thorough consideration of the key differences in Sophocles' distinct characterisation of Ismene and Chrysothemis and their relationships with their respective sisters.

In order to redress the oversimplification and neglect which the traditionally Antigone-centric readings have promoted, this research aims to tilt the play's theoretical focus away from the overdetermined distinction between 'hero' and 'foil' towards a fuller appreciation of the function and dramatic meaning of Ismene's character through a fresh philological analysis of the original Greek text. In the introduction to his study on Sophocles, Winnington-Ingram emphasises how important an unprejudiced reading of the text is to a proper appreciation of Sophoclean characters:

> We must wait and see what we find, relying more upon texts than upon dogmas… We must take what we find. We should not wave our antennae, delve into our egos, or read ingeniously between the lines: we should, however, read the lines, and read them carefully. We should not be frightened by a dogma into dismissing the natural interpretation of a text.[50]

To a large extent, of course, this idea of 'the natural interpretation of text' belongs only to the realm of utopian hermeneutics. As impossible as it is to ever entirely guard

[49] Wiersma 1984: 31. See also: Campbell & Abbott 1886: 309, Jebb 1894: xlii, Norwood 1948: 144, Shillington 1968: 139, Kamerbeek 1974: 10, Winnington-Ingram 1980: 241, Steiner 1984: 145, Sicking 1998: 45, March 2001: 11, Lloyd 2005: 41, 50, Jacobs 2007: 178, Apfel 2011: 291, and Roisman 2018: 69.
[50] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 8.

ourselves against proleptic readings and culturally determined assumptions, it is nevertheless my view that the focus of Sophoclean studies has been weighted so heavily in favour of the supposed contrast between the 'heroic' and the 'ordinary' that it has not only led to our established reception of Ismene being unduly founded on a subjective and predetermined reading of her character, but has in turn also precluded the possibility of a more balanced consideration of her critical significance.[51] In an attempt to offer a 're-characterisation' of Ismene, or at least the opportunity for such a re-characterisation, based on a comprehensive philological analysis and critical review of the reception history of the two *agones* ('dramatic contests') featuring Antigone and Ismene, this research seeks both to disrupt the largely prejudiced and limited appreciation of Ismene's character that has been passed on by each successive generation and to engage with the contemporary interest in re-examining canonical texts from newer interdisciplinary perspectives.

Chapter 1 focuses on Antigone and Ismene's first meeting in the prologue (lines 1-99). While the weight of scholarly focus has traditionally been directed towards the investigation of Antigone's underlying motives, this chapter aims to redress this previous imbalance by providing a thorough consideration of the various motivations that also drive Ismene's actions. Torn between duty to her brother and desperation to escape the inherited pattern of suffering and self-destruction that has plagued their family for generations, Ismene chooses life over death. Most critics never look beyond this initial refusal and swiftly dismiss her as weak, timid, and selfish. And yet Ismene's choice does not simply amount to a 'failure'; it is based on the guiding moral principle according to which she will act throughout the play and to which she is no less fiercely committed than Antigone is to her own cause. Ismene's decision *not* to act, moreover, does not only work to illuminate her sister's heroism, but also to complicate it. As she attempts to dissuade Antigone from going ahead with the burial, Ismene's alternative

[51] Pounds-Williams 2017: 56: "most translations portray Ismene negatively, pressuring and precluding future [scholars] who cannot read Greek from choosing a less negative view of her character."

perspective highlights the problems inherent in the old heroic distinctions between friend and enemy, honour and dishonour, and glory and shame; and her continued display of unconditional affection in the face of her sister's mounting cruelty works to challenge Antigone's own antithetical outlook in which heroic action and cowardly betrayal are the only possible alternatives.

Chapter 2 examines the sisters' second meeting towards the end of the second episode (lines 536-560). Although this scene reveals an added dimension to Ismene's character which works to further undermine the pervasive view of her character as a model of conformity and submission to masculine authority, most critics have simply regarded the sisters' second encounter as a further illustration of the contrast between the passionate Antigone and the timid Ismene. Not only does this reading continue to devalue any of Ismene's more daring, autonomous, and rebellious qualities, it also fails to recognise how this scene serves to both complicate our understanding of the difference between the two sisters and to heighten the complexity of their relationship. While the critical tradition has largely dismissed Ismene's attempt to share her sister's death as an act of hysterical remorse or a desperate bid to share in Antigone's glory, this chapter will explore how Sophocles' modelling of Ismene's devotion to Antigone on Antigone's own devotion to Polyneices challenges Antigone's own sense of heroic superiority as she starts to come to terms with the realisation that her own evaluation of the situation was not necessarily the only correct one. Moreover, the revelation that Sophocles has given us *two* sisters who are prepared to risk their lives for a sibling calls into question the very premise upon which the fascination with Antigone and the disdain for Ismene has rested for centuries.

In chapter 3 I examine another pair of Sophoclean sisters: Electra and Chrysothemis. Because the reception of Electra and Chrysothemis' relationship has largely been predicated on the assumption that Sophocles has simply recreated the same dynamic from the *Antigone*, once again setting his 'stronger' heroine against her more timid,

conventional sister, the scholarly tradition has, for the most part, only focused on what the two pairs of sisters have in common. In order to redress the overly reductive reading of the two pairs, this chapter will provide an in-depth comparison between the two sets of sisters based on a comprehensive re-examination of Electra and Chrysothemis' interactions in the *Electra*, exploring the various ways in which Sophocles deliberately draws upon a number of elements from the *Antigone*, not to emphasise how similar the two sororal relationships are, but how markedly different.

In order to allow for a more balanced consideration of Ismene and the dramatic function of her character, each chapter offers a re-reading of the key passages which have informed and contributed to the critical reception of her character, based on a thorough analysis of and engagement with the texts and their reception history from the 19th century onwards. Whereas chapters 1 and 2 focus on Sophocles' portrayal of Ismene in the *Antigone*, chapter 3 focuses on Sophocles' portrayal of Electra and Chrysothemis' relationship in the *Electra* as the basis for a comparison between Ismene and Chrysothemis. Chrysothemis is not only the character to whom Ismene is most often likened, she is also typically cast into the role of 'another Ismene'. While Ismene and Chrysothemis have almost invariably been brushed off as copies of one another – equally 'ordinary', 'feminine', and 'weak' – these two minor characters are in many respects a great deal more differentiated from one another than Antigone is from Electra. Moreover, shifting the focus away from the predetermined assumption that minor characters carry no greater depth or significance than their ability to delineate the central figures towards a more comprehensive, less prescriptive, appreciation of how Ismene and Chrysothemis differ as distinct, fully individuated characters, allows for new insights into Sophocles' characterisation not only of Ismene and Chrysothemis in relation to one another, but also in relation to their more intrepid sisters. A reassessment of the two 'weaker' sisters enables us not only to recognise how dissimilar these two characters are, but also that we can no longer afford to dismiss either one as a mere screen against which to view her more 'interesting' sister.

A full text and translation of each passage follows this study in the appendix. I have chosen to use Jebb's edition of the Greek text for both the *Antigone* (1888) and the *Electra* (1894). Since it is largely Jebb's reading of Ismene as 'merely the average woman'[52] that still governs our perception of her character within the field of contemporary Sophoclean studies (see, for example, Griffith's 1999 commentary, which takes a similarly reductive view of Ismene), an engagement with Jebb's commentaries[53] forms a significant part of my aim to demonstrate that it is possible to reach an entirely different interpretation of Ismene's character based on precisely the same text. In the course of my discussion, however, I do draw attention to important debates regarding various textual discrepancies and line attributions. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

[52] Jebb 1888: xxviii.

[53] In addition to those of Woolsey (1855), Campbell (1871, 1879, 1886), D'Ooge (1890), Wells (1900), Kells (1973), Kamerbeek (1974, 1978), Brown (1987), Bernadete (1999), Griffith (1999), March (2001), and Finglass (2007).

Chapter 1

Antigone & Ismene: The First Meeting

It is the hour before dawn, and two actors dressed as young women enter together from the central palace door. This is not just any palace, but the palace of Thebes, belonging once to Laius, then Oedipus, and now Creon: a palace with a history, looming sinister in the background throughout the play as a constant visual reminder of the troubles that plague the house of Oedipus. Unlike the two Oedipus plays, where we are told that the original audience would have been so familiar with the basic story that one had only to say 'Oedipus' for them to recall everything about him, the version of events depicted in this play is not attested before the 5th century.[1] From the Proagon, the audience would have known that the play was about Oedipus' daughters, but they would not have known which sister was which until one addressed the other.[2] That the two sisters are thus momentarily indistinguishable at the play's opening is significant, for this is precisely how Sophocles has both sisters initially conceive of themselves. There are 20 instances of the dual form in the first 62 lines of the play; the inflection used to refer to two persons or things that are linked either by nature or association to form a 'true pair' (3, 13-14, 21, 50, 55-58, 61-62).[3] Both sisters use the dual to refer not only to themselves (3, 21, 50, 58, 61-62) but also to their dead brothers (13-14, 21, 55-57). This prolific use of the dual highlights the two sisters' initial conception of themselves: they regard the four children of Oedipus as comprising a special unit. Their two brothers, taken as a pair, are dead, and now only Antigone and Ismene, the remaining pair, are left.

[1]Antiphanes fr. 189. 5–8 K-A. On the broader mythological tradition surrounding *Antigone*, see esp. Cerri 2018, Cairns 2016: 1-28 and Mulroy 2013: xvii-xlvi.

[2] Tyrrell & Bennett 2008-2009: 4.

[3] Smyth 1956: 269 n. 999; Jelf 1851: 387.1.

Antigone and Ismene are one another's 'other self', equal and interchangeable, identical halves of the same distinct unit. Their meeting in front of the courtyard gates recalls the fateful meeting of Polyneices and Eteocles at the city's seventh gate, and the sunrise that brings Thebes' deliverance from the war (100-116) brings also the hope that the two sisters will avoid the fractious path of their brothers, that they might escape the Labdacid cycle of internecine conflict and misfortune which has plagued their family for generations – but this is not to be. The sisters' initial meeting recalls another crucial scene from Aeschylus' *Septem*: their brothers' death (961-1004). Sewell-Rutter points out that in their mutual destruction the previous "opposition between Eteocles and Polyneices… collapses utterly… They are so closely joined… that they are barely indistinguishable, barely individuated."[4] Antigone and Ismene are on the opposite trajectory. Their moment of unity at the play's opening is a fleeting one, all the more poignant for its brevity, and the legacy of their two brothers – the subversion of family ties in which *philoi* become *echthroi* – soon starts to impose itself upon the sisters too. As soon as Antigone begins to relate the particulars of Creon's edict and her intention to defy it, this sense of intimacy and 'oneness' starts to dissolve, and when Ismene expresses her own reluctance to act, there is an immediate rupture between the two. Antigone stops conceiving of Ismene as her 'other half' and never again uses the dual when referring to Ismene and herself. The rift between the two sisters continues to deepen as Ismene sinks ever lower in Antigone's esteem, until finally she is redefined as an 'enemy', an *echthra* (86, 93-94).

At the end of this first meeting, the emotional separation of the 'pair' is mirrored by their physical separation with Antigone exiting alone through the side-entrance to go out and bury Polyneices and Ismene passing back though the palace door. Sophocles prepares us for this division from the outset by contrasting the two sisters' use of language. Antigone's lines are more heavily enjambed; her pace is faster, and more

[4] Sewell-Rutter 2007: 34.

abrupt; at times her syntax becomes confused and illogical, full of parentheses; her speech pattern is full of negatives, rhetorical questions, oxymorons, sarcasm, imperatives and first-person assertions (mainly in the future tense); she tends to use shorter sentences and simpler language. Ismene has more end-stopped periods; her pace is calmer and more measured; her sentence structure tends to be more carefully considered; she typically uses more ornate diction.[5] All of this serves to mark out Sophocles' distinct characterisation of the two sisters and the essential difference between them: Antigone is impudent and impetuous, brimming with indignation at Creon and furiously determined to do her duty, come what may; Ismene, still hopeful of a change in their fortunes and determined not to meet the same fate as the rest of their family, is more cautious, circumspect, and mindful of the pressures and vagaries of circumstance.

ὦ κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἰσμήνης κάρα

There are few plays that are quicker off the mark.[6] Having brought Ismene out from the palace, Antigone opens with what has come to be known as "a notoriously untranslatable" first line[7]: ὦ κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἰσμήνης κάρα (1). Not only does this line serve to identify the two characters on stage, it also announces the themes around which both the sisters' relationship and the play itself will turn. Literally, it reads something like: 'O common self-sibling head of Ismene'. As Steiner points out, the semi-darkness in which these words are spoken "seems to cling" to their meaning since of the five words, only the vocative *ô* and the name *Ismênê*, are

[5] Griffith 1999: 36-37.

[6] Bongie 1974: 239.

[7] Brown 1987 ad loc. Cf. Knox 1964: 79; Bongie 1974: 239; and Winnington-Ingram 1980: 134. For the "voluminous exegesis" which this line has occasioned, see Steiner 1984: 208-211. For various discussions and interpretations, see Goldhill 1986: 90; Scodel 2005: 236; Tyrrell & Bennett 2008-2009: 5; Cavarero 2010: 50; Kirkpatrick 2011: 419-420; and Moro 2021: 112-113.

"straightforward."[8] *Koinon* is a loaded term in the play.[9] Of the nine times the *koin-* stem is used (1, 57, 147, 161, 202, 539, 546, 988, 1024), six are in connection with the children of Oedipus: three with Eteocles and Polyneices (57, 147, 202), and three with Antigone and Ismene (1, 539, 546). *Koinon* signifies 'common' or 'shared'. When used of persons, it generally implies those of common origin or kindred blood, particularly brothers and sisters. Antigone is referring to the fact that she and Ismene are kindred through their common blood. By implication, however, *koinon* comes also to symbolise everything else shared by the two sisters because of their kindred bond: their shared parents, their shared history, their shared brothers, and their shared grief.[10] As well as signifying what is unique and particular to these two sisters, however, *koinon* "is also a key political term", referring to that which is common, public, or general to all the people.[11] The 'state' or 'public authority', for example, is typically referred to by the neuter singular *to koinon*, and 'public affairs' by the neuter plural *ta koina*. It can equally refer to 'the common good'.[12] Here then, in what is effectively the first proper word in a play rife with double meanings and ambiguities, comes the very first instance where the significance one character attaches to a particular term is soon revealed to hold different connotations for another character.[13]

In his study of Sophoclean language, Budelmann argues that "it is characteristic of Sophoclean characters to say things that prompt all kinds of judgements, thoughts and opinions, but judgements, thoughts and opinions which leave room for further judgements, thoughts and opinions which are in some way felt to be limited or incomplete." Sophoclean characters, he continues, "are fascinating because they make spectators feel that there is much they know, but much as well that they do not

[8] Steiner 1984: 208.
[9] Cf. Steiner 1984: 208; Bernadete 1999 ad loc; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 134; and Goldhill 2006: 152.
[10] Cf. Campbell 1871; Jebb 1888; and Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[11] Goldhill 2006: 145.
[12] LSJ s.v. κοινός.
[13] For a discussion on the 'multiplicity of levels' that informs the language of tragedy, see esp. Vernant & Vidal-Naquet 1988: 29-48.

know."[14] What is *koinon*? For Antigone, it is the shared familial obligations attendant upon those of kindred blood – specifically the sisters' shared duty towards the dead Polyneices. This soon turns out to be diametrically opposed to their duty, as citizens of Thebes, to the authority of the state, its ruler, and his 'common decree' (κοινῷ κηρύγματι 161). Although it is precisely this tension that gives rise to the action of the play, Antigone and Creon are not the only antagonists. Nor are they, necessarily, the most important ones. Mulroy has argued that "the critical ethical conflict is not between Creon and Antigone [as Hegel famously argued] but between Antigone and Ismene."[15] And while it has often been pointed out that "Antigone and Creon use the same moral vocabulary in subtly different ways",[16] hardly any consideration has been given to the value Ismene attaches to these same key terms. As will become apparent, Ismene has her own conception of what *koinon* signifies in terms of the sisters' inherited commonality, and it proves to be very different from Antigone's.

Antigone reinforces her emphasis on the bonds of kinship by using *koinon* as adjective with the emphatic *autadelphon*, a strengthened form of 'sibling', *adelphos*, stemming from the word for 'womb', *delphus*: a sibling from the self (*aut-*) same (*-a-*) womb (*-delphon*).[17] Antigone means, as the scholiast explains, that Ismene is her full sister, born of the same mother and father.[18] Like *koinon*, however, we shall see that words with the *aut-* ('self') prefix are heavily charged terms in this play, typically drawing our attention to the Labdacid cycle of incest, obduracy, violence and *self*-inflicted

[14] Budelmann 2000: 64.
[15] Mulroy 2013: xlix. For Hegel, see Paolucci 2001: 178.
[16] Foley 2002: 173.
[17] LSJ s.v. ἀδελφός; Tyrrell & Bennett 2008-2009: 5.
[18] Σ *Ant*. 1.1-1.7: αὐτάδελφον εἶπεν ὅτι ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν γεγόνασι· πολλάκις δὲ ὁ Σοφοκλῆς ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ τίθησι τὸ κοινὸν ὡς νῦν. ἐπειδὴ τὸ ἀδελφὸς κοινῶς λέγεται ἐπὶ τῶν μὴ ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων τῶν γονέων ὄντων ἀδελφῶν ἐπήγαγεν τὸ αὐτάδελφον ὅπερ παρίστησι τοὺς ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μητρὸς γεγονότας.

suffering.[19] In this instance, the audience might recall that the same womb that bore the four children of Oedipus also happened to bear their father, so that the emphatic combination *koinon autadelphon* points not only to the exceptional closeness of the two sisters, but also to the peculiar inwardness of their family.[20] In addition, as Griffith points out, Antigone's expression lacks feminine endings and may therefore "suggest also their 'common brother'".[21] Antigone will in fact later explicitly refer to Polyneices as her *autadelphon* (503), and in an ironic twist it is precisely the sisters' quarrel over their 'common brother' which results in Ismene's demotion from *koinon autadelphon* to *echthra* (86, 93-94) and Polyneices' resulting elevation to the position of Antigone's only 'true' sibling.

Ismênês kara, 'head of Ismene', is an elevated type of poetic periphrasis, "evoking the individual more vividly than the bare name would do."[22] As both Steiner and Bernadete point out, however, it is not the 'distinctiveness' of Ismene that Antigone is evoking here, but rather the sense of identification attendant upon the sibling bond:

> The link between 'head of Ismene' and 'common' is supplied by αὐτάδελφον. Antigone recognises Ismene's head as a sister's head… Antigone's love for Ismene as a person is mediated though Ismene's kinship with herself; and not only mediated through, but identified with, that kinship; for Ismene's head is αὐτάδελφον, nothing but a sister's… Her distinctiveness merely signifies for Antigone her membership in the family that Antigone loves unreservedly.[23]

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[19] αὐτάδελφος (1, 503, 696); αὐτόφωρος (51); αὐτουργός (52); αὐτοκτονέω (56); αὐτόχειρ (306, 900, 1315); αὐτόπρεμνος (714); αὐτόνομος (821); αὐτογέννητος (864); αὐτόγνωτος (875); and αὐθαδία (1028). Cf. Loraux 1986: 167 and Griffith 1999 ad loc.

[20] Scodel 2005: 236: "*Autadelphon* may remind the audience that the sisters are the children of incest, even more closely related than sisters should be."

[21] Griffith 1999 ad loc.

[22] Brown 1987 ad loc. Bernadete 1999: 1 n. 2: "It is no doubt accidental that the periphrasis 'head of X' occurs only in Sophocles' Oedipus plays… but it seems more significant that in the vocative the phrase is restricted in classical poetry to *Ant* 1 and *OT* 40 (Oedipus), 950 (Jocasta), 1207 (Oedipus)… The normal usage is either the person's name in the vocative followed by 'head' with a qualifying adjective or an adjective plus 'head' by itself."

[23] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.

By insisting that she and Ismene share a 'common head', Antigone thereby also reveals her expectation that she and Ismene will necessarily share the same perspective. Just like her appeal to *koinon autadelphon*, Antigone "demands a 'single-headed' unison"[24] that does not allow for any individuality, any difference of opinion.[25] "Ismene's individuality", as Cavarero points out, "lies entirely in her given name, which appears… only to designate the possessor of the 'head'".[26] While Antigone's invocation to the bonds of kinship raises the hope that the sisters, unlike their two brothers, will be united in common purpose, it is soon to be revealed that it is decidedly not one 'head' we are dealing with here, but two, and Antigone's passionate appeal to 'indistinction' will instead serve only to highlight how very dissimilar these two sisters really are.

Most scholars recognise that while Antigone's address certainly conveys a strong sense of intimacy with Ismene, this intimacy is not one of loving sisterly affection.[27] The sense of the Greek is so difficult to capture, however, that translators are still tempted to use words like 'dear' and 'beloved'. Jebb's "Ismene, my sister, mine own dear sister", for example, although still widely regarded as one of the best renderings, conveys too strong a sense of tenderness.[28] From the outset, Antigone is intense and passionate, but she is never tender. My own translation – 'My own sister, Ismene, born of the same womb and closest of kin' – though far from literal, is an attempt to capture the spirit of Antigone's address by stressing the intensity of her emphasis on the closeness of their kindred bond without becoming sentimental. While I suspect my

[24] Steiner 1984: 209.
[25] Cf. García 2018: 19.
[26] Cavarero 2010: 50.
[27] Brown 1987 ad loc.: "…though the line is passionately spoken, Antigone is not speaking *about* her emotions but about the physical fact of kinship. Kinship is what matters to Antigone." Cf. Bernadete 1999; Kamerbeek 1978; and Griffith 1999 ad loc.; Kirkwood 1958: 119; Goldhill 1986: 90; and Kirkpatrick 2011: 419-420. Campbell 1871 ad loc.; Scodel 2005: 236; Carter 2012: 125; and Moro 2021: 113 all argue that Antigone's address conveys her love and affection for Ismene.
[28] The same holds true for Kitto 1962; Watling 1974; Fagles 1984; Gibbons & Segal 2003; and Mulroy 2013. The best translations I have found are those of Fainlight & Littman 2009: "Ismene my true sister, born from the same mother"; and Taplin 2020: "My sister, bound by blood, Ismene".

emphasis is too strong, Wyckoff's (2013) "My sister, my Ismene" is certainly too weak and does no justice to the Greek.

In the light of what is to come – the revelation of Creon's edict and the impending dishonour towards their brother – it is clear that Antigone is trying to appeal to a sense of their shared heritage, of the "community of interests"[29] that unite the two sisters, and, more importantly, of the obligations entailed by such a bond. Just as Antigone will make no distinction between her two dead brothers, so she initially sees none between Ismene and herself. Steiner argues that, together, the two sisters form "a single, a 'common', being", suggesting that it is as if Antigone "strives to compact, to 'ingest', Ismene into herself."[30] This passionate expression of 'oneness' in Antigone's opening address, as Jebb points out, "gives the key-note of the drama. The origin which connects the sisters also isolates them. If Ismene is not with her, Antigone stands alone".[31] However, because Antigone's feelings for Ismene are so tightly bound up with their shared origin, this opening line also anticipates the intensity of the division between them. At this stage Antigone is utterly convinced that Ismene will share her own sense of outrage at Creon's edict as well as her fierce resolve to defy it.[32] Because this conviction is based on Antigone's own excessive interpretation of the requirements which constitute the bond of *philia*, the implication is that – should Ismene not meet these requirements – she will no longer qualify as an *autadelphos*. As Bernadete has it: "Only if Ismene acknowledges herself to be nothing but a sister to Antigone and Polyneices will Antigone continue to love her."[33] This is of course precisely what happens: as soon as it becomes apparent that she and Ismene do not in fact share a 'common head', Antigone responds by repeatedly and increasingly defining away Ismene's relation to herself. Through the course of the play Ismene

[29] Campbell & Abbott 1886 ad loc. Cf. Foley 2002: 173-174, 182.
[30] Steiner 1984: 209.
[31] Jebb 1888 ad loc.
[32] Cf. Jebb 1888: xxviii; Foley 2002: 174; and Tyrell & Bennett 2008-2009: 5.
[33] Bernadete 1999: 2.

moves from *koinon autadelphon* (1), to *echthra* (86, 93, 94), to one who is emphatically non-*philos* (543), and finally to complete nonentity. After her final two lines addressed to Ismene at 559-560, Antigone speaks as if Ismene had ceased to exist (847, 876, 882, 895, 919, 941).

The 'troubles' of Antigone

While the actual palace of Oedipus, now Creon's, looms sinister in the background, the troubles of the House of Oedipus are ominously recalled throughout the play, constantly reminding us that Antigone and Ismene are the last two survivors of a cursed family.[34] While both sisters are keenly aware of their miserable heritage, it affects them quite differently. Antigone's opening address is immediately followed by her own impassioned account of their shared suffering (2-6):

> ἆρ' οἶσθ' ὅ τι Ζεὺς τῶν ἀπ' Οἰδίπου κακῶν
> ὁποῖον οὐχὶ νῷν ἔτι ζώσαιν τελεῖ;
> οὐδὲν γὰρ οὔτ' ἀλγεινὸν οὔτ' ἄτης ἄτερ
> οὔτ' αἰσχρὸν οὔτ' ἄτιμόν ἐσθ', ὁποῖον οὐ
> τῶν σῶν τε κἀμῶν οὐκ ὄπωπ' ἐγὼ κακῶν.
>
> Do you know of any kind of misery, of all those stemming from Oedipus,
> that Zeus does not accomplish for us two while we still live?
> For there is nothing painful, nothing without ruin,
> no shame, no dishonour,
> that I have not seen in your sorrows and mine.

Of the 'evils from Oedipus', Antigone makes no mention of her father's parricide, his incestuous marriage, their mother's suicide, Oedipus' curse upon his two sons, or her brothers' fratricide. What we get, instead, is an account seething with righteous indignation at the burden of a history whose consequences she and Ismene have been forced to endure: a barrage of negatives (οὐδὲν… οὔτ'… οὔτ'… οὔτ'… οὔτ'… οὐ…

[34] 2-6, 49-57, 167-168, 379-380, 471-472, 583-603, 856-871, 897-903.

οὐκ), rhyming neuter adjectives and genitive plurals, and marked alliteration of τ- and κ-, are all used to "hammer home"[35] the one aspect of their family history which, for Antigone at least, is all-important: the 'shame' (αἰσχρόν) and 'dishonour' (ἄτιμον) which their shared legacy of 'pain' (ἀλγεινόν) and 'ruin' (ἄτης) has brought upon the family's last two survivors. As Else has argued, "Antigone regards the 'evils from Oedipus'" not as having come about through the actions of her family members towards one another, but "as purely external misfortunes which have befallen her dear ones."[36]

In these opening lines we also see the first of what is soon to become a steady stream of dual endings: νῷν… ζώσαιν, 'for us two who live'.[37] The dual form, as Knox notes, not only serves to blur "the distinction between identities"; it also "emphasises the close connection of two as opposed to the rest of the world."[38] Throughout the prologue, both sisters use the dual to refer not only to themselves (3, 21, 50, 58, 61-62) but also to their dead brothers (13-14, 21, 55-57). The four children of Oedipus are thus taken as comprising a special unit:[39] a pair of brothers set in counterpart to a pair of sisters. Following upon *koinon autadelphon* in line 1, Antigone uses the dual here as a means of further reinforcing her insistence on the special bond between Ismene and herself: with their pair of brothers now dead, only Antigone and Ismene, the remaining pair, are left. And yet the use of the dual is not without irony. While Antigone and Ismene repeatedly use the dual to refer to their dead brothers, in life Eteocles and Polyneices' relationship was characterised by internecine hostility, by the subversion of family ties and the failure of *to koinon*; it takes death to unite the two brothers (μόρον κοινὸν 56-57, κοινοῦ θανάτου 147). As Griffith notes, Sophocles has centred his play around a variety of "natural but frustrated *pairings*": champion-

[35] Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[36] Else 1976: 33.
[37] There are 20 duals in the first 62 lines of the play: 3, 13-14, 21, 50, 55-58, 61-62.
[38] Knox 1964: 79-80.
[39] Cf. Knox 1964: 79.

brother and traitor-brother (13-14, 21-22, 55-57, 144-147, 170-172), living-sister and dead-brother (73), dead-bride and living-groom (1220-1225).[40] By repeatedly referring to the sisters in the dual, as he does their brothers, Sophocles invites us to compare the two pairs of siblings, encouraging us to consider whether the sisters are destined to become true counterparts of their enemy brothers. Ironically, it is Creon's splitting of the brothers' dual in his divergent treatment of the two corpses (21-39) which ultimately results in the rupture of the sisters' dual, too.

Bernadete points out that despite using *koinon* in her opening line and the dual in line 3, Antigone nevertheless makes a point of distinguishing between Ismene's sorrows and her own in line 6: τῶν σῶν τε κἀμῶν… κακῶν.[41] This is yet another portent of the soon-to-be revealed division between the 'pair', for what began as the 'troubles from Oedipus' (Οἰδίπου κακῶν) at the end of line 2 now becomes ἐγὼ κακῶν at the end of 6, and Antigone's greatest 'trouble' – the need to guard their family against any additional shame and dishonour – will most certainly not turn out to be the same as Ismene's – the need to save Antigone and herself from the same fate as the rest of their family. The two sisters' *kaka* are thus "distinct from the start,"[42] and it is precisely this fundamental distinction which leads to their mirroring the conflict between Polyneices and Eteocles as their initial closeness swiftly disintegrates into bitter opposition.

Antigone concludes her opening speech with the revelation that Creon has now heaped further indignities upon them by the proclamation of an edict which will serve to inflict the sort of evils meant for enemies, *echthroi*, upon those dearest to them, *philoi* (7-10):

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[40] Griffith 1999: 121.

[41] Bernadete 1999 ad loc. Cf. Tyrrell & Bennett 2008-2009: 5: "Sophocles directs the audience to accept the sisters as a pair… Then almost immediately, he severs their unity by having Antigone differentiate herself from Ismene by speaking of 'your' and 'mine', not 'our'."

[42] Bernadete 1999: 3.

καὶ νῦν τί τοῦτ' αὖ φασι πανδήμῳ πόλει
κήρυγμα θεῖναι τὸν στρατηγὸν ἀρτίως;
ἔχεις τι κεἰσήκουσας; ἢ σε λανθάνει
πρὸς τοὺς φίλους στείχοντα τῶν ἐχθρῶν κακά;[43]

And what now of this new edict which they say
the General has just proclaimed to the entire city?
Have you heard anything? Or have you not yet realised
that the evils owed to our enemies are now marching upon our loved ones?

Antigone's opening speech, in Else' words, is "a loaded gun held at the head of Ismene."[44] *Echthroi* are now marching against *philoi*; the battlelines have been drawn, and there is no room for neutrality.[45] This is the most basic tenet of the heroic code which subsequently came to form the basis of Greek morality throughout the Archaic and Classical periods: the expectation that you should help your friends and harm your enemies.[46] The "problem", as Cairns points out, is that this ideal assumes "a strict and straightforward polarity between two distinct categories" which, in tragedy, "fail to remain distinct".[47] Sophocles deliberately complicates the distinction between *philoi* and *echthroi* and the various disputes "over the proper definition and application of these terms forms a major theme of the play."[48] Eteocles and Polyneices, as both brothers and rivals, are simultaneously *philoi* and *echthroi*; and yet neither Creon nor Antigone will allow for any such ambiguity or double-sidedness. As Kirkpatrick puts it: "For both Creon and Antigone, the landscape between friends and enemies is barren."[49] For Creon, a traitor like Polyneices, though kin (*philos*), can never be anything but an enemy *echthros* (522). For Antigone, on the other hand, it is precisely

[43] See Jebb 1888; Kamerbeek 1978; Brown 1987; and Griffith 1999 ad loc. for the various possible interpretations of this line.
[44] Else 1976: 31. Cf. Steiner 1984: 209: "Every syllable in this opening speech is simultaneously a calling and a challenge."
[45] Moro 2021: 115.
[46] Cf. Blundell 1989: 26-59 and Cairns 2016: 93.
[47] Cairns 2016: 94.
[48] Griffith 1999 ad loc. For further discussion on the theme of *philoi* and *echthroi* in the play, see Knox 1964: 80-89; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 129; Goldhill 1986: 89-106; Goldhill 2006: 153; Carter 2012: 126; and Cairns 2016: 93-104. For the concept of *philia*, see Konstan 1997.
[49] Kirkpatrick 2011: 417.

because Polyneices is her brother (*philos*) that, whatever he did in life, he could never be an *echthros* (73-74, 511-523). Friend or enemy, noble (*eugenês*, *esthlos*) or base (*kakos*), honour or dishonour – these are hard categories for the great Sophoclean heroes, renowned for their dogmatic inflexibility;[50] there is no in-between. So when Ismene fails to meet Antigone's challenge by answering her call to defend their *philos* (Polyneices) against their *echthros* (Creon), Antigone does not hesitate to label her sister a traitor who has 'betrayed' her *philoi* (προδοῦσ' 46) and therefore deserves to be banished to the opposite camp (86, 93-94).

The difference in character and outlook between the two sisters starts to emerge as soon as Ismene speaks (11-17):

> ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐδεὶς μῦθος, Ἀντιγόνη, φίλων
> οὔθ' ἡδὺς οὔτ' ἀλγεινὸς ἵκετ', ἐξ ὅτου
> δυοῖν ἀδελφοῖν ἐστερήθημεν δύο,
> μιᾷ θανόντοιν ἡμέρᾳ διπλῇ χερί·
> ἐπεὶ δὲ φροῦδός ἐστιν Ἀργείων στρατὸς
> ἐν νυκτὶ τῇ νῦν, οὐδὲν οἶδ' ὑπέρτερον,
> οὔτ' εὐτυχοῦσα μᾶλλον οὔτ' ἀτωμένη.
>
> No word of those we love, Antigone, has reached me –
> neither pleasing nor painful. Not since when,
> on a single day, we two were robbed of our two brothers,
> each dying at the hands of the other.
> And since the Argive army has departed
> this last night, I know nothing more,
> neither of good fortune nor of sorrow.

In opposition to Antigone's opening *koinon*, Sophocles now gives to Ismene for her first word the emphatic ἐμοὶ. Furthermore, whereas Antigone had addressed Ismene with the extraordinary appellation *koinon autadelphon Ismênês kara*, Ismene, as García points out, uses only Antigone's name, "without any reference to a special sorority". This "affirmation of individuality", of distinctiveness, is further reinforced by her use

[50] Cf. Knox 1964: 28-34, 80-90 and Blundell 1989: 115-30.

of the first-person οἶδα and the singular participles εὐτυχοῦσα and ἀτωμένη in 16-17. [51]

The sisters may well come from the 'self-same womb', but Ismene is nevertheless to have her own 'head', her own perspective on their family's 'troubles', both old and new. What she clearly does 'share' with her sister, however, is Antigone's conception of the special bond that exists between Eteocles and Polyneices, Antigone and herself: the dead brothers form one pair, designated by the dual (δυοῖν ἀδελφοῖν… θανόντοιν), and the surviving sisters, another pair (ἐστερήθημεν δύο). Although Jebb feels that the addition of δύο is not "specially relevant" and that its only real purpose here is to "suggest the isolation of the sisters",[52] I would suggest that the deliberate wordplay on two-two-one-double in 13-14 is not only meant to add pathos to the 'real contrast' between δυοῖν ἀδελφοῖν and μιᾷ… ἡμέρᾳ,[53] but also to imply a parallelism between the two pairs of siblings; that Sophocles is encouraging us to see the sisters' impending opposition in the context of their brothers' hostility. The emphatic use of the dual, together with the play on 'one', 'two' and 'double', seems to suggest a recurring pattern of strife-in-unity. Like their two brothers (δυοῖν), the two sisters (δύο) form a natural unit, but one which is soon to be divided in conflict.[54]

Whereas Antigone "altogether disregards" and "represses" any of the circumstances surrounding Polyneices' death – the recent war, the fact that Eteocles was defending Thebes and Polyneices was attacking it, and the fact that Polyneices and Eteocles killed one another – Ismene does not shy away from confronting the harsher realities which have brought their family to its current plight;[55] indeed she will later plead with

[51] García 2018: 20.
[52] Jebb 1888 ad loc.
[53] Kamerbeek 1978 ad loc.
[54] On the pattern of 'doubling' in the play, see Cairns 2016: 14-28.
[55] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.: "Antigone abstracts from everything except the fact that Polyneices lies unburied." Cf. Goldhill 1986: 90; Kirkpatrick 2011: 414; and Winnington-Ingram 1980: 132: "It is Ismene, the realist, who speaks of the mutual fratricide…".

Antigone to recognise the wider pattern of discord and dysfunction which defines their family's recent past (49-60). Whereas Antigone and Creon see the world in terms of the unambiguous distinction between *philoi* and *echthroi*, Ismene complicates these categories: their brothers may have been *philoi*, but they were also *echthroi* whose conflict over the throne led to the war against Thebes; they may have formed a natural 'pair' (δυοῖν ἀδελφοῖν), but they were 'paired', too, in their mutual destruction (θανόντοιν… διπλῇ χερί).[56] And while Ismene may share Antigone's conception of the special bond uniting the Labdacid siblings, she does not share Antigone's assessment of their family history. For Ismene, their shared legacy is not merely a source of 'shame and dishonour' (αἰσχρὸν οὔτ' ἄτιμον 5), but a dire warning not to fall victim to the same pattern of self-destruction. In dying 'by each other's hand' (διπλῇ χερί) the brothers come to share a 'double fate' (διπλῆς μοίρας 170, cf. 56-57, 147) – and it is precisely this fate that Ismene is determined to avoid.

And yet Ismene does not dwell, as Antigone does (*kakôn… kakôn… kaka*, 2-10), solely on their previous and present miseries. Despite Antigone's insistence on their wretched heritage in 2-6 and the ominous tone of her rhetorical questions in 7-10, Ismene does not automatically assume the worst. For her, there is not only the possibility of additional 'pain' (ἀλγεινός) and 'disaster' (ἀτωμένη), but also 'pleasure' (ἡδύς) and 'good fortune' (εὐτυχοῦσα). As Bernadete notes: "Ismene does not preclude the possibility of a change for the better in her circumstances. But Antigone cannot conceive, especially with her knowledge of Creon's decree, of an open future. That Ismene and herself are still alive (ἔτι ζώσαιν 3) does not carry with it any hope."[57] The only time when Antigone speaks with any optimism about her future is in relation to her death: she will die 'nobly' (καλῶς, 72-73, 96-97); her death will be a 'gain' (κέρδος 461-464); and there will never be a death 'more glorious' than her own (κλέος… εὐκλεέστερον 502-504). In addition, although Ismene picks up

[56] Cairns 2016: 95.
[57] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.

Antigone's reference to *philoi* in 10, she makes no mention of *echthroi*. In fact the only time Ismene ever uses the *echth-* stem is when she says that their father died 'despised', ἀπεχθὴς, in line 50. Friend or enemy, honour or dishonour, glory or shame, profit or insult – unlike Antigone and Creon, Ismene is not caught up in the old heroic obsession over these uncompromising antitheses. All of her focus and concern, it will turn out, is for the continued well-being of her *philoi*; more specifically, her *living philoi*.[58] This will prove to be another fundamental difference between the two sisters, since all of Antigone's affection and devotion is directed toward her *dead* relations.[59]

Antigone has been inwardly seething since her opening line. Her anger steadily mounts the closer she comes to revealing the particulars of Creon's edict, until she cannot contain it any longer. When the moment does come, she is not able to convey the news directly, but instead bursts forth with yet another indignant rhetorical question (21-22):[60]

> οὐ γὰρ τάφου νῷν τὼ κασιγνήτω Κρέων
> τὸν μὲν προτίσας τὸν δ' ἀτιμάσας ἔχει;
>
> What? Our two brothers – their burial – has Creon
> not gone and honoured the one and dishonoured the other?

Her meaning is clear enough, as is her scornful tone, but the syntax is odd:[61] 'What, burial, us two (dual), our two brothers (dual), Creon, the one, honoured, the other, dishonoured?' The truth is so horrifying to her that she can barely manage to splutter it out. Antigone is outraged that Creon has dared to discriminate (τὸν μὲν… τὸν δὲ…) between their two brothers (νῷν τὼ κασιγνήτω), those same two brothers who up

[58] 58-60, 82, 536-537, 540-541, 544-545, 548, 552, 554, 566, 570.
[59] 9-10, 21-30, 45-46, 48, 71-76, 80-81, 89, 450-470, 502-4, 511-523, 555, 559-560, 897-915. Cf. Bonnard (1951: 49), who argues that it is Ismene who brings to light the 'identical obsessiveness' of Antigone and Creon.
[60] Campbell & Abbott 1886 ad loc.: "The indignant question suits well the sudden outburst of feeling."
[61] On the scornful tone of οὐ γὰρ, see Denniston 1934: 79. For discussions on the syntax of these two lines, see Jebb 1888; Wells 1900; Kamerbeek 1978; and Griffith 1999 ad loc.

until this point have only been referred to in the dual (13, 21).[62] Her description of Polyneices' fate is markedly more emotional than that of Eteocles (23-30):

> Ἐτεοκλέα μέν, ὡς λέγουσι, σὺν δίκης
> χρήσει δικαίᾳ καὶ νόμου, κατὰ χθονὸς
> ἔκρυψε, τοῖς ἔνερθεν ἔντιμον νεκροῖς·
> τὸν δ' ἀθλίως θανόντα Πολυνείκους νέκυν
> ἀστοῖσί φασιν ἐκκεκηρῦχθαι τὸ μὴ
> τάφῳ καλύψαι μηδὲ κωκῦσαί τινα,
> ἐᾶν δ' ἄκλαυτον, ἄταφον, οἰωνοῖς γλυκὺν
> θησαυρὸν εἰσορῶσι πρὸς χάριν βορᾶς.
>
> Eteocles, as they say, with righteous observance
> of justice and custom, he has buried below the earth
> to be honoured among the dead below.
> But the other, the corpse of Polyneices, who died miserably,
> they say that he has proclaimed to the citizens that no-one
> is to bury him in a grave or mourn for him,
> but that he is to be left unwept, unburied, a delightful treasure
> for the vultures to behold and feed on at their pleasure.

The simple Ἐτεοκλέα in the μέν-clause is set against ἀθλίως θανόντα Πολυνείκους νέκυν in the δέ-clause, and as Antigone begins to relate the particulars of Creon's edict as it pertains to the treatment of Polyneices' corpse, the syntax becomes more convoluted as she herself becomes more agitated.[63] Griffith points out that the mood of the five lines devoted to Polyneices also becomes "increasingly unsettled, with piled-up epithets, resolutions (26 Πολυνείκους, 29 ἄταφον, 31 ἀγαθὸν), enjambments (27-28, 29-30), and harsh alliteration (τ/θ, κ/χ)."[64] As well as once again avoiding any mention of the war or of the part either brother played in it, Bernadete suggests that "Antigone seems to separate Polyneices from his corpse; Creon, in order

[62] Knox 1964: 80: "For Antigone and Ismene the brothers are an inseparable entity, and the use of [the dual] to refer to them makes clear the gulf between the sisters, who cannot think of the brothers apart from each other, and Creon, who distinguishes the patriot brother from the traitor."
[63] Griffith 1999 ad loc.: τὸν… νέκυν (accusative after καλύψαι) does not correspond, as we would expect it to, with Ἐτεοκλέα; and τινα (the subject of the indirect clause after ἐκκεκηρῦχθαι, along with its infinitives καλύψαι and κωκῦσαί) only comes at the end of 28.
[64] Griffith 1999 ad loc.

to justify his vindictiveness, seems to identify them; but Antigone speaks of the haplessly dead corpse of Polyneices, as though his corpse and not Polyneices had suffered and died… His corpse is in and of itself the object of her care."[65] Although Bernadete is correct in his assessment that Antigone is not trying to "vindicate Polyneices' death", this separation between 'brother-in-death' and 'traitor-in-life' is another example of Antigone's tendency to deliberately blind herself to those aspects of reality which do not align with her own purpose. As far as she is concerned, whatever Polyneices did in life is irrelevant; he remains a brother, no less than Eteocles, and so the same obligations apply to both (511-519). So insistent is Antigone in the conviction that hers is the only correct interpretation, moreover, that she is not only prepared to dismiss any opposing views, but also any person who should dare to hold such a view.

As she concludes her revelation of Creon's edict, Antigone's anger at Creon's presumption flares again, this time in the form of an indignant parenthesis (31-32):

> τοιαῦτά φασι τὸν ἀγαθὸν Κρέοντα σοὶ
> κἀμοί, λέγω γὰρ κἀμέ, κηρύξαντ' ἔχειν…
>
> Such, they say, the good Creon has decreed
> for you and for me – yes, even for *me*!

The scholiast notes that Antigone speaks the phrase λέγω γὰρ κἀμέ 'with passion', μετὰ πάθους,[66] and Brown aptly remarks that "it is not often in Greek tragedy that we are invited to assess a speaker's motivation and character from such implicit clues as this. There is a fierce note of pride here; Antigone takes the decree as a personal insult, assuming without hesitation that she, at least, could not possibly be expected to obey it."[67] Although Sophocles has made it evident, from the start, that Antigone is

[65] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.
[66] Σ *Ant*. 31.2-31.4: τὸ δὲ λέγω γὰρ κἀμὲ διὰ μέσου μετὰ πάθους ἀνεφώνησεν, λέγω γάρ, φησίν, ὅτι κἀμὲ προσπεριείληφε τῷ κηρύγματι.
[67] Brown 1987: 139 ad loc. Cf. Jebb 1888; Wells 1900; and Griffith 1999 ad loc.

furiously devoted to her cause, scholarship is divided over the precise nature of this cause. Jebb, Knox, Segal, Lesky, Blundell and Foley see Antigone as the embodiment of selfless love, driven throughout the play by her deeply felt obligation to both family and gods.[68] On the opposite side of the spectrum is Bongie, who argues that Antigone's primary concern is for "her own reputation" and that "all her fine talk about obeying the 'unwritten laws' of kinship and burial is no more than a rationalisation of the more compelling personal motives".[69] Given Antigone's opening emphasis on the 'shame' and 'dishonour' their family has incurred in line 5, her forceful opposition of the key heroic distinctions of *philos* and *echthros* in 10, 'honoured-brother' and 'dishonoured-brother' in 22, and 'noble' (*eugenês*) and 'base' (*kakos*) in 38, together with the fact that she does not once mention the gods or any sacred obligations until Ismene cites the necessity of submitting to the laws of the *polis* and its ruler (59-68), I am forced to agree with Kirkwood's assessment that Antigone's initial reaction to Creon's edict is an intensely "personal one" – an instinctive heroic impulse to restore her family's honour – and that she will only later begin to formulate her religious conviction concerning the 'unwritten laws' (454-455).[70]

Scholars are also divided over the question of when Antigone actually comes to form her resolve. Mogyoródi, for instance, argues that Antigone only makes her decision to defy Creon's edict after Ismene expresses her own unwillingness to act.[71] Like Campbell and Bongie, however, I believe that, given Antigone's passionate appeal to family solidary and the burning indignation she has displayed throughout these opening lines – especially the "bitter emphasis" of her parenthesis in 31-32 – there can be little doubt that Antigone has already made up her mind and "fully counted the

[68] Jebb 1888: xxvii-xxviii; Knox 1964: 116; Segal 1964: 70; Lesky 1967: 107; Blundell 1989: 109; and Foley 2002: 173.
[69] Bongie 1974: 252.
[70] Kirkwood 1958: 119-120. Cf. Holt 1999: 681: "Antigone's defiance is a complex combination of principle and personality, and she is driven by will, pride, and family honour at least as much as by devotion to the unwritten laws."
[71] Mogyoródi 1996: 360-362.

cost" of her defiance.[72] In this respect, Bongie points out, Antigone is unlike any of Sophocles' other extant heroes: she is not "searching to find her fate", only to accomplish it.[73] To argue, as Mogyoródi does, that it would "disregard the dramatic significance of the two sisters' encounter" if Antigone had already made her decision is to misunderstand Sophocles' intention.[74] The question is never 'will Antigone attempt to defy Creon?', but 'will Ismene join her?' For Antigone, as Bowra argues, "there is no conflict between love and duty, between what she wishes to do and what she knows to be right."[75] She opens the play with her resolve already formed – her tragic choice already made – and, like an Achilles or an Aeschylean Eteocles,[76] she stubbornly pushes through to the bitter end.[77] While Creon's "incompetence as a deliberator"[78] becomes increasingly evident over the course of the play, we never see Antigone deliberate. We see her assert, justify, accuse and attack, but we never see her weigh up alternatives or explore pros and cons; even her decision to commit suicide is taken off-stage. It is Ismene whom Sophocles presents to us as grappling with the tragic forces of their circumstances, torn between 'what she wishes to do and what she knows to be right'.

Having begun the play with her passionate insistence that Ismene came from the 'self-same womb' (*koinon autadelphon* 1), Antigone ends her speech with a sternly worded ultimatum in which she now demands that Ismene prove that she is in fact a legitimate member of their family (37-38):

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[72] Campbell 1871: 407. Cf. Bongie 1974: 244 and Knox 1964: 62.
[73] Bongie 1974: 243.
[74] Mogyoródi 1996: 361.
[75] Bowra 1944: 96. Cf. Whitman 1951: 84; Foley 2002: 192; Honig 2011: 48 n. 21; and Wauke 2020: 45.
[76] For comparisons between Antigone, Eteocles, and the Homeric heroes (particularly Achilles), see Bongie 1974: 244-245; Goldhill 1986: 91-92; Blundell 1989: 113; Saxonhouse 1992: 70; Foley 2002: 196; Blondell 2004: 43; and Carter 2012: 113.
[77] Cf. North 1966: 62-63: "Antigone's failure in sophrosyne (especially evident in her reactions to Ismene and Creon) is, dramatically speaking, static".
[78] Hall 2009: 78.

οὕτως ἔχει σοι ταῦτα, καὶ δείξεις τάχα
εἴτ' εὐγενὴς πέφυκας εἴτ' ἐσθλῶν κακή.

So, there you have it. Soon you will show whether you are indeed worthy
of your noble birth, or just the worthless daughter of a noble house.

The father who married his own mother and endangered his *polis*, who blinded himself and cursed his own sons to wage war over his kingdom; the mother who hung herself; the brothers who murdered one another – and Antigone still conceives of their family as 'noble', *eugenês*. More than this, she is now determined to display this noble bloodline through her deeds.[79] For Antigone, "the burial of Polyneices becomes… the very touchstone of nobility": to perform it will be to demonstrate their noble heritage (*eugenês, esthlos*), to fail would be nothing short of betrayal (46).[80] Antigone exploits the double meaning of *kakos*, which can refer equally to social class and moral character.[81] *Kakos* also happens to be the antithesis of *kalos* – "the strongest term of moral approbation in the Greek vocabulary"[82] – which is how Antigone will later define her own behaviour (72, 97, 557). Will Ismene now act in the manner Antigone would expect of her 'other self' by sharing her own reaction to this new disaster, and thereby prove herself to be *eugenês* like Antigone herself, or will she turn out to be nothing but a 'worthless' *kakê*?

So ruthlessly determined is Antigone, however, not only to avert Polyneices' fate but also to honour those obligations which she believes Creon's edict has placed upon them, that issuing this challenge is not enough for her; she goes one step further and makes an implicit threat. Antigone concludes her challenge to Ismene with two words

[79] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.
[80] Kirkwood 1958: 119. Cf. Foley 2002: 174. For Antigone's adherence to the traditional aristocratic ideals of the *eugenês*, see Kirkwood 1958: 177-180; Webster 1969: 57; and Bongie 1974: 244-247. For a more general discussion on the heroic values, see Whitman 1951; Adkins 1960; Knox 1964; and Dover 1974.
[81] Brown 1987 ad loc.: "The word *kakê*, flung down as a challenge at the end of her speech, combines 'bad', 'cowardly' and 'low-born'." Griffith 1999 and Bernadete 1999 ad loc. also maintain that Antigone is laying down a 'challenge' for Ismene here.
[82] Griffith 1999: 135. Cf. Bongie 1974: 250.

(*esthlôn kakê*) that closely echo the two words with which she ended her opening address in line 10 (*echthrôn kaka*).[83] By switching out 'enemy' for 'noble', Antigone implies that, should Ismene not now definitively prove herself a 'true' Labdacid, she will become not only *kakê* but also *echthra* – which, of course, is precisely what happens (86, 93-94). What is ironic, however, is that Antigone and Ismene turn out to have very different ways of conceptualising their 'noble heritage'. For Ismene, theirs is not a family characterised by aristocratic virtue but by the subversion of the normal bonds of *philia*; and so Antigone's insistence that Ismene prove herself worthy of belonging to their 'noble' family, and thereby run the risk of further perpetuating the many sufferings which this family has brought upon itself, happens to be precisely the fate that Ismene is most determined to avoid. What is even more ironic is that the course Antigone ends up following affirms not her own view of their heritage, but Ismene's. Before she is led off to her own death, Antigone laments (857-868):

> ἔψαυσας ἀλγεινοτάτας ἐμοὶ μερίμνας,
> πατρὸς τριπόλιστον οἶκτον τοῦ τε πρόπαντος
> ἁμετέρου πότμου κλεινοῖς Λαβδακίδαισιν.
> ἰὼ ματρῷαι λέκτρων
> ἆται κοιμήματά τ' αὐτογέννητ' ἐμῷ πατρὶ δυσμόρου ματρός,
> οἵων ἐγώ ποθ' ἁ ταλαίφρων ἔφυν·
> πρὸς οὓς ἀραῖος, ἄγαμος, ἆδ' ἐγὼ μέτοικος ἔρχομαι.
>
> You have touched on my most painful thought,
> awakening the three-fold lament for my father and for all the terrible fates
> given to us, the renowned Labdacidae.
> Alas for the horror of the mother's marriage-bed,
> for the ill-fated mother's lying with her own son, and my father.
> What manner of parents have produced my wretched being!
> It is to them I go thus – accursed, unwed – to join them.

Creon's edict has provoked in Antigone an instinctive and furious determination to right the injustice done to her 'most beloved brother' (ἀδελφῷ φιλτάτῳ 81). But in order to do this, as Ismene points out, Antigone will need 'to act against the state'

[83] Griffith 1999 ad loc.

(τὸ… βίᾳ πολιτῶν δρᾶν 78-79) which, in the light of fifth-century Greek ideals of womanhood, would undoubtedly have been viewed by Sophocles' audience as deliberately provocative.[84] There has been much debate over the reason for Antigone's extreme reaction to Creon's edict – her incestuous origin, her obsession with death, her prioritisation of male relatives. I agree with Adams' view that Antigone's intensity stems primarily from the tragic history of her family:

> … we may think of her as 'daughter of a House Accursed.' We may call it a 'complex' or 'family fixation' or whatever the proper term may be; it is affection concentrated on 'her own'; and when this opportunity to do a service to her dead brother is presented to her it is not a question of choosing between the laws of the gods and the laws of man. She has no choice.[85]

Unlike Creon, Antigone admits of no distinction between 'champion-brother' (ὁ ἀντιστὰς 518) and 'traitor-brother' (τῷ δυσσεβεῖ 516) so far as one's duty to the dead is concerned: ὅμως ὅ γ' Ἅιδης τοὺς νόμους τούτους ποθεῖ (519). Whatever he did in life, Polyneices was her *autadelphon* (503); and so, insisting that Creon has no right to keep her from 'her own' (τῶν ἐμῶν 48), she resolves to defy his edict in favour of honouring what she will later come to term the 'unwritten and unfailing laws of the gods' (ἄγραπτα κἀσφαλῆ θεῶν νόμιμα 454-455).

Given the critical tradition's tendency to set the other-worldly heroism of Antigone against the 'conventional' pragmatism of Ismene, however, not enough weight has been given to the consideration that Ismene is no less a 'daughter of a House

[84] Although the burial of family members was traditionally regarded as the prerogative of their female family members, see Bowra 1944: 78-80; Sorum 1982: 205-206; Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 29-42; Holt 1999: 660, 666-669; Griffith 2001: 130-132; and Cairns 2016: 42-46 for discussions on the view that Antigone's behaviour would nevertheless have been shocking to fifth-century sensibilities. For the 'rightness' and 'wrongness' of Creon and Antigone's respective positions, see esp. Tyrrell & Bennett 1998; Holt 1999; Scodel 2005; and Cairns 2016.

[85] Adams 1955: 50.

Accursed'[86] and that her decision *not* to act, which is just as instinctive as Antigone's own, is no less based on her own interpretation of her family's tragic history. Before Antigone even reveals her decision to defy Creon's edict, Ismene has resolved not to get involved (39-40):

> τί δ', ὦ ταλαῖφρον, εἰ τάδ' ἐν τούτοις, ἐγὼ
> λύουσ' ἂν ἢ 'φάπτουσα προσθείμην πλέον;
>
> But, my poor sister, if this is how things stand, what could I possibly do to improve the situation by trying to loosen or tighten the knot?

Kirkpatrick claims that Ismene's "first reaction is to help Antigone", but this is not quite right.[87] Ismene does not believe that *any* action on her part could do anything to relieve or resolve the situation. λύουσ' ἂν ἢ 'φάπτουσα προσθείμην πλέον appears to have been a common idiomatic expression "emphasising the ἀμηχανία of the speaker, amounting to 'whatever I do or omit to do'."[88] Whereas Antigone's instinctive reaction to Creon's edict is a determination to *act*, Ismene's is immediately to deem the situation an 'impossible' one – a belief she will resolutely stick to throughout the prologue. She tries to explain to Antigone that her very nature makes it 'impossible' (ἀμήχανος 79) for her to act against the state; she warns that Antigone is in love with the 'impossible' (ἀμηχάνων 90); and she argues that it is senseless to chase after 'impossible things' (τἀμήχανα 92).[89]

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[86] Adams 1955: 50. Exceptions to this view are Roberts 2005: 140; Mastronarde 2005: 325; and Holt 1999: 674.

[87] Kirkpatrick 2011: 407, cf. 417-418. Although Kirkpatrick bases her reading of the play on Wyckoff's 2013 translation, she switches to Grene's 1991 translation of these lines ("If things are as you say, poor sister, how can I better them? how loose or tie the knot?") because it better supports her view of Ismene as an 'unheroic disobedient' who secretly performs the first burial. Wyckoff's rendering ("If things have reached this stage, what can I do, poor sister, that will help to make or mend it?") is correct.

[88] Kamerbeek 1978 ad loc. Cf. Jebb 1888; Brown 1987; Griffith 1999; and Bernadete 1999 ad loc.

[89] Bernadete (1999: 17) points out that "Ismene's triad of impossibles is matched by the Chorus' triad of possibles" in their famous 'Ode to Man' (*mêchanai* 349, *mêchanê* 363, *mêchanai* 365). The only thing that man is 'incapable' of overcoming is Death (361). If, as Ismene claims, Antigone is in love (ἐρᾷς) with the impossible, and Death is man's only 'impossible', then it follows that what Antigone is really 'in love' with, is Death.

As the sisters engage in their first stichomythia and Antigone's intention to defy Creon's edict is gradually revealed, the contrast between them becomes increasingly pronounced. While Antigone is brusque and assertive, Ismene is fearful and questioning (41-44):

> {AN.} εἰ ξυμπονήσεις καὶ ξυνεργάσει σκόπει.
> {ΙΣ.} ποῖόν τι κινδύνευμα; <u>ποῦ</u> γνώμης ποτ' εἶ;
> {AN.} εἰ τὸν νεκρὸν ξὺν τῇδε κουφιεῖς χερί.
> {ΙΣ.} ἦ γὰρ νοεῖς θάπτειν σφ', ἀπόρρητον πόλει;
>
> AN. Consider if you will share in the labour and the deed.
> IS. In what sort of venture? What are you proposing?
> AN. Whether, together with this hand, you will help lift the corpse.
> IS. What? You actually mean to bury him, when it is forbidden to the city?

When Antigone demands that Ismene now 'consider' (σκόπει) whether she will 'collaborate' with her (ξυμπονήσεις) and 'share in the deed' (ξυνεργάσει), Ismene, as the scholiast observes, further reveals her character (ἦθος) by labelling any type of action in what she has already determined to be an 'impossible situation', a 'risk' (κινδύνευμα).[90] When Antigone finally reveals not only the particulars of her own intention but also the full implications of her opening address, that those who 'share a common head' (*koinon kara*) should as a matter of course also 'share a hand' (ξὺν τῇδε… χερί) in the burial, Ismene reacts with genuine shock and disbelief.[91] 'Hand', χείρ, is another of those key terms over which Antigone and Ismene differ. Antigone, who talks repeatedly of the 'glorious' reputation her 'noble' death will earn her (72, 97, 502), is nothing but proud when later revealed to be the 'very author', αὐτόχειρ, of Polyneices' burial (306, 429, cf. 900). Ismene, however, has an entirely different perception of what it means for a member of this particular family to 'put their hand'

[90] Σ *Ant*. 42.1-42.3: ἐκ τούτου ἤδη τὸ ἦθος ὅρα κινδύνευμα καλούσης τὸ ἔργον· τὸ δὲ ποῖ γνώμης ποτ'εἶ ὡς ἀδυνάτοις ἐπιχειρούσης λέγει.

[91] Cf. García 2018: 23. For ἦ γὰρ as a mark of surprise, see Denniston 1934: 284-85 and Hancock 1917: 28. Jebb 1888 ad loc.: "The absence of caesura in the first three feet allows each of the two important words (νοεῖς θάπτειν) to fall slowly from the astonished speaker's lips."

to something: their two brothers have been killed by a 'two-fold hand' (διπλῇ χερί 14), each slain 'by the hand of the other' (ἐπαλλήλοιν χεροῖν 57, cf. Creon in 172); their father blinded himself with 'self-wrought hand' (αὐτουργῷ χερί 52); their mother took her own life, as will Haemon and Eurydice (αὐτόχειρ 54, cf. the Messengers in 1175 and 1315).

If it is inconceivable to Ismene that Antigone could possibly risk 'sharing' (ξυμπονήσεις… ξυνεργάσει… ξὺν) in the same fate as the rest of their family,[92] it is equally inconceivable to Antigone that Ismene could *not* wish to share in this opportunity to perform such a glorious duty for their noble family. How each sister reacts to this shocking realisation, however, is markedly different. Ismene's fearful questioning only serves to incense Antigone further, and she immediately reproaches her sister with another indignant parenthesis and condemns Ismene's caution as an act of 'betrayal' against both Polyneices and herself (45-46):

> τὸν γοῦν ἐμὸν καὶ τὸν σόν, ἢν σὺ μὴ θέλῃς,
> ἀδελφόν· οὐ γὰρ δὴ προδοῦσ' ἁλώσομαι.
>
> Most certainly I do! – for my brother, and yours too, even if you are not willing. *I* will never be convicted of betraying him.

As in lines 21-22 and 31-32, Antigone's heightened emotion affects her syntax, but not the sentiment behind it.[93] Jebb, Brown and Griffith all argue that these two verses constitute an important moment in the dialogue as Antigone expresses "the resolve on which the action of the play turns".[94] This passage, however, is significant in another crucial aspect: it marks the beginning of Antigone's shifting relationship with

[92] Cf. Bongie 1974: 248: "She cannot understand why Antigone wants to run the risk of bringing more trouble and disgrace down on them; she fails to see how any act of theirs could improve the situation."
[93] See Jebb 1888; Kamerbeek 1978; Brown 1987; and Griffith 1999 ad loc. for discussions on Antigone's 'illogical' parenthesis. Although the scholiast notes that line 46 was considered spurious by the ancient commentators (Σ *Ant*. 45.5-6), Campbell 1871; Jebb 1888; Kamerbeek 1978; Brown 1987; and Griffith 1999 ad loc. all believe it to be authentic.
[94] Jebb 1888 ad loc.; Griffith 1999; and Brown 1987 ad loc.

her living sister and her dead brother, as she starts to sever all ties of *philia* with Ismene and transfers all her familial attachment to Polyneices. The four children of Oedipus, as we have seen, were initially conceived of by both sisters as a distinct but equal set of 'pairs', comprised of two brothers (13, 14, 21) and two sisters (3, 13). As far as Antigone is concerned, these pairings have now come asunder. The two brothers have already been divided into brother-honoured and brother-dishonoured (τὼ κασιγνήτω… τὸν μὲν προτίσας τὸν δ' ἀτιμάσας 21-22). Antigone now splits what was initially 'the two brothers of *us two*' (νῷν τὼ κασιγνήτω) into a strongly contrasted 'my brother' and 'your brother' (τὸν… ἐμὸν καὶ τὸν σόν… ἀδελφόν),[95] with 'brother' – the very object around which the discord between the two sisters revolves – occupying an emphatic first-word position.

From this point onwards, Antigone will never again use the dual to refer to Ismene and herself as a pair, nor will she again allow any use of the ξὺν- compounds (ξυμπονήσεις… ξυνεργάσει… ξὺν 41, 43) to convey any sort of unity or collaboration between her sister and herself, insisting instead on emphatic ἐγώ/σὺ distinctions.[96] With the two pairs now both severed, the kindred bond that Antigone initially held towards her siblings also starts to shift. The οὐ γὰρ δὴ which at this stage marks the "vehement rejection"[97] of an alternative course of action will soon become the vicious rejection of the actual person who chose such a course. Ismene – who began the play as *koinon autadelphon* (1) – is reduced first to *echthra* (86, 93, 94) and ultimately to complete nonexistence (847, 876, 882, 895, 919, 941). Ismene's drop in Antigone's estimation is accompanied by a concomitant rise in Polyneices' status: he moves from the more generic *kasignêtos* and *adelphos* (21, 46), to *philos* (73), to *adelphos philtatos* (81), ultimately replacing Ismene as Antigone's 'true' *autadelphos* (503).

[95] Cf. Woolsey 1855 ad loc.: "Thus, though the same person is meant by τὸν ἐμὸν and τὸν σόν, yet he is viewed in his relation to each of the sisters apart." Cf. Antigone in 6: τῶν σῶν τε κἀμῶν… κακῶν.
[96] 70, 71, 72, 75, 76, 80, 83, 89, 93, 95, 538-39, 543, 546-7, 549, 551, 553, 555, 557, 559.
[97] Griffith 1999 ad loc. Cf. Jebb 1888 ad loc.

When Ismene calls Antigone 'too bold' (σχετλία 47)[98] for daring to act against Creon's edict, Antigone further rescinds their kindred bond by again reframing what had only now been reclassified as 'my brother' and 'your brother', to just 'mine own' (τῶν ἐμῶν 48): a genitive of separation that firmly reclaims Polyneices not only from Creon's jurisdiction, but also Ismene's.[99] Her frequent possessives and proprietorial tone, which serve not only to "personalise the burial issue"[100] but also to assert her own authority over the situation and further distinguish Ismene from herself – *my* brother (45-46, 79-80, 466-467, 503), *my* act of duty (48, 69-70, 89, 95-96, 538-539), *my* death (73, 546), *my* glory (72, 96-97, 502) – culminate in Antigone's very last speech, where she refers to herself as the 'last' (λοισθία 895) of her line and says that she is going to join 'her own' (τοὺς ἐμαυτῆς 893).

The 'troubles' of Ismene

Desperate to try and curb Antigone's anger and the rapid disintegration of their relationship, Ismene tries to explain her own position, basing her refusal to act on the tragic misfortunes of their family and beseeching Antigone to reconsider (49-57):

> οἴμοι· φρόνησον, ὦ κασιγνήτη, πατὴρ
> ὡς νῷν ἀπεχθὴς δυσκλεής τ' ἀπώλετο,
> πρὸς αὐτοφώρων ἀμπλακημάτων διπλᾶς
> ὄψεις ἀράξας αὐτὸς αὐτουργῷ χερί·
> ἔπειτα μήτηρ καὶ γυνή, διπλοῦν ἔπος,
> πλεκταῖσιν ἀρτάναισι λωβᾶται βίον·
> τρίτον δ' ἀδελφὼ δύο μίαν καθ' ἡμέραν
> αὐτοκτονοῦντε τὼ ταλαιπώρω μόρον
> κοινὸν κατειργάσαντ' ἐπαλλήλοιν χεροῖν.
>
> Oh no! Just think, my sister,
> how our father died, despised and infamous,

[98] Cf. Kamerbeek 1978 ad loc.: "it combines 'audacious' and 'headstrong', 'stubborn'"; and Jebb 1888 ad loc.: "'over-bold'… 'unflinching' in audacity or cruelty".
[99] Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[100] Cf. Foley 2002: 174.

> when through his own investigation he discovered his crimes
> and blinded both his eyes with his very own hand.
> And then his mother, and his wife – a twofold name, for she was both –
> who destroyed her own life in the twisted coils of the noose.
> And thirdly, our two brothers, who on a single day
> killed one another, unfortunate souls, and so came to their shared fate,
> each slain by the hand of the other.

Sophocles, as Roberts puts it, presents the past "as the differentiated experience of individual characters"[101] so that, while both Antigone (1-5) and Ismene give an account of 'the miseries of the house of the Labdacidae' (τὰ Λαβδακιδᾶν οἴκων… πήματα 593-595), the difference between the two versions is striking. Ismene has also been profoundly affected by their wretched history,[102] but the 'shame' and 'dishonour' that form the climax of Antigone's version in line 5 and which fuel her resolve to act find no place in Ismene's account. So different is each sister's conception of what their shared family legacy (*koinon* 1) entails that,[103] whereas Antigone focuses only on the various miseries that 'they two who are still alive' have inherited (νῷν ἔτι ζώσαιν… ἀλγεινὸν… ἄτης… αἰσχρὸν… ἄτιμόν), Ismene focuses only on what 'they two' have lost: νῷν… πατὴρ… ἔπειτα μήτηρ… τρίτον δ' ἀδελφὼ δύο. Instead of Antigone's outburst of seething indignation, Ismene's version "is a model of reasonable argument".[104] With Antigone's resolve already set and their sororal bond on the brink of permanent dissolution, Ismene cannot afford emotion. Her aim is to persuade;[105] so although she gives a fuller and more poignant description of their family's fate, her tone is calmer, her pace slower. Each family member's death is presented in distinct segments (4 lines for Oedipus, 2 for Jocasta, 3 for the brothers) which neatly coincide with line-beginning and end, and her argument is carefully structured (φρόνησον, ὦ

[101] Roberts 2005: 140.
[102] Brown 1987 ad loc.: "Ismene feels the shames and misfortunes of the family as keenly as Antigone, but for her these are reasons for bowing to the inevitable and trying to preserve the last survivors."
[103] Roberts 2005: 140: "Antigone sees the past in terms of family dishonour, and will not allow any additional dishonour; Ismene, in contrast, sees the family history as one of death and destruction, and hopes that she and her sister can escape with their lives."
[104] Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[105] Cf. Griffith 2001: 127 and Wauke 2020: 41, 46.

κασιγνήτη 49, ἔπειτα 53, τρίτον δ' 55, νῦν δ' αὖ… σκόπει 58, τοῦτο μὲν 61, ἔπειτα δ' 63).[106]

Whereas Antigone makes a point of deliberately suppressing the facts surrounding their family's suffering, Ismene confronts them head-on, giving voice not only to each family member's fate but also to the circumstances responsible for each one's destruction.[107] Her necrology, as Steiner argues, "evokes a massive counter-presence to the living agents in the play":[108] their father, who insisted on investigating the murder of Laius and then blinded himself (ἀράξας αὐτὸς αὐτουργῷ χερί) upon the revelation of his self-detected crimes (αὐτοφώρων ἀμπλακημάτων); their mother, who took her own life because she could not bear the horror of incest (μήτηρ καὶ γυνή, διπλοῦν ἔπος); their brothers who killed one another so wretchedly, each slain by the hand of the other (αὐτοκτονοῦντε τὼ ταλαιπώρω… ἐπαλλήλοιν χεροῖν). Ismene's alliterative repetition of the *auto*-stem (αὐτοφώρων… αὐτὸς αὐτουργῷ… αὐτοκτονοῦντε) emphasises just how much of this death and misery has been 'self-inflicted.'[109] Parricide, incest, suicide, fratricide – this is what their family legacy means to Ismene. Against Antigone's use of *koinon autadelphon* in her opening address to Ismene in line 1, where *koinon* came by association to stand for Antigone's conception of their shared familial obligations, Ismene now counters with her own interpretation of what *koinon* signifies in their family – not *koinon autadelphon*, but *koinon moron*, a 'common fate' (56-57, cf. the chorus' use of κοινοῦ θανάτου in 147).[110] To Antigone's implied threat in 37-38 Ismene now responds with an implicit warning: if Antigone – whom the chorus will later describe as 'self-governed' (αὐτόνομος 821) and 'self-determined' (αὐτόγνωτος 875) – goes ahead with her plan then she, too, will bring

[106] Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[107] Goldhill 2006: 151: "Her language strains to capture her family's incestuous and violent history."
[108] Steiner 1984: 263.
[109] Cf. Goldhill 1986: 91 and Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[110] Goldhill 2006: 152: "As with the first word of the play, so here too *koinon* is a freighted term. It implies a death that is shared, for sure, and that a death that is of common kin, too. But the question it raises is whether this doom will be shared by the next pair in the family line."

suffering upon herself and share the same 'fate' as the others; Antigone's destruction will become yet another installment in the inherited pattern of misfortune that their family has willfully inflicted upon itself.

Since it is a common rhetorical strategy to conclude a speech aimed at persuasion with "the most significant example", Wauke has argued that Ismene's decision to place their brothers last in her list implies both that theirs is the fate which is likely to carry the most weight with Antigone and that Ismene herself regards their brothers' deaths as "the 'worst' of their family's misfortunes".[111] However, their brothers' is not the final, and therefore 'the most significant', death Ismene mentions.[112] Against Antigone's earlier demand that Ismene 'consider' (σκόπει) what was most crucial to Antigone – the question of whether Ismene would be willing to 'share in' the task of Polyneices' burial (εἰ ξυμπονήσεις καὶ ξυνεργάσει 41) – Ismene now sets her own entreaty for Antigone to 'consider' (σκόπει) what is of paramount importance to Ismene – their own deaths (58-60):

> νῦν δ' αὖ μόνα δὴ νὼ λελειμμένα σκόπει
> ὅσῳ κάκιστ' ὀλούμεθ', εἰ νόμου βίᾳ
> ψῆφον τυράννων ἢ κράτη παρέξιμεν.
>
> Now consider how we in turn – we two who have been left all alone –
> will perish, most wretchedly of all, if we transgress
> against this ruling or the might of those in power.

This sentiment comes at the exact middle of Ismene's speech and lies at the very heart of her decision *not* to act: as the sole survivors of their family, they need to do whatever is necessary to avoid the same fate as their loved ones.[113] The fundamental difference

[111] Wauke 2020: 41.

[112] Cf. Steiner (1984: 263), who also includes 58-60 as part of Ismene's 'necrology'.

[113] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.: "[Ismene's] central thought, and what occupies the center of her speech, is that she and Antigone are the sole survivors of their family… They alone can continue it. Antigone starts from the same premise but concludes differently. As they are the only living members of their family… they must join them."

between the two sisters is not merely one of principle, but of personality and outlook.[114] Unlike her sister, Ismene has not inherited their father's 'fierceness' (ὠμὸν ἐξ ὠμοῦ πατρὸς τῆς παιδός 471-472); her φύσις is not, like Antigone's, 'relentless' or 'unflinching' (σχετλία 47); nor does she share Antigone's 'frenzied' heart (φρενῶν ἐρινύς 602) and 'tempestuous' soul (ψυχῆς ῥιπαὶ 930).[115] And so we have two sisters, alike in birth and experience, confronted with the same situation: but whereas the self-destructive inwardness of their family's terrible past urges Ismene to caution, it only serves to strengthen Antigone's obstinate resolve.

Antigone equates death with 'nobleness' and 'glory' (καλόν μοι… θανεῖν 72, καλῶς θανεῖν 97, κλέος… εὐκλεέστερον 502); Ismene only with that which is 'most wretched' (κάκιστ' ὀλούμεθ' 59). Whereas Ismene sees their family lineage as a recurring cycle of self-inflicted misery and death from which she only hopes to escape, Antigone's greatest 'hope' is to be reunited with her family in death (897-899):

> ἐλθοῦσα μέντοι κάρτ' ἐν ἐλπίσιν τρέφω
> φίλη μὲν ἥξειν πατρί, προσφιλὴς δὲ σοί,
> μῆτερ, φίλη δὲ σοί, κασίγνητον κάρα·
>
> But as I make my way there, I nourish a strong hope that my arrival
> will be welcome to my father, and pleasing to you,
> mother, and welcome also to you, my own brother.[116]

It is widely accepted that "Antigone is a morbid figure even by the standards of Greek tragedy".[117] It has also often been observed that Antigone's fate – in which she

[114] Mastronarde 2005: 325: "Sophocles… has paired Antigone with Ismene in his play, both offspring of the same parents and inheritors of the same genes of destruction, and has shown their characters and fates to be completely different."

[115] 471-472, 602 and 930 all belong to the chorus.

[116] Jebb (1888 ad loc.) argues that the 'brother' Antigone is referring to here is Eteocles, since this is the only brother of whose 'welcome' she can be truly assured. Cf. Wells 1900, Kamerbeek 1978, and Bernadete 1999 ad loc. Griffith (1999 ad loc.) argues for Polyneices, "since he is always the focus of her concern". Cf. Campbell 1871 and D'Ooge 1890 ad loc.

[117] Carter 2012: 125. For discussion on Antigone's preoccupation with and preference for the world of the dead, see Whitman 1951: 86; Knox 1964: 91-99; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 131; Williams 1993: 86-87; Butler 2000: 23; Griffith 2001: 131; Carter 2012: 125-128; Badger 2013: 23; and Cairns 2016: 104-110.

becomes not the wife of Haemon but the 'bride of Hades' (653-654, 808-816, 891-894, 916-920)[118] – reflects the etymology of her name: 'instead of' or 'in opposition to' (ἀντί) 'offspring' or 'generation' (γονή).[119] This 'hope' to be reunited with the dead is the only thing that Antigone will ever 'nurture' (τρέφω),[120] as she herself will later lament: 'no nuptial bed, no bridal song, no share in either marriage or the rearing of children' (ἄλεκτρον, ἀνυμέναιον, οὔτε του γάμου / μέρος λαχοῦσαν οὔτε παιδείου τροφῆς 917-918).

What has seldom been recognised, as Winnington-Ingram points out, is just how irritational this vision of familial bliss in the afterlife really is: "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… that death ends all and that in the world below the family can be reunited in love."[121] This runs contrary to normal belief, where most Greeks would have readily agreed with Creon's view that 'an *echthros* is never a *philos*, not even in death' (οὗτοι ποθ' ούχθρός, οὐδ' ὅταν θάνῃ, φίλος 522).[122] Winnington-Ingram argues that Antigone's insistence that her own observance of the proper bonds of *philia* can somehow annul, in death, the dysfunction which characterised her family's relations in life is a further expression of her "obstinate heroism"; "a supreme effort to impose heroic will upon a recalcitrant world".[123] It could also be taken as a further manifestation of what might be termed Antigone's 'delusional' tendencies, whereby she repeatedly and tenaciously dismisses or suppresses anything that does not suit her own purpose or align with her own perspective. In her determination to try and prove herself a 'true daughter' of Oedipus

[118] 653-654 belongs to Creon; 808-816, 891-894 and 916-920 belong to Antigone.
[119] LSJ s.v. ἀντί; γονή. Goldhill 1986: 102: "For although she has constantly depicted herself as supporting the ties of the family… as bride of death it is Antigone herself who denies for the oikos the possibility of its own continuation." See also: Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 72; Bernadete 1999: 10; Griffith 2001: 132 n. 40; Foley 2002: 175; Miller 2007: 78; and Holland 2010: 29.
[120] Cf. Wauke 2020: 35.
[121] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 245.
[122] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 132 and Blundell 1989: 114.
[123] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 245; 1980: 132.

(37-38, 471-472) – which is essentially what drives the rest of the play – Antigone also shows that in addition to what the chorus terms her father's 'fierceness' (ὠμὸν ἐξ ὠμοῦ πατρὸς τῆς παιδός 471-472) she has in a sense also inherited his blindness. 'Hope' (ἐλπὶς), says the chorus, while it may offer comfort to mortals, is also to many a deceptive lure into delusion; that very same delusion, they continue, which can make κακόν seem ἐσθλόν to one whom the gods lead to madness (ἄτη 615-624).

Ismene, on the other hand, is notorious for her prudence and circumspection. Indeed, Kristeva has even suggested that the etymology of Ismene's name does not stem, as is usually assumed, from the Theban river Ismenos,[124] but rather from the stem of οἶδα: 'the one who knows'.[125] Adams has argued that Ismene is the 'incarnation' of the cardinal Greek virtue of *sophrosyne*, 'safe-mindedness' or 'moderation'.[126] This is the kind of wisdom, Webster explains, that recognises "the limits of human possibilities" and the necessity of maintaining "a sane and cautious attitude to the changes of life."[127] In her study of this virtue, North points out that while the tension between *sophrosyne* and the opposing 'heroic principle' has often been recognised, modern scholarship has frequently misunderstood and undervalued its 'positive force'. Usually translated into English as 'caution' or 'prudence', the literal meaning of *sophrosyne* is 'saving sense' or 'judgment', and since it is the secondary figures rather than the heroes who display this quality, it has typically been assumed that it must necessarily be somehow related to weakness or cowardice.[128] In Sophocles, North explains, *sophrosyne* is predominantly portrayed as "the power to recognise reality" and is thus closely identified with self-knowledge:

> For the *hybris*-sophrosyne conflict of Aeschylus, Sophocles substitutes the struggle between the demands of the heroic nature (the *eugenês*) and

[124] See, for example, Cerri 2018: 234 and Griffith 2001: 132 n. 40.
[125] Kristeva 2010: 216.
[126] Adams 1955: 48. Cf. Rohdich 1980: 31.
[127] Webster 1969: 39.
[128] See, for example, Whitman 1951: 8-9, 244 and Adams 1957: 18-19.

> the limitations imposed even on the hero by the realities of human life. In the typical Sophoclean situation the central figure, who towers above ordinary beings and cherishes a noble standard of conduct to which he will sacrifice everything else, encounters disaster through a weakness that is inextricably connected with his strength: the hero, that is, pushes beyond permissible limits that form of *aretê* in which he excels, and thus reveals his failure to know himself perfectly or to know the truth about his circumstances… In addition to excess, the Sophoclean hero is commonly marked by a second species of failure in *sophrosyne* (and this is clearly a failure in self-knowledge) – namely, delusion.[129]

Antigone's 'delusions' or her 'failure to recognise the truth' extend beyond her suppression of the facts surrounding her dead relations and her hope of a happy reunion with them in the afterlife. She also refuses to acknowledge any of the practical or political considerations concerning Creon's position as the new ruler of Thebes and her transgression of his edict: she never once refers to him as 'king';[130]she rejects his authority to make any decisions regarding the treatment of Polyneices' corpse (48); and, once apprehended, she deliberately provokes his anger by flaunting her guilt (448, 450-470) and labelling him a 'fool' (μῶρος 470).[131] Antigone only has eyes for one thing: the absolute necessity of burying Polyneices. Ismene, however, sees more.[132]

For all the critical tradition's dismissal of "quiet little spineless Ismene" as a "passive, compliant" pushover, both Honig and Bongie point out that not only does Ismene "pu[t] up quite a fight"[133] against her intrepid sister, but also that her argument is a great deal more compelling than it has generally been recognised.[134] In the first part of her speech (49-50) she entreated Antigone to 'be mindful' (φρόνησον) of the realities concerning their family's wretched past; in the second part (58-60) she moved from

[129] North 1966: ix-x, 31-32, 50-51. Cf. Scodel 2005: 237.
[130] Griffith 1999: 122: "Ant. never calls Kreon 'king'; but everyone else does… Kreon's relationship to the sisters is not mentioned until 173-4, but Ant.'s intense animosity towards him is apparent at once."
[131] Cf. Cairns (2016: 56) who argues that Antigone's "deliberate provocation of Creon, her active pursuit of the death penalty" is part of her fixation with death.
[132] Cf. Kirkwood 1958: 120.
[133] Honig 2011: 48, 31.
[134] Bongie 1974: 249.

the past to the present, begging Antigone to 'consider' (σκόπει) the terrible implications for Antigone and herself; now, in the third and final part, she beseeches Antigone to 'take thought' (ἐννοεῖν) of the socio-political realities of their position (61-68):

> ἀλλ' ἐννοεῖν χρὴ τοῦτο μὲν γυναῖχ' ὅτι
> ἔφυμεν, ὡς πρὸς ἄνδρας οὐ μαχουμένα·
> ἔπειτα δ' οὕνεκ' ἀρχόμεσθ' ἐκ κρεισσόνων,
> καὶ ταῦτ' ἀκούειν κἄτι τῶνδ' ἀλγίονα.
> ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν αἰτοῦσα τοὺς ὑπὸ χθονὸς
> ξύγγνοιαν ἴσχειν, ὡς βιάζομαι τάδε,
> τοῖς ἐν τέλει βεβῶσι πείσομαι· τὸ γὰρ
> περισσὰ πράσσειν οὐκ ἔχει νοῦν οὐδένα.
>
> We must, first, remember this – we are women.
> And so we should not contend against men.
> Next, that we are ruled by the stronger, and so
> we must submit in this, yes and in things far more painful still.
> So I shall beg the forgiveness of those below the Earth,
> since in this matter I am forced,
> and I shall obey those who have come to power.
> To act in vain – there just is not any sense in that.

Budelmann warns spectators against "coming down [too] heavily on the things Sophoclean characters say" because any kind of "unequivocal evaluation", whether positive or negative, "deprive[s] the speaker of any inaccessibility or depth that might be attributed to him."[135] Not only are these undoubtedly Ismene's most quoted lines, they are also the lines scholars have 'come down on' most heavily, typically seizing upon this passage as a prime illustration of Ismene's weak and submissive nature:[136] Griffith, for instance, argues that "as the… embodiment of conformity and subservience to male authority, the state, and her legal guardian," Ismene disapproves of her sister's "'unfeminine' resistance to male authority";[137] Foley that Ismene "does

[135] Budelmann 2000: 78, 77.
[136] Cf. Kirkpatrick 2011: 402: "To use the word most commonly associated with her, Ismene is weak."
[137] Griffith 1999: 62, 33n., 101, cf. 53.

not view women as capable of making independent choices to act";[138] and Bongie that Ismene believes that "[d]isobedience to the law and to the will of one's rulers is dishonourable" and that "Antigone is striving after a form of ἀρετή that is inappropriate for a woman".[139] This passage has also proved troubling to feminists and political theorists, for whom Antigone has become an icon of rebellious political agency, taking a stand against patriarchal oppression and forcing herself into the civic arena to assert her ethical consciousness. Elshtain, for example, remarks that Ismene "embodies 'traditional womanhood'" and is incapable of "act[ing] on her beliefs";[140] Mills that "in siding with the law of the *polis* Ismene bows to 'the law of woman' as male domination";[141] Johnson that "Ismene is the 'normal' Greek girl living within the limits and laws of the *polis*";[142] Irigaray that Ismene is "indisputably a 'woman' in her weakness, her fear, her submissive obedience";[143] and Roisman that Ismene has an "avowed temperamental incapacity to disobey the edicts of rulers".[144]

[138] Foley 2002: 194 n.78.

[139] Bongie 1974: 250. Cf. Whitman 1951: 86: "as passive and obedient as a world of men could wish her to be"; North 1966: 54: "amounts to no more than a timid acquiescence in the conventions of feminine behaviour"; Pomeroy 1975: 99-100: "Ismene seizes upon the excuse that they are not men… Ismene… has been indoctrinated into the beliefs of patriarchal society"; Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 39; 77: "Ismene conforms and allows herself to be silenced by men; "a model for the compliance and submission expected of women"; Picklesimer 2000: 223-224: "Por su parte, Ismene asume perfectamente... la obligación de ser obediente... al poder establecido... Esto la lleva a considerar impensable intentar actuar por encima de sus posibilidades como mujer"; Griffith 2001: 123: "conventionally 'feminine' Ismene"; Tyrrell & Bennett 2008-2009: "a paragon of obedience to male authority"; Carter 2012: 123: "the woman who would prefer to remain indoors and uninvolved"; and Cairns 2016: 12: "Ismene maintains a normal feminine subservience to male authority".

[140] Elshtain 1989: 228.

[141] Mills 1986: 141.

[142] Johnson 1997: 385.

[143] Irigaray 2010b: 102.

[144] Roisman 2018:70. Cf. Sorum 1982: 206, 209: Whereas "Antigone challenges the authority of the *polis*, of Creon, with civil disobedience" and "thus enters into the political arena", Ismene's function is only to serve as "an onstage reminder" of the "socially approved female characteristics"; Paul 2007:433: "Ismene is… held back by the injunction upon her sex to suffer male rule. This leaves Antigone to pursue the path of genius alone"; Cavarero 2010: 51: Ismene "abandoned [the roots of kinship] in obedience to the masculine laws of the mightiest"; and Holland 2010: 43 n.23: "Ismene… capitulated to Creon's reorganization of power and kinship".

What all these Antigone-centric readings have in common is that they, like Antigone, see Ismene's refusal only as a 'betrayal' (46), failing to take into proper consideration how familial ties, both to the dead and to the living, also drive Ismene's actions. Kirkpatrick notes that, while Antigone is "comparatively blind to context… For Ismene, the political specifics of the situation matter."[145] And yet Ismene does not submit to Creon merely because she believes that it is her 'duty' as a woman.[146] She submits because, while the prospect of Polyneices' dishonour is, to Antigone, unquestionably all-consuming, for Ismene there are 'more painful things still', κἄτι τῶνδ' ἀλγίονα.[147] As far as Antigone is concerned, the worst has already happened. She does not believe that she has anything to lose; indeed, she is convinced that her death will be a 'gain' (κέρδος 462, 464). For Ismene, however, who has not yet abandoned hope that things might yet turn out for the better (οὔθ' ἡδὺς οὔτ' ἀλγεινὸς 11-12, οὔτ' εὐτυχοῦσα… οὔτ' ἀτωμένη 16-17), there is still the possibility that the 'worst' might be averted, should she and Antigone only manage to escape the same fate as the rest of their family: σκόπει / ὅσῳ κάκιστ' ὀλούμεθ', εἰ νόμου βίᾳ / ψῆφον τυράννων ἢ κράτη παρέξιμεν (58-60). Kirkwood's assessment that Ismene's "instinct is to obey, just as surely as Antigone's is to exercise her own will", while essentially correct, is too crude.[148] Ismene's primary instinct is to survive;[149] obedience is but the means to an end. The same holds true for Knox and Bowra, who both claim that Ismene does not have "the courage to defy the *polis*"; that she "is moved not by principles but by timidity."[150] In the most basic sense, of course, they are correct, but as will become apparent when Ismene later tries to claim a share in Polyneices' burial (536-537), a 'lack of courage' is clearly not the issue. Ismene *is* in fact willing both to

[145] Kirkpatrick 2011: 414.
[146] Wauke 2020: 82-83: "Ismene does not recommend that Antigone follow Creon's edict because she believes they owe any special allegiance to Thebes. Instead, her arguments reflect her concern for the safety and conservation of her family."
[147] Cf. Kirkpatrick 2011: 421: "While Antigone seems unable to comprehend an injustice more painful than Creon's decree, Ismene is clearheaded about the multitude of sufferings of political exiles."
[148] Kirkwood 1958: 120.
[149] Kamerbeek 1978: 8: "… her plea is in the last resort a plea for survival."
[150] Knox 1964: 81; Bowra 1944: 80.

defy the *polis* and to die for her family, but for its living members rather than for its dead ones. This type of reductive oversimplification – heroine *versus* foil, autonomy *versus* submission, bravery *versus* timidity, idealist *versus* realist – is, as both Bongie and Sourvinou-Inwood point out, dangerous not only because it "impl[ies] that Antigone's evaluation of the situation is the only possible one, and it is doubtful indeed that Sophocles meant to imply any such thing", but also because this greatly reduces, or even conceals, the play's "complexities and ambiguities", ultimately "collapsing its meanings into a straightforward… monosemic message" which privileges certain aspects of the text and ignores others.[151]

Having admitted that she is neglecting her duty to 'those below the earth', Ismene concludes her speech by once again appealing to the notion of 'good sense' (49, 58, 61), or rather the lack thereof: τὸ γὰρ περισσὰ πράσσειν οὐκ ἔχει νοῦν οὐδένα. While the Greek is relatively straightforward ('For to act, πράσσειν, in vain, περισσὰ, has no sense, οὐκ ἔχει νοῦν οὐδένα'), it nevertheless affords scholars the opportunity to allow their own perception of Ismene's character to colour their translation. The meaning of *perissos* ranges from 'extraordinary', 'excessive', 'superfluous', to 'useless'.[152] Kamerbeek and Griffith both argue for 'useless' or 'futile' here,[153] and the scholiast glosses the term as 'beyond one's power 'or 'ability' (τὸ… παρὰ δύναμίν).[154] Following the scholiast's definition, Woolsey argues that the point Ismene is making is that "the act would have been *peculiarly proper for Antigone*… had it not surpassed her power."[155] Translators have tended to work against this reading, however, either weakening or distorting Ismene's meaning.[156] Jebb and Kitto, for instance, both imply that Ismene is accusing Antigone of being a meddlesome busybody. Jebb has "to be

[151] Bongie 1974: 253; Sourvinou-Inwood 1989: 135.
[152] LSJ s.v. περισσός.
[153] Kamerbeek 1978 and Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[154] Σ *Ant*. 67.3.
[155] Woolsey 1855 ad loc.
[156] The only exceptions I have found are Gibbons & Segal 2003: "for it makes no sense to do things that are futile"; and Taplin 2020: "There is no sense, I say, in trying to do more than can be done".

over-busy" for περισσὰ πράσσειν, and Kitto "useless meddling".[157] Brown, Bowra and Fainlight & Littman take a different approach, linking the implications of περισσὰ not with πράσσειν, but with Ismene's preceding sentiments in 61-67 about the need to accept their inferior position as women; implying, in other words, that Ismene is specifically casting Antigone's daring as an attempt to exceed her *feminine* role: Brown has "acting beyond our limits"; Bowra "beyond our scope"; and Fainlight & Littman "I must obey the reigning power. It would be mad not to."[158] And yet, when the same word is given to Creon in 780 (πόνος περισσός), these translators all revert to the 'in vain' sense of *persissos*: Jebb has "lost labour"; Kitto "wanton folly"; Brown "wasted labour"; and Fainlight and Littman "futile".

Ismene is not merely saying that it is not their place, as women, to meddle in matters beyond their scope; she is saying that to act 'in vain', 'uselessly', 'redundantly' *in any capacity* is senseless. This is how she first defined her view of the situation upon the revelation of Creon's edict, before Antigone had even revealed her intention to defy it (39-40), and she will repeat the sentiment another three times: τὸ δὲ βίᾳ πολιτῶν δρᾶν ἔφυν ἀμήχανος 78-79, εἰ καὶ δυνήσει γ'· ἀλλ' ἀμηχάνων ἐρᾷς 90; ἀρχὴν δὲ θηρᾶν οὐ πρέπει τἀμήχανα 92. Ismene sees no possible hope of their success. Antigone may envision 'glory' and 'gain', but Ismene sees only failure and death: σκόπει ὅσῳ κάκιστ' ὀλούμεθ' 58-59. And so she does the very thing which Antigone never comes to understand (472), which Haemon defines as the true meaning of *kalon* (718-723), and which Creon only learns too late (1096-1097): she recognises when 'to yield before troubles': εἴκειν… ἐπίσταται κακοῖς (472).[159] Ismene is ultimately proved right on

[157] Jebb 1888; Kitto 1962.

[158] Brown 1987; Bowra 1944: 79; Fainlight & Littman 2009.

[159] The chorus remarks to Creon, in Antigone's presence, that Antigone 'does not know how to yield before troubles' (εἴκειν δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται κακοῖς 472). On the refusal to 'yield' as the defining characteristic of the Sophoclean hero, see esp. Knox 1964 and Cairns 2016: 29.

both counts. Firstly, Antigone does fail; it is Creon who finally buries Polyneices.[160] And secondly, as she is led off to her death, Antigone laments that she is to die 'most wretched by far' (κάκιστα δὴ μακρῷ 895, cf. 489), precisely as Ismene had feared she would (ὅσῳ κάκιστ' ὀλούμεθ' 59).

The parting of the ways: ἐγώ μέν… σύ δέ…

Although Ismene's take on the Polyneices situation is so radically different from Antigone's, she does not seek to dissociate herself from Antigone. On the contrary, she is desperate to re-establish their initial closeness. Before she expresses the course of action which she, personally, has chosen to follow (ἐγὼ μέν… 65), she repeatedly employs the first-person 'we' rather than the singular 'you' (59, 60, 62, 63). Again, where Antigone had previously split the two 'pairs', Ismene once again reintroduces the dual to refer both to Polyneices and Eteocles (55, 56, 57), and to Antigone and herself (50, 58). Ismene may not believe that a difference of opinion necessarily warrants the termination of their kinship bond, their 'oneness', but Antigone certainly does. She reacts with cold hostility, immediately splitting Ismene's dual. What started off as 'we two' (3, 21), only to become 'you' *and* 'me' when Ismene first hesitated (46), has now further deteriorated into an emphatic 'you' *versus* 'me'. The separation between the sisters becomes increasingly pronounced as Antigone, who initially insisted on their closeness with her opening ὦ κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἰσμήνης κάρα and her call for Ismene to 'share in the labour and the deed' (ξυμπονήσεις καὶ ξυνεργάσει 41), now uses language that insists on their division.[161] In her single-

[160] Cf. Brown 1987: 141 n.90; Bernadete 1999: 14-15; Griffith 1999: 32; Mulroy 2013: l; and Cairns 2016: 47-48. Brown 1987: 9: The "*only* consequence" of Antigone's reckless defiance "is the death of three people."

[161] οὔτ' ἂν κελεύσαιμ' οὔτ' ἄν… ἐμοῦ γ' ἂν ἡδέως δρῴης μέτα 69-70; ἀλλ' ἴσθ' ὁποία σοι δοκεῖ, κεῖνον δ' ἐγὼ θάψω 71-72; καλόν μοι τοῦτο… 72; σοὶ δ' εἰ δοκεῖ… 76; σὺ μὲν… ἐγὼ δὲ… 80; μὴ 'μοῦ προτάρβει 83; πολλὸν ἐχθίων ἔσῃ… 86; ἐχθαρεῖ μὲν ἐξ ἐμοῦ… 93; ἀλλ' ἔα με καὶ τὴν ἐξ ἐμοῦ δυσβουλίαν 95.

minded devotion to Polyneices, Antigone "knows no compromise, accepts no excuses."[162] If Ismene is not with her, then she is against her (69-77):

> οὔτ' ἂν κελεύσαιμ', οὔτ' ἄν, εἰ θέλοις ἔτι
> πράσσειν, ἐμοῦ γ' ἂν ἡδέως δρῴης μέτα.
> ἀλλ' ἴσθ' ὁποία σοι δοκεῖ· κεῖνον δ' ἐγὼ
> θάψω· καλόν μοι τοῦτο ποιούσῃ θανεῖν.
> φίλη μετ' αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα,
> ὅσια πανουργήσασ'· ἐπεὶ πλείων χρόνος
> ὃν δεῖ μ' ἀρέσκειν τοῖς κάτω τῶν ἐνθάδε.
> ἐκεῖ γὰρ ἀεὶ κείσομαι· σοὶ δ' εἰ δοκεῖ,
> τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἔντιμ' ἀτιμάσασ' ἔχε.
>
> Then I would not urge you. No, not even if you were to later
> be inclined, I would still not welcome you in this task with me!
> You be whatever seems best to you. But I will bury him.
> And if I die trying, well then to me it will be a glorious death.
> I shall lie there beside him, a loved one with him whom I love,
> once I have dared my righteous crime. Since I must oblige
> those below far longer than I must those here.
> For I shall dwell there forever. But if this seems best to you,
> then go ahead and dishonour those things held in honour by the gods.

As Bernadete notes, "Antigone begins very severely",[163] scornfully rejecting not only Ismene's position but also any sense of commonality with her sister. The scholiast remarks on 69-70: δαιμόνιον δὲ τὸ ἦθος.[164] Antigone's 'character' is that of a *daimôn*; awe-inspiring, but also terrible. Like the other great Sophoclean heroes, she has "no sense of proportion, no capacity for moderation";[165] her anger, once provoked, is fearsome to behold and nearly impossible to assuage. In 37-38 Antigone demanded that Ismene prove herself worthy of their noble birth: δείξεις τάχα εἴτ' εὐγενὴς πέφυκας εἴτ' ἐσθλῶν κακή. Now that it has been revealed that what Antigone initially believed about their common bond was mistaken – that what 'seems best to

[162] Bowra 1944: 82.
[163] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.
[164] Σ *Ant*. 69.4.
[165] Knox 1964: 24.

you' (σοι δοκεῖ 71, σοὶ δ' εἰ δοκεῖ 76) is most certainly not the same as what 'seems best to me'[166] – Antigone wants nothing more to do with her. 'Be what you will', she says to Ismene; the implication being that, as far as Antigone is concerned, 'what' Ismene has in fact proven to 'be' is a *kakê*. Antigone is correct, of course, but not in the way she imagines: in choosing to opt out of the inherited pattern of self-destruction which has been the norm in their family for generations, Ismene does in fact prove that she is not a 'true' Labdacid.

Antigone never for one moment gives any credence to Ismene's position or the possible validity of her arguments. She makes no answer to Ismene's plea to consider their family history (50-58) or her contention about their position as women (62-65). To her argument that defying Creon would lead to their own miserable deaths (60-61), Antigone only counters that *her* death will at least be a noble one (καλόν μοι… θανεῖν).[167] Although she never wavers in her "stubborn, self-willed, insistence on her own way and on her rightness",[168] regarding her conviction that 'what seems best' to *her* is the only correct interpretation, Ismene's refusal does affect her. Firstly, it strengthens her resolve. Before Ismene reveals her decision not to act, the discussion concerning Polyneices' burial is largely hypothetical. At this stage, the only thing Antigone has expressly stated is her intention never to betray him (οὐ γὰρ δὴ προδοῦσ' ἁλώσομαι 47). Now her resolution about what she will and will not do is expressed in an insistent stream of first-person assertions, mainly in the future: κεῖνον δ' ἐγὼ θάψω (71-72 cf. 69, 73, 76, 81, 91, 96).[169] This strengthening of Antigone's resolve goes hand in hand with the dissolution of her earlier sense of identification with Ismene. When Ismene asserts her decision in 65-68, she frames it as a μέν-δέ

[166] As Jebb 1888 ad loc. correctly observes, the "primary contrast" here is "between their points of view".
[167] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.: "Antigone borrows the language appropriate to the patriotic soldier whose dying on behalf of his country coincides with his fighting cf. 194-5; *Ai.* 1310-12."
[168] Knox 1964: 67.
[169] On the use of the simple future to express the 'heroic resolve', see Knox 1964: 68.

construction (ἐγώ μέν…) in which she fails to supply an answering σύ δέ.[170] As Hahnemann has argued: "Ismene shrinks back from making the contrast explicit because she wishes to preserve the bond that connects her to her sister in spite of their disagreement."[171] Antigone now also explicitly states her own decision: κεῖνον δ' ἐγὼ θάψω (71-72). This the first time that Antigone uses the personal pronoun ἐγὼ and its purpose, as Steiner notes, is to explicitly separate herself from Ismene: "… the word is a bitter concession. 'I' is now her marker of solitude, of that enforced break with unisons of kinship… which made possible, which necessitated, fusions of feeling, of purpose, of action."[172] Antigone further reinforces this sense of dissociation, this parting of the ways, "by providing the contrasting δέ-clause that was missing from Ismene's speech".[173]

Secondly, Ismene's argument about the necessity of submitting to the laws of the *polis* and its ruler (60-68) forces Antigone to reframe what was, initially, an overtly personal reaction to Creon's edict. In opposition to the human law Ismene has chosen to obey, Antigone now appeals to a higher power (ὅσια πανουργήσασ' 74, τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἔντιμ' 77) as she begins to formulate what will eventually become her famous claim to the 'unwritten and unfailing laws of the gods' (ἄγραπτα κἀσφαλῆ θεῶν νόμιμα 454-455).[174] In addition, as Antigone begins to further dissociate herself from Ismene, her devotion to Polyneices starts to intensify. Brown comments that Antigone "now sees the burial of Polyneices as a privilege which Ismene has forfeited."[175] But it goes deeper than that. From initially wanting to carry out her duty by performing the necessary burial rites for Polyneices, she now wishes to join him: φίλη μετ' αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα (73). Griffith points out that the double repetition of *philos* and

[170] Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[171] Hahnemann 2019: 8.
[172] Steiner 1984: 212.
[173] Hahnemann 2019: 8.
[174] Bernadete 1999 ad loc. Cf. Griffith 1999 ad loc.: "τὰ τῶν θεῶν: the first explicit mention of this theme."
[175] Brown 1987 ad loc.

meta "emphasises both the bond of φιλία and the physical closeness of the two bodies."[176] Loved one with loved one; two identical entities, joined together. The two *meta*s of 73 also stand in marked contrast to the preceding *meta* Antigone just used of Ismene in 69-70: οὔτ' ἄν… ἐμοῦ γ' ἂν ἡδέως δρῴης μέτα. Her 'not with me', for Ismene, becomes 'I with you… you with me' for Polyneices, as Antigone begins to transfer the intense sense of identification she once felt with Ismene onto her dead brother.

The revelation that the two sisters do not after all 'share the self-same head' (*koinon autadelphon… kara* 1) with regards to either their family history or the repercussions of Creon's edict has very decidedly split 'us two' into 'you' and 'me'. But whereas, for Antigone, this seems to necessitate the immediate severing of all ties of association and affection, Ismene still tries to maintain a sense of connectedness with Antigone.[177] And yet, now that Ismene has expressed her own position and the motivation behind it, the fearful uncertainty which characterised her opening lines is replaced by a more assertive and resolute tone. The sisters' second stichomythic exchange (78-92), as Hancock points out, is significantly more agonistic in character as Ismene, who had previously come across as the underdog, now matches Antigone in determination.[178] Even though her attempt to dissuade Antigone fails, Ismene nevertheless stands her ground and stays true to her original assessment of the situation (39-40 cf. 67-68, 90, 92), even in the face of Antigone's mounting anger and hostility. When Antigone accuses her of dishonouring 'those things held in honour by the gods' (77), Ismene again asserts both her position and her individuality (78-79):

> ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἄτιμα ποιοῦμαι, τὸ δὲ
> βίᾳ πολιτῶν δρᾶν ἔφυν ἀμήχανος.

[176] Griffith 1999 ad loc. Cf. Jebb 1888 ad loc.
[177] οἴμοι ταλαίνης, ὡς ὑπερδέδοικά σου 82; σὺν δ' αὔτως ἐγώ 85; τοῦτο δ' ἴσθ' ὅτι… τοῖς φίλοις δ' ὀρθῶς φίλη 98-99.
[178] Hancock 1917: 11.

I do not mean them any dishonour, but
to act against the state – this is impossible for me!

These two lines are key to a proper understanding of Sophocles' characterisation of Ismene in this scene, and yet they have not generally been given sufficient consideration. Antigone says to Ismene: σοὶ δ' εἰ δοκεῖ, τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἔντιμ' ἀτιμάσασ' ἔχε, and Ismene replies: ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἄτιμα ποιοῦμαι, τὸ δὲ βίᾳ πολιτῶν δρᾶν ἔφυν ἀμήχανος. I do not believe, as Jebb, Woolsey and Griffith propose, that ἄτιμα ποιοῦμαι is an exact equivalent for ἀτιμάζω, 'I dishonour'.[179] Why would Ismene feel compelled to 'beg forgiveness of those below the Earth' (αἰτοῦσα τοὺς ὑπὸ χθονὸς ξύγγνοιαν ἴσχειν 65-66) for failing to bury Polyneices – where, as Jebb, Woolsey, Wells, Bernadete and Griffith all point out, τοὺς ὑπὸ χθονὸς includes not only the spirit of Polyneices but also the gods below[180] – if she did not believe that she was dishonouring them by doing so? It does not make any sense that, having already said that she would ask the gods' forgiveness for dishonouring them, Ismene would then go on to protest: 'I do not dishonour them'.[181] I propose that while the *active* ἄτιμα ποιῶ might serve as a circumlocution for ἀτιμάζω,[182] the *middle* ἄτιμα ποιοῦμαι[183] carries a slightly different sense, as middles generally do. Not 'I do not dishonour them', but 'I do not hold, deem, consider them as being worthy of dishonour'. In other words, 'I do not hold them in contempt'. Although Bernadete does not offer a direct translation of these two lines, his paraphrase seems to agree with my own understanding of ἄτιμα ποιοῦμαι here: "Ismene says that she is by nature incapable of acting against the citizens, but that this does not imply that she holds in contempt τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἔντιμα."[184] Campbell's gloss on ἐγὼ… ποιοῦμαι ('I do not disregard')

[179] Jebb 1888; Woolsey 1855; and Griffith 1999 ad loc. Jebb 1888; Brown 1987; Watling 1974; Kitto 1962; Fagles 1984; Gibbons & Segal 2003; Wyckoff 2013; and Mulroy 2013 all translate along the lines of 'I do not dishonour…' for οὐκ ἄτιμα ποιοῦμαι.
[180] Jebb 1888; Woolsey 1855; Wells 1900; Bernadete 1999; and Griffith 1999.
[181] As, for example, Tyrrell & Bennet (2008-2009: 6) argue: "She denies that she herself acts dishonourably".
[182] Cf. Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 55.3.2; Men. *Mon.* 1.455; Artem. *Onirocriticon* 4.27.22; Hdt. 2.141.4.
[183] Cf. Theophr. *de Pietate* fr. 13.34; Cass. Dio 78 17.2.2; Porph. *Abst.* 2.27.26.
[184] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.

and Fainlight & Littmans' translation ('I do not wish to dishonour') also support this reading.[185]

If this is correct, then I also suggest that μέν does in fact answer to δέ. Jebb argues that it does not, and Kamerbeek follows Jebb's reading.[186] Griffith, however, admits that either reading is possible and has found similar instances of transposed word-order.[187] My reading of this passage, then, would run something like: 'While, on the one hand, I do not *mean* them any dishonour', or 'I do not think them worthy of dishonour', 'on the other hand τὸ… βίᾳ πολιτῶν δρᾶν ἔφυν ἀμήχανος'. This reading would fit better with Sophocles' characterisation of Ismene, which I believe is considerably more complex than has generally been allowed. It would also better compliment his depiction of the contrast between the two sisters. Antigone, with her assertive and unshakeable self-confidence, typically uses her μὲν-δέ constructions to draw a sharp distinction between the 'rightness' of her own actions and beliefs and the 'wrongness' of others' (22, 23-26, 80-81, 93-94, 555, 557, 559-560). Here cautious, circumspect Ismene uses her μὲν-δέ not to distinguish herself from Antigone, but to express the inner conflict within herself as she grapples with the 'impossible' situation she finds herself in (cf. 39-40, 90, 92), torn between her duty to τοὺς ὑπὸ χθονὸς and her natural instinct to survive. For Antigone, whose tragic choice was already made the moment she uttered her first line, there is no such conflict; she *will* bury her brother: κεῖνον δ' ἐγὼ θάψω 71-72.

At 523 Antigone gives a famous description of her own *physis*: οὔτοι συνέχθειν, ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν.[188] Scholars have rightly emphasised the significance of this line, Kamerbeek arguing that it "reveal[s] the innermost centre of her being", D'Ooge that

[185] Campbell 1871 ad loc.; Fainlight & Littman 2009.
[186] Jebb 1888; Kamerbeek 1978 ad loc.
[187] Aesch. *Ag*. 759-760 and Eur. *Hel*. 264-266. Griffith (1999) ad loc.
[188] For various interpretations of this line, see Knox 1964: 81-82; Bongie 1974: 259-261; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 133; and Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 75-76.

it brings "to view the entire inner soul", and Campbell & Abbott that it "gives a glimpse of what is deepest in Antigone."[189] And yet Ismene's description of her own *physis*, though certainly much less impressive,[190] is scarcely even acknowledged as such. Jebb, D'Ooge, Storr, Watling, Fagles, Brown, Bernadete, Griffith, Gibbons & Segal, Mulroy and Taplin all give weight to Antigone's ἔφυν, translating it as 'it is my nature to…' or 'I was born to…',[191] but Ismene's ἔφυν is not generally afforded the same significance.

When Creon tries to defend himself against the charge of plotting Oedipus' overthrow in *Oedipus Tyrannus* with the claim 'I am by nature (ἔφυν) not the man to wish to be a king' (587-588), his words are taken at face-value; not as an expression of his 'subservient' disposition but as a genuine attempt to explain who he is as a person.[192] And yet, as both a woman and the non-heroic sister, Ismene's attempt to explain her own nature as an individual is not regarded as an expression of her 'soul' or 'innermost being', but simply as a further illustration of her feminine weakness and submissiveness. For τὸ δὲ βίᾳ πολιτῶν δρᾶν ἔφυν ἀμήχανος Jebb has "but to defy the State, – I have no strength for that"; Watling: "I am not strong enough"; Kitto: "I am too weak"; Mulroy: "I simply can't ignore the citizens' explicit will"; Taplin: "I've no ability"; and French dramatist and screenwriter Jean Anouilh: "I'm an awful coward, Antigone".[193] Only Griffith, Bernadete and Campbell & Abbott point out the link between the two ἔφυνs. Griffith, however, adds that it is Ismene's "'feminine' nature" that "forbids" her from acting with Antigone;[194] while Steiner argues that

[189] Kamerbeek 1978; D'Ooge 1890; Campbell & Abbott 1886.
[190] συνέχθειν and συμφιλεῖν are found nowhere else in Classical Greek.
[191] Jebb 1888; D'Ooge 1890; Storr 1962; Watling 1974; Fagles 1984; Brown 1987; Bernadete 1999; Griffith 1999; Gibbons & Segal 2003; Mulroy 2013; and Taplin 2020.
[192] See, for example, Kitto 1962, Storr 1962, Watling 1974, Fainlight & Littman 2009, and Grene 2013.
[193] Jebb 1888; Watling 1974; Kitto 1962; Mulroy 2013; Taplin 2020; and Anouilh 1958: 17. Cf. Storr 1962; Fagles 1984; Brown 1987; and Wyckoff 2013.
[194] Griffith 1999; Bernadete 1999; Campbell & Abbott 1886 ad loc.

Ismene "is 'by nature' and 'in her very φύσις' a wholly feminine being."[195] Fainlight & Littman's is the only translation which treats both ἔφυνs equally: "I do not wish to dishonour him, but it is against my nature to defy the city's will"; "My nature is drawn to love; I cannot hate either."[196] While ἔφυν can certainly be used as a metrically convenient form of the verb 'to be',[197] I do think that Sophocles is making a point here about how difficult this decision really is for Ismene: it is not simply that her character is 'feminine' or 'weak', but rather that while 'acting against the state' might pose no existential challenge for one such as Antigone, for Ismene it would require her to act against her own nature. It is significant that each sister's description of her own *physis* is made to the very person who has the least possible interest in understanding her. Just as Creon dismisses Antigone's 'noble'[198] sentiment in 523 – if she is indeed so 'compelled to love', he callously replies, then she should go to the world of the dead and love them (524-525) – so Antigone now dismisses Ismene, accusing her of just making 'an excuse' (80-81):

> σὺ μὲν τάδ' ἂν προὔχοι'· ἐγὼ δὲ δὴ τάφον
> χώσουσ' ἀδελφῷ φιλτάτῳ πορεύσομαι.
>
> Well let this be your excuse then. But now I shall go
> to raise the burial mound for my most beloved brother.

As Kamerbeek points out, instead of the usual imperative, Antigone 'scornfully' uses the optative: "the scorn is the more biting since normally this use of the potential optative in the second person has the force of a mild command or exhortation."[199] To Antigone, who initially held Ismene to be her 'other self' and therefore took it for granted that she would share her own understanding of how to face the problem

[195] Steiner 1984: 241. Cf. Picklesimer (2000: 224), who remarks on line 79 that although Ismene is no 'coward', her refusal to help Antigone is based on her belief in her own limitations as a woman: "Ni Ismene ni Crisótemis se atreverán a ayudar a su hermana de una forma efectiva, porque está demasiado arraigado en ellas el reconocimiento de su propia limitación".
[196] Fainlight & Littman 2009.
[197] LSJ s.v. φύω.
[198] Campbell & Abbott 1886 ad loc.
[199] Kamerbeek 1978 ad loc.

presented by Creon's edict,[200] it has now become apparent that the one person left to her in all the world, the one whom she had addressed as her *koinon autadelphon*, has forsaken her. As we have seen, the 'scorn' which Antigone directs towards her living sister corresponds to an intensification of her feelings towards her dead brother. As Antigone starts to make her way to the side-entrance, while Ismene remains on stage, the separation between the 'pair' of sisters, both physical and affective, widens even further as Antigone now transfers all her domestic affection onto Polyneices: ἀδελφῷ φιλτάτῳ πορεύσομαι.

There are two aspects of Antigone's behaviour that scholars have found most troubling. The first is the speed and intensity with which Antigone turns against her only surviving sibling. Many scholars are puzzled by Antigone's inconsistent treatment of Ismene and Polyneices: "Her sense of values is such that she does not regard Polyneices' treasonable actions sufficient reason to damn him as an ἐχθρός and she will affirm somewhat grandiloquently later on: οὔτοι συνέχθειν, ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν (523). In contrast, however, Ismene's refusal to accept Antigone's position is enough to banish her from the family as unworthy and to damn her in her sister's eyes as an ἐχθρά."[201] The second is Antigone's excessive devotion to Polyneices, for which scholars have offered a variety of justifications: Pomeroy, Johnson and Irigaray argue, albeit for slightly different reasons, that Polyneices' gender plays a crucial role in Antigone's attachment to her dead brother, that Antigone values male natal relationships above female ones;[202] Butler, Griffith and Mills all believe that Antigone's

[200] Cf. Jebb 1888: xxviii: "…she turns to her sister Ismene, and asks for her aid; not as if the response could be doubtful – she cannot imagine its being doubtful; it does not enter her mind that one whom she has just addressed by so dear a name, and with whom her tie of sisterhood is made closer still by the destiny which has placed them apart, can be anything but joyful and proud to risk life in the discharge of a duty so plain, so tender, and so sacred"; Foley 2002: 173-174; and Tyrrell & Bennett: 2008-2009: 5. Bongie (1974: 248) takes the opposite view: "What [Antigone] does not know is whether Ismene will grasp the possibilities of the situation as she sees them."

[201] Bongie 1974: 252. Cf. Winnington-Ingram 1983: 245; Goldhill 1986: 98; Nussbaum 1986: 54-56; Blundell 1989: 106-115; Griffith 2001: 129; Scodel 2005: 244; Honig 2011: 32, 49; Carter 2012: 125-126; Cairns 2016: 99; and Hahnemann 2019: 11.

[202] Pomeroy 1975; Johnson 1997; Irigaray 1985, 2010a, 2010b.

devotion stems from her incestuous love for Polyneices;[203] Sorum sees her devotion to her brother as an expression of the central conflict between *polis* (Creon) and family (Antigone);[204] and Badger as an extension of Antigone's obsession with death.[205]

Scholars have typically disregarded Ismene's role in the play as little more than a prime example of the "Sophoclean technique of bringing out an essential quality in the tragic figure by setting it in sharp contrast with the opposite quality in another character."[206] Bowra, for instance, argues that when "Ismene shrinks from giving help when asked for it", she brings "into high relief… the unique quality of Antigone's devotion."[207] While there is no denying that Ismene's timidity does serve to emphasise Antigone's remarkable courage in the face of adversity, or that this was precisely what Sophocles intended when he chose to pair these two particular sisters, I would nevertheless suggest that Ismene's role is far less cursory, or subsidiary, than has generally been recognised. As Jebb notes on Antigone's opening address: "The pathetic emphasis on this first line gives the key-note of the drama. The origin which connects the sisters also isolates them. If Ismene is not with her, Antigone stands alone."[208] This also explains the later inconsistency in Antigone's attitude towards her siblings. Her growing anger towards Ismene and her increasing attachment to Polyneices are not only clearly connected, they also stem from the same cause: her quarrel with Ismene, which provokes in Antigone not only an overwhelming feeling of abandonment but also a sense of her own heroic superiority as she now determines to prove Ismene wrong. As the scholiast notes on ἀδελφῷ φιλτάτῳ, Antigone's sense of disaffection with Ismene 'now amplifies her desire', τοῦτο ἤδη τῆς προθυμίας αὐξητικόν.[209] Ismene's refusal to act, then, is not only artistically and symbolically

[203] Butler 2000; Griffith 1999, 2001, 2005; Mills 2018.
[204] Sorum 1982.
[205] Badger 2013.
[206] Adams 1955: 48.
[207] Bowra 1944: 65.
[208] Jebb 1888 ad loc.
[209] Σ *Ant*. 81.1.

effective, but also constitutive of a new emotional state in our heroine: Polyneices, who up until this point has only been *philos* (10, 73), now becomes *philtatos*.[210] While the word *philos* need not in itself necessarily imply affection, as Winnington-Ingram points out, "the superlative *philtatos* must surely do so."[211] I propose that it is precisely Antigone's initial conviction that Ismene would share her own extreme interpretation of 'kinship' that explains not only the intensity of her reaction to Ismene's 'betrayal' (46) but also the concomitant redirection of all her familial attachment and identification to Polyneices (οὔτ' ἄν… ἐμοῦ γ' ἂν ἡδέως δρῴης μέτα… φίλη μετ' αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα 69-73). In the end this sense of identification is so strong that even though it is Haemon's arms she ends up in, rather than Polyneices', it is Polyneices' fate she mimics, and not only in her quintessentially Labdacid enmity with Ismene: with Polyneices dead but not buried, and Antigone sentenced to be buried while not yet dead, neither of them has a 'home among the living or the dead' (μέτοικος… οὐ ζῶσιν, οὐ θανοῦσιν 851). And Antigone, like Polyneices, also goes to her death 'unwept and unfriended' (ἄκλαυτος, ἄφιλος 876), without the proper funeral rites.

Of course Ismene has not abandoned Antigone – and she never will, despite Antigone's mounting anger and cruelty towards her. Ismene says that she fears for Antigone (ὡς ὑπερδέδοικά σου 82). Assured as she is of the 'rightness' of her own position (89), Antigone rejects Ismene's concern – 'Do not be afraid on *my* account'[212] (μὴ 'μοῦ προτάρβει 83) – spitefully adding that Ismene would do better to 'set right' her own fate (τὸν σὸν ἐξόρθου πότμον). When Antigone scornfully tells Ismene in 69-70 that she would never again welcome her aid, even if she should later prove willing, the scholiast remarks that δαιμόνιον δὲ τὸ ἦθος; he now says of Ismene that

[210] Antigone will also refer to Polyneices as τὸν ἐξ ἐμῆς μητρὸς (466-467), αὐτάδελφον (503), ὁμοσπλάγχνους (511), and κασίγνητον κάρα (915).
[211] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 130. Cf. Blundell 1989: 108.
[212] Cf. Jebb 1888 and Griffith 1999 ad loc.

although her ἦθος is 'cautious' (εὐλαβές) it is also 'tenderly loving' (φιλόστοργον).[213] Because Antigone's nature is so severe, so rigidly uncompromising, she never makes the slightest concession. As soon as Ismene shows any hesitancy, she accuses her of being a 'traitor' (46) and stubbornly refuses to even consider her appeals to reason or try to understand her position. The cautious figure of Ismene might pale in comparison to Antigone's grand heroic stature, but nor is she bound by such extremism. It is not 'all or nothing' for Ismene. She does not agree to help with Polyneices' burial, but she did answer Antigone's initial summons to a secret meeting outside the palace. This in itself already challenges the critical tradition's perception of Ismene as a stereotypically submissive woman, since by forsaking the private, feminine realm of the *oikos* in favour of the public, masculine one of the *polis*, neither Antigone nor Ismene can be classified as a 'good' woman.[214]

In her defense of Antigone, Foley argues that her hostility towards Ismene is justified because Ismene's refusal "leaves no room for mediation, since it denies action to Antigone and burial to Polyneices";[215] but Ismene does now propose a compromise (84-85):

> ἀλλ' οὖν προμηνύσῃς γε τοῦτο μηδενὶ
> τοὔργον, κρυφῇ δὲ κεῦθε, σὺν δ' αὕτως ἐγώ.
>
> Well then at least give no indication of this deed beforehand.
> Keep it a secret, and I will keep it hidden with you.

Antigone asked Ismene whether she would 'share in the labour and the deed' (ξυμπονήσεις καὶ ξυνεργάσῃ 41). Ismene now offers to 'share' in (σὺν δ' αὕτως ἐγώ) keeping Antigone's plan a secret. It is not often recognised that, by offering to be

[213] Σ *Ant*. 82.1-82.3.
[214] Sourvinou-Inwood 1989: 138; Williamson 1990: 16; Cairns 2016: 12, 159 n. 57; and Moro 2021: 116.
[215] Foley 2002: 198.

Antigone's co-conspirator, Ismene is actually placing herself at considerable risk.[216] In 534-535 Creon, assuming that Ismene was complicit in the burial, demands that she either admit her guilt or swear that she had no knowledge of Antigone's plan.[217] Ismene's bid to have some small 'share' in Antigone's enterprise might not amount to much, especially when compared to the level of 'sharing' that Antigone originally envisaged,[218] but it is as much as Ismene feels herself capable of at this point (ἔφυν ἀμήχανος 79). As Bernadete correctly points out, Ismene is desperate to prove that even though she has chosen her own path, her loyalty remains firmly with Antigone and she is willing to do whatever she can to support her.[219] What this small gesture also demonstrates, however, is that Ismene is consciously making an effort to act against her natural predisposition for caution in an attempt not only to appease Antigone but also to save her life; which is a great deal more than Antigone ever does for Ismene.

Ismene's attempt was bound to fail; their outlooks are just too different. For one thing, Antigone is an absolutist, and so any type of compromise or 'half-measure'[220] simply will not do:

> Ismene faced a choice: she could either honour the dead by joining Antigone or she could honour Creon. Locked into the binary logic of obedience and resistance, Antigone does not think it is possible to do both. For Antigone, the appearance of honoring Creon *is* honouring Creon and a facade of obedience *is* obedience. There is no difference between the visible and the actual; they are one and the same.[221]

[216] Kirkpatrick 2011: 407: "It is important to note that Ismene not only suggests violating Creon's decree in secret, she also unhesitatingly offers to assist Antigone in this duplicity."
[217] φέρ', εἰπὲ δή μοι, καὶ σὺ τοῦδε τοῦ τάφου φήσεις μετασχεῖν, ἢ 'ξομεῖ τὸ μὴ εἰδέναι;
[218] Cf. Griffith 1999 ad loc.: "The closest Ismene will come to 'sharing' in Ant.'s 'deed' is to 'share' in 'concealing' it."
[219] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.
[220] Cf. 543: λόγοις δ' ἐγὼ φιλοῦσαν οὐ στέργω φίλην.
[221] Kirkpatrick 2011: 416-417. Cf. Söderbäck 2010: 70.

Secondly, whereas Ismene sees only danger, and therefore seeks to minimise it, Antigone conceives of Polyneices' burial as 'noble' and 'righteous' (72, 74, 96-97, 502, 521, 943 cf. 511). She once again misunderstands Ismene's purpose, believing that Ismene is implying that their brother's burial is some shameful act which needs to be carried out in secret.[222] Ismene's attempt at solidarity only serves to provoke Antigone's angriest outburst yet (86-87):

> οἴμοι, καταύδα· πολλὸν ἐχθίων ἔσῃ
> σιγῶσ', ἐὰν μὴ πᾶσι κηρύξῃς τάδε.
>
> No, shout it out! You shall be far more hateful to me
> by keeping quiet, if you do not proclaim it to all.

To Ismene's οἴμοι in 82 Antigone now opposes her own οἴμοι, not as an expression of heartfelt concern, as Ismene's was[223], but of frustration and hostility.[224] There can be no meeting of the minds with these two; whatever Ismene does to try and restore their initial bond only results in Antigone's rescinding it all the more definitively. Having begun the play with what Cairns terms "a hyper-pleonastic expression of her *philia* with Ismene",[225] and the insistence on their kindred duty to treat all *philoi* alike (21-32, 45-46, 48, 73-77) – which is the exact basis on which she will later justify her actions to Creon (499-523) – Antigone now carries out her earlier threat and denounces Ismene as an *echthra*.

As Antigone's cruelty begins to intensify, the scholiast notes that Antigone not only insults Ismene, but at the same time seems to take pleasure in doing so.[226] Still Ismene stands firm. When Antigone once again emphasises the moral superiority of her own

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[222] Cf. Brown 1987 ad loc.
[223] The scholiast notes on Ismene's οἴμοι ταλαίνης (Σ *Ant*. 82.2-82.3): 'Frightened for her sister, she cries out passionately (δέδοικεν οὖν… περὶ τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ ἀναβοᾷ περιπαθῶς).
[224] Knox 1964: 68-69: The "advice to compromise… is rejected in [typical] heroic style". On Antigone's οἴμοι see Kamerbeek 1978 and Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[225] Cairns 2016: 94.
[226] Σ *Ant*. 86.2-3: ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἐφυβρίζει ἐν οἷς δοκεῖ αὐτῇ προσχαρίζεσθαι.

position ('I know that I am obliging those whom I am most bound to oblige' 89), Ismene holds true to her original assessment of the situation: 'If you succeed. But you are in love with the impossible' (εἰ καὶ δυνήσει γ'· ἀλλ' ἀμηχάνων ἐρᾷς 90 cf. 39-40, 67-68). When Antigone replies that she will nevertheless continue until her 'strength runs out', Ismene says that 'it is not fitting to chase after the impossible in the first place' (ἀρχὴν δὲ θηρᾶν οὐ πρέπει τἀμήχανα 92). Antigone responds with yet another violent outburst, this one "still harsher and more unfair"[227] than the last (93-97):[228]

> εἰ ταῦτα λέξεις, ἐχθαρεῖ μὲν ἐξ ἐμοῦ,
> ἐχθρὰ δὲ τῷ θανόντι προσκείσει δίκῃ.
> ἀλλ' ἔα με καὶ τὴν ἐξ ἐμοῦ δυσβουλίαν
> παθεῖν τὸ δεινὸν τοῦτο· πείσομαι γὰρ οὐ
> τοσοῦτον οὐδὲν ὥστε μὴ οὐ καλῶς θανεῖν.
>
> If this is what you say, you will have hatred from me,
> and you will justly bring down upon yourself the hatred of the dead.
> But let me be – me and my foolishness! Leave me alone
> to suffer this dread deed. For I shall suffer nothing
> so terrible as if I were not to die gloriously.

Every time Ismene appeals to 'reason' and the 'impossibility' of Antigone's success she only manages to infuriate Antigone further, who in her turn further defines away Ismene's relation to herself; this time she threatens that Ismene will not only incur her own hatred but also that of their dead kin. This is how the scholiast defines the difference between the two sisters: αἱ ἀντιλογίαι δῆλαί εἰσιν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ τῷ πράγματι ἡ δὲ τῇ οἰκειότητι ἀκολουθεῖ.[229] Whereas Ismene, he says, is guided by 'practicalities', Antigone is guided by 'kinship'. It is not simply two different personalities, two distinct 'heads', that are at play here, however, but two entirely opposing value systems. The significance Antigone attaches to '*koinon*', as we have seen, is vastly

[227] Brown 1987 ad loc.
[228] Goldhill 1986: 93: "It is as if Antigone is implying that even to disagree with her attitude towards a *philos* is to make one an *ekhthros*."
[229] Σ *Ant*. 47.1-2.

different from Ismene's conception of the term. While, for Antigone, death is most closely associated with that which is '*kalon*' (καλόν… θανεῖν 72, καλῶς θανεῖν 97), Ismene, who never once speaks of honour or glory, associates death only with that which is 'most *kakos*' (κάκιστ' ὀλούμεθ' 59). For Antigone, on the other hand, '*kakos*' denotes the lack of nobleness which defines an *eugenês* (εἴτ' εὐγενὴς πέφυκας εἴτ' ἐσθλῶν κακή 38). And whereas Antigone comes to identify '*philos*' primarily with her dead relations (φίλη μετ' αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα 73, ἀδελφῷ φιλτάτῳ 81, φίλη μὲν ἥξειν πατρί, προσφιλὴς δὲ σοί, μῆτερ, φίλη δὲ σοί, κασίγνητον κάρα (898-899), it turns out that the exact opposite holds true for Ismene; it is not the dead who are 'dear', but the living: τίς βίος μοι σοῦ λελειμμένη φίλος; (548).

Similarly, it is because the sisters do not attach the same value to 'good sense'[230] that Ismene's appeals to reason have so little effect. Her repeated protestations that it is 'senseless' (67-68, 98-99) to try and bury Polyneices when there is no hope of their success mean nothing in the face of what Antigone herself 'knows' to be true with such emphatic and intuitive certainty:[231] ἀλλ' οἶδ' ἀρέσκουσ' οἷς μάλισθ' ἁδεῖν με χρή (89 cf. 458-460). To one who is so convinced that what 'seems best to her' (cf. 71, 76) is the only correct interpretation, accusations of 'foolishness' are empty since any alternative line of reasoning is nothing but 'folly' (95, 469-470). The same applies to *ta amêchana*. When Ismene tells Antigone that 'it is not seemly (οὐ πρέπει) to chase after the impossible' (92), the scholiast says that what Ismene means is that it is 'not *kalon*'.[232] While the term clearly holds moral weight for Ismene, her repeated entreaties have no effect because, for Antigone, the central issue is not whether or not her attempt

[230] For the persistent emphasis on 'good sense', 'foolishness' and 'wisdom' in the play, see esp. Knapp 1916; Else 1976; and Cairns 2016: 69-88.

[231] Cf. Griffith 2001:128: "Creon, along with other male characters… constantly harps on the need for 'intelligence, good sense, planning (*phronein, gnome, bouleuma, euboulia, nous,* etc.) and 'learning, understanding' (*manthanein*), whereas for Antigone to 'know' (*eidenai, epistasthai*) seems to involve a more immediate, less intellectual state of awareness, or 'certainty' (18, 89, 447-48, 460, 521; 471-472, 480." For Antigone's 'instinctive' knowledge as opposed to the use of reason and logic, see also Norwood 1948: 139; Goheen 1951: 76-79, 82, 98; Kirkwood 1958: 165; Knox 1964: 116; and Murnaghan 1986: 195.

[232] Σ *Ant*. 92.1.

actually succeeds. As Bernadete points out, if Ismene had indeed carried out her sister's sarcastic injunction to 'proclaim her plan to everyone' (πᾶσι κηρύξης τάδε 87), "Antigone would have failed at her first attempt. She would not have done anything for Polyneices. Antigone seems to regard it as essential that she be caught and as inessential that she succeed."[233] Bongie makes a similar point, arguing that Antigone never considers "the possibility that she could bury her brother and not be caught… The burial of her brother would accomplish little in her view if it were not at the same time known that she was the one who had done it… She must be detected, she must be punished by death, she must win fame and renown by her deed."[234] Even though Antigone's initial conception of the edict as a personal insult at the hands of an enemy (10 cf. 31-32, 48) has now started to take on a higher significance (τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἔντιμ' 77, cf. 73-77, 89), an element of the heroic concern for one's own reputation and the drive to win glory and recognition for one's honourable deeds, nevertheless still remains. When Antigone says here that she 'will suffer nothing so terrible as an ignoble death' (οὐ καλῶς θανεῖν), as Bernadete points out, she "comes close to forgetting her intention, for she implies without knowing it that the most terrible thing she could suffer would not be Polyneices' lack of burial."[235] As Antigone will later boast to Creon (502-505):

> καίτοι πόθεν κλέος γ' ἂν εὐκλεέστερον
> κατέσχον ἢ τὸν αὐτάδελφον ἐν τάφῳ
> τιθεῖσα; τούτοις τοῦτο πᾶσιν ἀνδάνειν
> λέγοιτ' ἄν, εἰ μὴ γλῶσσαν ἐγκλῄοι φόβος.
>
> And yet for reputation, where could I have secured one more glorious
> than by giving burial to my own brother?
> These here would all say they found this pleasing
> if fear did not hold their tongues.

[233] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.
[234] Bongie 1974: 251. Cf. Kamerbeek 1978: 51 n.90: "she wants to be defeated rather than to resign, to die rather than to yield."
[235] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.

τοῖς φίλοις δ' ὀρθῶς φίλη

Antigone's parting words may be full of hatred (ἐχθαρεῖ μὲν ἐξ ἐμοῦ 93, ἐχθρὰ δὲ τῷ θανόντι 94), but Ismene's are full of love (98-99):

> ἀλλ' εἰ δοκεῖ σοι, στεῖχε· τοῦτο δ' ἴσθ', ὅτι
> ἄνους μὲν ἔρχει, τοῖς φίλοις δ' ὀρθῶς φίλη.
>
> Go, then, if this seems best to you. But know this –
> that though you go foolishly, to your loved ones you are rightly loving.

These last two lines of the prologue, presumably spoken as Antigone makes her way off the stage through the side-entrance, are once again key to a proper appreciation of Ismene's characterisation; they also once again illustrate how a pre-established view of her character can influence a translator's reading of the Greek text. As Bernadete notes, Ismene ends the one-line stichomythia with the exact same phrase (εἰ δοκεῖ σοι) that Antigone used to introduce it in 76-77 (σοὶ δ' εἰ δοκεῖ, τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἔντιμ' ἀτιμάσασ' ἔχε).[236] Not only does this underline once again the total irreconcilability of these two opposing standpoints, with neither side willing (or able) to relinquish her own perspective for the sake of the other, but also the contrast between each sister's reaction to this essential conflict. Whereas Antigone is so incensed by 'what seems best' to Ismene that she accuses her of dishonouring τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἔντιμα, Ismene – while unable to join in with 'what seems best' to Antigone – nevertheless offers Antigone her continued love and support.

Jebb, D'Ooge, Brown and Bernadete all prefer to take ὀρθῶς φίλη as passive.[237] Griffith's assessment that "ὀρθῶς φίλη must be primarily active here", however,

[236] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.
[237] Jebb 1888; D'Ooge 1890; Brown 1987; and Bernadete (1999) ad loc. Also Kitto 1962; Storr 1962; Watling 1974; Fagles 1984; Fainlight & Littman 2009; and Wyckoff 2013.

seems far more plausible.[238] It is also supported by the scholiast, who says that what Ismene means here is 'you are acting kindly towards the dead' (πράττεις εὐνοϊκῶς δὲ τῷ θανόντι).[239] So we do not have the passive 'you are truly loved by your loved ones', but the active 'to your loved ones you are truly loving'. This would mean, then, that Ismene is not merely giving Antigone a "parting assurance that [*her*] love is undiminished" – which is the only reading that Jebb is prepared to accept here[240] – but that she is also expressing her *approval* of Antigone's determination to bury their brother.[241] In 83 Antigone orders Ismene, instead of being concerned for her safety, to 'set right', ἐξόρθου, her own destiny lest she incur the gods' anger for neglecting her duty to Polyneices. Ismene now uses an adverb based on the same stem to express her approval of the manner in which Antigone is carrying out her obligations as a *philê*. *Orthos*, literally 'straight' or 'upright', carries the metaphorical sense of 'right', 'true', 'correct'.[242] As Goldhill points out in his discussion on this passage, *orthos* is frequently used in philosophical and linguistic debates concerning the proper meaning and application of certain key terms; in this case, *philê*: "The emphatic last phrase of this scene is 'to those who are *philos* you are rightly, properly *philos*. That is, Antigone is in a proper sense fulfilling her obligations of *philia* to those who are her *philoi*… She is not merely asserting her affection for her sister, but indicating something of Antigone's basis for action."[243]

Although Griffith admits that Ismene "acknowledges the legitimacy of Antigone's attitude", he nevertheless adds a qualifying disparagement: "albeit half-disapprovingly and to her departing back."[244] D'Ooge, Brown and Bernadete all argue

[238] Griffith 1999 ad loc. Also Campbell 1871; Wells 1900; Knox 1964; Kamerbeek 1978; Goldhill 1986; Gibbons & Segal 2003; Mulroy 2013; and Taplin 2020.
[239] Σ *Ant*. 99.1-99.2.
[240] Jebb 1888 ad loc.
[241] Cf. Griffith 1999 ad loc.; Else 1976: 35; and Cairns 2016: 95.
[242] LSJ s.v. ὀρθός,
[243] Goldhill 1986: 93, and n. 25.
[244] Griffith 1999 ad loc.

strongly against this active reading of ὀρθῶς φίλη: D'Ooge because "this seems tame, and inconsistent with the character of Ismene, who would not wish to imply that her love for her brother was less than Antigone's"; Brown because "this would hardly be compatible with what Ismene has said so far"; and Bernadete because "Ismene sees no connection between the dearness and the piety of Antigone".[245] These prescriptive readings of the text, based on predetermined views of what is and what is not considered 'consistent with the character of Ismene', have in turn led to misguided interpretations of Ismene's role in the play. Foley, for example, has argued that Ismene accuses Antigone of "moral myopia."[246] As this close reading of the text has shown, however, Ismene never gives the slightest indication that she disapproves of Antigone's plan in principle.[247] She may well call Antigone's plan 'senseless' (οὐκ ἔχει νοῦν οὐδένα 68, ἄνους 99) because she does not believe there is any hope of its success (39-40, 67-86, 90, 92), but there is no doubt that she knows that Antigone is doing the right thing (65-66). While Goldhill recognises that Ismene is affirming Antigone's behaviour as 'properly loving', he also argues that Ismene will only truly come to 'admire' this behaviour when she later tries to claim a share in the burial;[248] but this is not quite right either. When Ismene tells Antigone that she has 'a hot heart for chilling deeds' in 88, Kamerbeek argues that her words are both "admiring and reproachful".[249] I suggest that this same combination of admiration and reproach also applies to σχετλία in 47. As both Jebb and Kamerbeek point out, Sophocles never uses σχετλίος to mean 'miserable', as Aeschylus and Euripides do, but only in the Homeric

[245] D'Ooge 1890; Brown 1987; and Bernadete 1999 ad loc.
[246] Foley 2002: 197.
[247] Cf. Kirkwood 1948: 120: "So far as moral attitude is concerned, there is no fundamental difference; Ismene is as aware as Antigone of the wrongness of Creon's edict."; Bernadete (1999) 14: "Her submission to Creon is not based on any agreement with Creon; as far as her intention goes, she is on Antigone's side."
[248] Goldhill 1986: 92.
[249] Kamerbeek 1978 ad loc.

sense of 'unflinching' or 'audacious',[250] generally used to refer to the gods, particularly Zeus, and the great heroes like Achilles, Hector and Odysseus.[251]

This would mean, then, that even though she cannot bring herself to share it, or perhaps precisely *because* she cannot share it (ἔφυν ἀμήχανος 79), Ismene admires Antigone's audacity from the moment she reveals the full extent of her intention in 45-46. In the same way that Antigone is impervious to Ismene's repeated appeals to reason and contemptuous of her 'excuse' not to act (80), so too is she deaf to any suggestion of admiration from her sister. As both her indignant retorts in 48 and 89 show, she hears only the reproach.[252] Now, having finally given up her attempt to dissuade Antigone, Ismene matches Antigone's two parting 'hates' (ἐχθαρῆ… ἐχθρὰ 93-94) with her own two parting 'loves' (φίλοις… φίλη 99). Whereas Antigone threatens Ismene with both her own hatred and that of their dead relations, Ismene uses her parting lines to both reassure Antigone that she is still *philê* to Ismene, even if she herself is now *echthra* to Antigone, and to show that she both shares and affirms Antigone's conception of herself as a 'properly' loving sister (98-99). The emotional rift between the two sisters is now paralleled by their physical separation as Antigone and Ismene, who had entered together from the palace as a 'pair' at the beginning of the prologue, now go off separately: Antigone exits through the side-entrance to go and attempt the burial of Polyneices before Ismene heads back inside the palace. Ironically, though it is Antigone who makes her way to the battlefield and Ismene who returns into Oedipus' palace, it is Antigone who remains trapped within the Labdacid cycle of self-mutilation and self-destruction (593-595).

[250] Jebb 1888; Kamerbeek 1978 ad loc.
[251] Zeus: *Il.* 2.112, 8.361, 9.19, *Od*. 3.161; the gods in general: *Il.* 24.33, *Od.* 5.118; Achilles: *Il.* 9.630, 16.203, 22.41; Hector: *Il.* 17.150, 22.86; Odysseus: *Od.* 9.494, 11.474, 12.116, 12.279, 13.293, 20.45.
[252] Kamerbeek 1978: 51 n. 88.

Conclusion

Jebb comments that Ismene "cannot be called exceptionally weak or timid; she is merely the average woman", and Linforth that "she is a pitiable figure, but she cannot be called heroic".[253] In a critical tradition where the alternative to 'average' or 'ordinary' is not '*ab*normal' but 'heroic' and 'extraordinary', these kinds of remarks effectively amount to insults.[254] Even among those scholars who have taken a more sympathetic view of Ismene's character, only Winnington-Ingram has recognised that what is perhaps the most fundamental difference between the two sisters is not that Ismene is *not* a 'hero', but that she never wanted to be one in the first place.[255] Kirkwood has argued that what Sophocles uses to contrast "the heroic with the unheroic" is devotion to the ideal of the *eugenês*.[256] Antigone offers Ismene the opportunity to take her rightful place in their 'noble' family: δείξεις τάχα εἴτ' εὐγενὴς πέφυκας εἴτ' ἐσθλῶν κακή (37-38). But Ismene declines. Their father lived and died according to the heroic principle – that unshakeable and intransigent belief in one's own autonomy – as did their two brothers, and Ismene is determined not to follow in their footsteps. Her refusal to participate in Polyneices' burial is not simply a 'failure', but a conscious decision to disrupt the status quo, opting out of the inherited pattern in which Labdacids repeat the misfortunes of their forebears. When Antigone takes her place in their family history of self-inflicted suffering and goes to her death lamenting that she is the last 'true' daughter of her house (895), she is in fact more right than she knows.

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[253] Jebb 1888: xxviii; Linforth 1961: 211.

[254] Cf. Pounds-Williams 2017: 35, 60. Picklesimer (2000: 217) is a notable exception, arguing that Sophocles is deliberately setting out to present Antigone as 'abnormal': "Por nuestra parte, creemos que la insistencia de Sófocles sobre la condición femenina de Antígona, y sobre el hecho de que ya no se casará, de que se ha frustrado su proyecto de boda con el joven Hemón, de que va a morir sin haber sido esposa, puntos en los que se insiste igualmente, está guiada por la necesidad de recordar al público que lo que le está presentando es una figura femenina atípica".

[255] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 133.

[256] Kirkwood 1958: 179.

Ismene's function in the play is not only to explore the nature of Antigone's heroism, but also to call that heroism into question. Neither Antigone nor Creon make any allowances for life's complexities. It is Ismene who recognises that the old heroic antitheses between noble and base, honour and shame, friend and enemy are simply too crude, too uncompromising, and too ineffective for dealing with the tensions and vagaries of human life. And for all of Antigone's excessive insistence on the bonds of *philia* and her famous claim that she was 'born not to share in hatred, but in love' (οὔτοι συνέχθειν, ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν 523), it is again Ismene who displays a truly inclusive perspective of *philia*. When Creon appeals to Haemon's allegiance, he asks him: 'are we still friends (*philoi*), whatever I may do?' (634). As Goldhill notes, both Creon and Antigone are "happy to claim the permanent family obligations whose validity" they themselves deny for others.[257] In the same way that Creon sees Haemon as little more than an extension of himself (639-646), demanding absolute obedience from him, so too does Antigone initially conceive of Ismene as an extension of her own selfhood (ὦ κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἰσμήνης κάρα), expecting unconditional loyalty from her; a loyalty that demands not only unconditional support but also the denial of all traces of selfhood. Any failure in this simultaneously extreme and limited conception of *philia* immediately renders one an *echthros*. Creon and Haemon's bonds of *philia* become so distorted that the last time Haemon sees his father, he tries to stab him with his sword. Antigone, like Achilles, threatens hatred to a *philos* whom she believes has sided with her enemy (*Il.* 9.612-615, cf. *Ant.* 86, 93-94). And yet even Achilles, the original prototype for the Sophoclean heroes,[258] eventually relents. Creon finally recognises his mistake, after it is too late to do any good. Antigone never relents. How remarkable, then, that a family characterised by the failure of *to koinon* should produce an Ismene who – although determined to assert her individuality, her own perspective – never abandons her attempt to retain a sense of connectedness with Antigone. Far from being the 'ordinary' sister, it is actually Ismene who is the anomaly

[257] Goldhill 1986: 99.
[258] Carter 2005: 173.

in this family. Indeed, of the four successive confrontations around which the dramatic action of the play is centred – Antigone and Ismene; Antigone and Creon; Creon and Haemon; Creon and Teiresias – Ismene is the only character who never resorts to anger or cruelty to realise her own self-assertion.

For her 'all-loving' nature[259] and lack of heroic spirit Ismene has earned only a reputation for weakness and selfishness. Pathetic, unprincipled Ismene who lacks the courage to stand up for what she knows to be right, who 'abandons' both her sister and her familial obligations, who prefers life to duty.[260] And yet the contrast with Antigone's sacrifice is not nearly as clear-cut as many have assumed. For one thing, as Antigone herself admits, she was already death-bound (θανουμένη γὰρ ἐξήδη, τί δ' οὔ; 460); death, for her, is not a punishment but a 'gain', κέρδος (461-464). As Miller phrases it: "Antigone seeks death not because of Creon's decree, but almost in spite of it."[261] Antigone's motive, moreover, is not nearly as selfless or altruistic as many have supposed. Tyrrell & Bennett have argued that "Antigone is not primarily defying [Creon, she] is pursuing her own purpose";[262] and one such purpose is her determination to earn renown through a noble death (502 cf. 72, 97). So while it has often been argued that Antigone did not feel, ethically, that she had a 'choice' when presented with the "opportunity to do a service to her dead brother"[263], it would be more accurate to argue, as Williams does, that Antigone was 'lucky' that what she wanted happened to coincide with what was 'right': "Creon's obstinacy does not simply elicit a noble response from Antigone. It triggers a ready and massive self-assertion, and the fact that her end can mean what it does mean (and, still more, what it has come to mean) is in a sense Antigone's good luck."[264]

[259] Cf. Winnington-Ingram 1983: 246.
[260] Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 39; Kitto 1956: 161.
[261] Miller 2007: 78.
[262] Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 72.
[263] Adams 1955: 50.
[264] Williams 1993: 86-87.

Ismene, for whom there *is* a conflict between 'what she wishes to do and what she knows to be right',[265] is not so lucky. Does Ismene make the wrong choice? Perhaps she does. And yet the pervasive over-reliance on this perception of Ismene as the 'ordinary, stereotypical woman' – the meek, obedient, acceptable face of femininity – as the sole basis for her refusal is far too narrow. Ismene does not choose "her *polis* over her *philoi*."[266] Nor is she simply "a paragon of obedience to male authority."[267] While Antigone, as Cairns points out, sees the central issues of the play "as a zero-sum game" – *kalon* or *kakon*, *philos* or *echthros*, *eugenês* or *kakos* – and encourages the audience to do likewise, the "*Antigone* is not a study in black and white."[268] Rather than a model of "submissive femininity", Frank not only suggests that we should follow Nonet's view of Ismene as "a model of ambiguity", but also that we should "take her ambiguity as a sign of her importance for Sophocles."[269] It is Ismene who qualifies and complicates the polarising categories which drive the Sophoclean heroes to self-destruction, who acknowledges the conflicting pressures and complexities that characterise mortal life, and who "alerts us to a world far more intriguing and ultimately far more demanding":[270] a world in which a father also happens to be a brother, in which *philoi* can also be *echthroi*, in which one can both disagree and love, compromise and resist.

Just because Ismene "has chosen to be one of the insignificant majority", as Kitto puts it,[271] it does not necessarily follow that she is inherently weaker or less courageous

[265] Bowra 1944: 96: "In [Antigone] there is no conflict between love and duty, between what she wishes to do and what she knows to be right."
[266] Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 38.
[267] Tyrrell & Bennett 2008-2009: 5. Cf. Campbell 1871: 393; Jebb 1888: xxviii; Bowra 1944: 65, 80; Schlesinger 1947: 209; 79-80; Whitman 1951: 86; Kirkwood 1958: 120; North 1966: 54-55, 65; Webster 1969: 75, 85; Pomeroy 1975: 99-100; Fagles 1984: 50; Steiner 1984: 144, 241; Johnson 1997: 385; Griffith 1999: 10, 35, 53, 62; Griffith 2001: 123, 129, 131; Foley 2002: 198-199; Scodel 2005: 241; Irigaray 2010b: 102; Carter 2012: 120; Roisman 2018: 70; Cairns 2016: 56 and Taplin 2020: 5.
[268] Cairns 2016: 51, 53.
[269] Frank 2006: 339 n. 9.
[270] Saxonhouse 1992: 73.
[271] Kitto 1956: 161.

than Antigone. While Ismene recognises the need to yield to the situation, she never yields to pressure from Antigone. It takes courage to stand up to your *echthroi*, certainly, but it takes a special kind of courage to stand up to your *philoi*. As difficult as it is for Antigone to discover that she and Ismene do not 'share the self-same head', how much harder is it for Ismene to stand her ground in the face of Antigone's bitter enmity and the complete dissolution of the only kindred bond she has left? While Sophocles is famous for his use of contrasts in characterisation, the reductive antithesis between 'heroine' and 'foil' has for too long rested on the assumption that it is the contrast between Antigone and Ismene rather than the complex nature of their relationship itself that is of critical interest. Both sisters are driven by the guiding moral principle they assert right at the beginning of the play, and to view Ismene as little more than a 'caricature'[272] or as the "far weaker of the two sisters"[273] is to emulate not only Antigone's dismissal of Ismene but also her sense of heroic superiority. Kamerbeek claims that Ismene would not have hesitated to answer Antigone's call for aid "were [her] character of the same stuff as her sister's".[274] But this is not only to impose an Antigone-centric reading onto Ismene's character, but also to assume that Sophocles wanted us to regard Antigone's actions as intrinsically superior to Ismene's. Their characters are very clearly not 'of the same stuff'; surely this is the whole point. Yet it is not simply a matter of two different personality types – brave or timid, defiant or subservient, exceptional or ordinary – but of two entirely opposing moral philosophies. And who is to say that Antigone's allegiance to the dead is any 'truer' or 'higher' than Ismene's devotion to the living?

[272] Irigaray 2010b: 102. Cf. Tycho Wilamowitz (1917: 42), who argued that Ismene barely classifies as a 'character' at all: "gar nicht was wir einen Charakter nennen".
[273] Saxonhouse 1992: 70.
[274] Kamerbeek 1978: 8.

Chapter 2

Antigone & Ismene: The Second Meeting

The sisters meet again towards the end of the second episode (536-560). Antigone has been caught, and defiantly admitted her guilt. Creon now summons Ismene out from the palace to be questioned about her own involvement. Creon and the chorus, both ignorant of the sisters' earlier disagreement, each comment on the nature of their relationship. Creon's mistaken assessment of the two sisters as a linked pair through his use of the dual (δύ' ἄτα 533) serves as a poignant reminder of the prologue: of Antigone and Ismene's initial closeness at the beginning of the play, where the dual was repeatedly used to evoke a sense of their inherited sameness (3, 21, 50, 58, 61-62), and of the rapid disintegration of this shared unity, where both sisters stopped using the dual to refer to themselves as soon as Ismene revealed her hesitation to act and any sense of commonality, at least on Antigone's part, was replaced by accusations of hatred and betrayal (45-46, 76-77, 80, 86-87, 93-94). The chorus' reference to the visibly distraught Ismene as a 'loving sister' (*philadelpha* 527), however, is an accurate reflection not only of Ismene's earlier determination to retain a sense of connectedness with Antigone, despite their opposing viewpoints, but also of Ismene's continued loyalty towards Antigone throughout this second meeting. Antigone may have written Ismene off as a *kakê* and an *echthra* for failing to perform her duty towards their dead brother, but Ismene is soon to evince a level of unfailing sisterly devotion that rivals Antigone's own devotion to Polyneices.

This second meeting of the two sisters has attracted less attention than the first, and yet, as Moro has correctly pointed out, "it provides the reader with an entirely different image of Ismene's agency."[1] Typically, this scene has been regarded merely as a continuation of the prologue, where Antigone continues to be revealed "as a

[1] Moro 2021: 116.

wholly… exceptional figure" and the 'ordinary', submissive Ismene continues to display her "irresolute though loving nature".[2] Once again, we have a marked contrast in Antigone and Ismene's language throughout this second scene. Ismene, distressed and entreating, still uses language that expresses her desperation to re-establish a sense of intimacy with Antigone: ξυμμετίσχω (537); ξύμπλουν (541); μήτοι, κασιγνήτη, μ' ἀτιμάσῃς τὸ μὴ οὐ θανεῖν τε σὺν σοὶ (544-545); καὶ τίς βίος μοι σοῦ λελειμμένῃ φίλος; (548); τί δῆτ' ἂν ἀλλὰ νῦν σ' ἔτ' ὠφελοῖμ' ἐγώ; (552); οἴμοι τάλαινα, κἀμπλάκω τοῦ σοῦ μόρου; (554); ἴσῃ νῷν ἐστιν ἡ 'ξαμαρτία (558). Antigone, cold and unyielding, still uses language that asserts their alienation: οὔτ' ἠθέλησας οὔτ' ἐγὼ 'κοινωσάμην (538-539); λόγοις δ' ἐγὼ φιλοῦσαν οὐ στέργω φίλην (543); μή μοι θάνῃς σὺ κοινά (546); σῶσον σεαυτήν (553); σὺ μὲν… ἐγὼ δέ… (555, 557, 559-560). There have, however, been a number of key reversals. If the opening scene was dominated by the contrast between passion and prudence – where Antigone was the more emotionally driven of the two sisters, overcome with indignation for Creon and concern for the corpse of Polyneices, while it fell to Ismene to be the voice of reason – here it is clearly Ismene who is more emotional, distraught at the prospect of losing Antigone and determined, no matter the cost, to do whatever she can to help her (544-545, 548, 550, 552, 554, 566), while Antigone accepts her fate with an almost detached passivity (553, 555, 557, 559-560).

Similarly, when Antigone discovered that her first attempt at Polyneices' burial had been tampered with, the guard compared her anguished scream over her brother's uncovered corpse to that of mother bird who discovers that her nest has been robbed of her chicks (422-428). Now, before she is led out from the palace to be questioned, it is Ismene whom Creon informs us has been 'raving' about like a madwoman inside the palace, driven out of her mind with anguish: λυσσῶσαν αὐτὴν οὐδ' ἐπήβολον φρενῶν (492). This new presentation of Ismene, as Winnington-Ingram has pointed

[2] Brown 1987: 166; Campbell 1871: 395.

out, "out of her senses" [and] "so different from that embodiment of *sophrosyne* we met in the Prologos… alone should guard us against under-estimating the individuality of Ismene."[3] It has often been argued that sensible, pragmatic Ismene does not 'feel' things as keenly as Antigone, that she is governed neither by emotion nor principle but by considerations of practicality. Indeed, this is precisely how the scholiast defined the essential difference between the two sisters in the prologue: αἱ ἀντιλογίαι δῆλαί εἰσιν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ τῷ πράγματι ἡ δὲ τῇ οἰκειότητι ἀκολουθεῖ.[4] As North has shown, however, in its most typical manifestations *sophrosyne* is neither a lack of emotion, nor is it simply 'cautious': "Rather it is the harmonious product of intense passion under perfect control, *vis temperata* in the felicitous Horatian phrase."[5] If Ismene was able to maintain control over her 'passion' in the prologue, because she was trying so desperately to persuade Antigone not to act and thereby save her life, things have clearly changed now. Creon, as is so often the case, mistakenly assumes that Ismene had been complicit in Polyneices' burial and that it is her own guilt at having transgressed his edict that has aroused this passion (493-496). As she makes her way on stage, however, the chorus correctly interprets the true source of Ismene's distress, sibling grief (526-530):

> καὶ μὴν πρὸ πυλῶν ἥδ' Ἰσμήνη,
> φιλάδελφα κάτω δάκρυ' εἰβομένη·
> νεφέλη δ' ὀφρύων ὕπερ αἱματόεν
> ῥέθος αἰσχύνει,
> τέγγουσ' εὐῶπα παρειάν.
>
> Look, here comes Ismene from the gates,
> shedding the tears of a loving sister.
> A cloud upon her brow
> mars her flushed face
> and moistens her fair cheek.

[3] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 133; 136 n. 56.
[4] Σ *Ant*. 47.1-47.2.
[5] North 1966: x.

Ismene's 'flushed face' is usually taken to be the result of emotional excitement, and yet both Jebb and Griffith point out that the application of αἱματόεν, 'suffused with blood', to the human face, ῥέθος, is unparalleled.[6] Bernadete suggests that Ismene's face is not merely flushed, but "bloody… from raking her cheeks" with her nails. He goes on to remark that "[n]othing of Antigone's ever provokes the Chorus to such concentrated poetic expression as Ismene has done".[7] Even though the chorus is later moved to tears out of pity for Antigone's fate (800-805), Antigone herself never weeps. These two descriptions of Ismene, overcome by emotion and not in possession of her senses, stand in marked contrast to Antigone's 'defiant demeanour' throughout her confrontation with Creon,[8] and is generally regarded as little more than a further illustration of the distinction between Antigone's heroic defiance and Ismene's stereotypical femininity.[9] As Kirkpatrick points out, however, Creon's edict had expressly forbidden not only the burial of Polyneices' corpse, but also any displays of public mourning (26-29). Whether Ismene is weeping for Antigone, Polyneices, or both her siblings, she continues, the fact remains that Creon already suspects Ismene (491-494, 531-535), and so for her to continue her mourning in Creon's presence is "not the actio[n] of a compliant or indecisive young woman. From the moment she steps into Creon's presence, Ismene makes it perfectly plain where her loyalties lie".[10] Indeed, Ismene's actions throughout this scene will continue to undermine the widely accepted view of her character as "the… embodiment of conformity and subservience to male authority".[11]

Brown has argued that the purpose of Ismene's despair is "to direct our attention, which has hitherto been concentrated on Antigone's deed and her defiance of Creon,

[6] Jebb 1888 and Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[7] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.
[8] Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[9] See, for example, Bernadete 1999 ad loc.
[10] Kirkpatrick 2011: 410.
[11] Griffith 1999: 62.

towards the pathos of her fate, which will be a major theme in the central part of the play."[12] What is of far greater significance, however, is how this reversal from the emotionally driven Antigone and the pragmatic Ismene, from before Antigone's capture, to the defiant but detached Antigone and the emotionally overwrought Ismene, after Antigone has been apprehended, allows Sophocles to challenge our earlier understanding of Ismene's character and the nature of the contrast between the two sisters. As we discover that prudent, practical little Ismene is as capable of being overcome by 'kinship', οἰκειότης, as Antigone herself, we begin to realise that the essential difference between Antigone and Ismene is not nearly as straightforward as that of heroic audacity and pragmatic timidity, devotion to family and submission to the *polis*, or selfless martyrdom and unprincipled self-preservation. Ismene, as we are about to discover, is as willing as Antigone to fight, and even die, for that one thing without which life would not be worth living. It just happens that the two sisters differ fundamentally over what this one thing is: for Antigone, it is a dead brother; for Ismene, a living sister.

δέδρακα τοὔργον

Despite the perception of this scene's relative lack of dramatic interest, there are two aspects of the sisters' second meeting that sit uneasily with scholars. The first is Ismene's attempt to share in Antigone's guilt. The second is Antigone's intensifying cruelty towards Ismene. Creon asks Ismene whether she will confess to her part in the burial or otherwise swear that she had no knowledge of it: φέρ', εἰπὲ δή μοι, καὶ σὺ τοῦδε τοῦ τάφου / φήσεις μετασχεῖν, ἢ 'ξομῇ τὸ μὴ εἰδέναι; (534-535). Ismene did 'know', but this is not what she confesses to. Instead, she claims an equal share of guilt in the burial itself (536-537):

[12] Brown 1987: 166.

δέδρακα τοὔργον, εἴπερ ἥδ' ὁμορροθεῖ,
καὶ ξυμμετίσχω καὶ φέρω τῆς αἰτίας.

I have done the deed – if she consents –
and I claim my share of the guilt.

'I have done the deed': Harry, Rouse, Honig and Kirkpatrick have all proposed that we should take Ismene at her word here; all four scholars have argued that Ismene, unbeknownst to either Antigone or Creon, was in fact responsible for the first burial.[13] This view has not been favourably received. Kirkwood, for example, denounced this reading as a "fantastic interpretation" based on "the wildest nonsense" which both "misreads the character of Ismene and destroys the isolated heroism of Antigone";[14] and Goldhill has argued that this interpretation "requires an extraordinary act of willful reading against the grain."[15] Although I agree with this view, Kirkwood's assessment is too harsh. I do not believe, moreover, that the notion of Ismene's having performed the first burial contradicts Sophocles' portrayal of her character – that Ismene is too weak, selfish, or submissive, in other words, to have dared such an act – or, as Rothaus has argued, that "such an important action cannot be attributed to a minor character" like Ismene.[16] Rather, like Goldhill, I feel that this reading relies far too heavily on inference and supposition, and has little to no textual support. Kirkpatrick has argued that this interpretation of the play "suggests a view of Ismene as an intriguing, layered character".[17] But the fact that Ismene did not actually play a part in the burial, as Wells has correctly pointed out, "does not… detract from her loyalty to her sister."[18] I would suggest that the same holds true for the intricacy of her

[13] Harry (1911), Rouse (1911), Honig (2011), Kirkpatrick (2011). Moro (2021) agrees that this reading of the play is plausible.
[14] Kirkwood 1958: 71.
[15] Goldhill 2012: 247.
[16] Rothaus 1990: 209.
[17] Kirkpatrick 2011: 414. Kitto (1956: 140-141) makes a similar point: "By taking Ismene's confession seriously, Rouse… turned Ismene into a much more interesting character than most of us had taken her to be." However, Kitto also rejects this reading of the play as "a very expensive explanation of the double burial" (142).
[18] Wells 1900 ad loc.

characterisation; that her confession to a crime she did *not* commit in no way lessens the complexity of her character.[19]

In keeping with the predominantly reductive view of Ismene's character, however, Ismene's attempt to share her sister's guilt has, for the most part, been met with dismissive contempt. Jebb argued that Ismene's avowal is nothing but an "emotional after-impulse… of a sentimental and almost hysterical kind" – that Ismene is driven "by a feverish remorse, and… an impulse towards self-immolation" as she desperately tries to "cancel [out her] earlier conduct" and "make amends to the dead";[20] Saunders that Ismene's "attempt to shoulder the blame" amounts to little more than "a distraction in the story", the only object of which is to "give us a last display of Antigone's spirit" so that her appearance in the *kommos* is "doubly pathetic";[21] Foley that Ismene's "change of mind [is] so halfhearted that no one would believe it";[22] and Honig that "this late effort to share her sister's fate seems so wildly out of character that it almost demands to be discounted."[23]

To regard Ismene's desire to share Antigone's death as being either 'wildly out of character' or as some hysterical yet feeble attempt to atone for her past failings is to misunderstand not only Sophocles' characterisation of Ismene in the first place, but also how this scene is meant to deepen and modify our understanding of the character we were presented with in the prologue. Griffith, who largely shares Jebb's view of Ismene's character, concedes that "her claim to 'share responsibility'" is a "moving

[19] Cf. García 2018: 29.
[20] Jebb 1888: xxix.
[21] Saunders 1934: 21.
[22] Foley 2002: 186 n. 94. Foley claims that this is the scholiast's view, which she herself shares, but her reading of the scholiast's explanation on this passage is incorrect. The scholiast does not claim that Ismene's admission is either 'halfhearted' or 'unbelievable', merely that the purpose of her conditional phrase – εἴπερ ἥδ' ὁμορροθεῖ – is to make it clear that she is lying and that she did not actually take part in the burial: ὅρα πῶς ἑαυτὴν πρόδηλον ὡς συκοφαντοῦσαν ποιεῖ· ὁμολογεῖ γὰρ πεπραχέναι ταύτης συντιθεμένης ὅπερ ἀδύνατον. ὁμοφωνεῖ (Σ *Ant*. 536.1-536.4).
[23] Honig 2011: 43.

moment", but he also dismisses it as an "unexpected display of loyalty".[24] While the act itself – Ismene's sudden rejection of any concern for her own safety – may be 'unexpected', the 'display of loyalty' is entirely in character with the affection Sophocles had Ismene display towards Antigone throughout the prologue. Ismene's view of the burial may have differed drastically from Antigone's, but she nevertheless affirmed Antigone's devotion to Polyneices and made repeated attempts to maintain a sense of connectedness with Antigone (82, 84-85, 98-99). Moreover, as Scodel has pointed out, while "Sophoclean characters… do not exactly develop, [they do] show different aspects of themselves as their situations change, and they can surprise an audience."[25] This is precisely what has happened here: Ismene's situation has changed, and her responses have developed accordingly. In the prologue, before Antigone defied Creon's edict, it seemed that Ismene's primary concern was to avoid the 'same fate' (κοινὸν μόρον 56-57) as the rest of their family. Now that Antigone has been captured, however, and sentenced to the 'worst fate' (μόρου κακίστου 489) – which is precisely what Ismene had most feared (κάκιστ' ὀλούμεθ' 59) – it starts to become apparent that it is not just *any* life that Ismene has been so determined to preserve, but a life *with* Antigone. That hope has now been destroyed, and so Ismene does something 'surprising': she actively seeks that which, in the prologue, she was most desperate to avoid – a κοινὸν μόρον. Acting against what Sophocles has established as her natural predisposition for *sophrosyne*, Ismene now endeavours to die with Antigone. To ask how we can be expected to accept this sudden display of daring which Ismene so clearly lacked before, is to fall victim to Antigone's own reductive and unambiguous worldview, where one is categorically either a hero or a coward, and to dismiss, as Antigone herself does, the small acts of agency Ismene displayed in the prologue: her offer to be Antigone's co-conspirator (84-85), for example, which also carried the penalty of death, or the assertion of her own individuality as she refused to yield to pressure from Antigone, despite the danger of

[24] Griffith 1999 ad loc.; 212 n. 526-81.
[25] Scodel 2005: 243.

losing her last surviving family member (65-68, 79-80). Ismene's 'sudden' decision to stand by Antigone, then, is not so much a sharp discontinuity in character as an extension, a fleshing out, of what was already there, as Sophocles reveals a different aspect or dimension to her character.

D'Ooge is therefore correct when he comments that this scene brings "the true character of Ismene… more clearly to view", but wrong in asserting that what it reveals about her is that she is "affectionate and unselfish, but timid and weak."[26] Similarly, Campbell is mistaken when he points to Ismene's conditional phrase εἴπερ ἥδ' ὁμορροθεῖ as "significant of the irresolute character of Ismene."[27] The dramatic purpose of Ismene's qualification, 'if she consents to' (or 'allows') my claim', is two-fold. The first, as the scholiast explains, is to make it clear to the audience that Ismene is lying; that she had no actual part in the burial and is only pretending to have 'performed the deed'.[28] The second is to prepare the way for Antigone's vehement refusal by reminding us of her earlier threat in the prologue: οὔτ' ἂν κελεύσαιμ', οὔτ' ἄν, εἰ θέλοις ἔτι / πράσσειν, ἐμοῦ γ' ἂν ἡδέως δρῴης μέτα. (69-70).[29] Sophocles needed the condition, but there is nothing 'weak', 'timid', 'halfhearted' or 'irresolute' about the confession itself. In her sum total of 60 lines, Ismene only makes twelve first-person assertions, three of which are in these two lines: δέδρακα τοὔργον… καὶ ξυμμετίσχω καὶ φέρω τῆς αἰτίας.[30] Sophocles has Ismene begin with the emphatic δέδρακα. Not only is this verb formed from the same stem (δράω) as one of the key terms which define the essence of the heroic principle itself, "*to drastêrion*, ('the active

[26] D'Ooge 1890 ad loc. Cf. Tovar (1960: 31), who takes a particularly negative view of Ismene's character: "Un tercer término nos presenta la vulgar, modesta y débil Ismene, la hermana de la heroína, que no se decide a seguirla, y que luego, en un arranque muy de persona débil, la quiere sustituir en el holocausto."

[27] Campbell 1871 ad loc.

[28] Σ *Ant*. 536.1-536.4: ὅρα πῶς ἑαυτὴν πρόδηλον ὡς συκοφαντοῦσαν ποιεῖ· ὁμολογεῖ γὰρ πεπραχέναι ταύτης συντιθεμένης ὅπερ ἀδύνατον. ὁμοφωνεῖ. Cf. D'Ooge 1890, Wells 1900, and Brown 1987 ad loc. Also Kitto 1956: 159.

[29] Cf. Campbell & Abbott 1886, Jebb 1888, Griffith 1999 ad loc, and Honig 2011: 43.

[30] 16, 40, 66, 67, 78, 82, 536-537, 540, 552, 554. Of the other nine, four express her affection for Antigone: 82, 540, 552, 554.

principle')",[31] it also happens to be the same verb that Antigone uses when she makes her own confession to Creon in 443 (φημὶ δρᾶσαι). While Antigone uses the aorist infinitive, however, Sophocles gives Ismene a perfect indicative. The perfect, as Knox has pointed out, is the tense most closely associated with the heroic resolve since it is used to "express the resolution as an objective and permanent fact."[32] So Ismene readily abandons any thought of her own safety to assert, not 'tentatively'[33], but boldly and unequivocally that she, like Antigone, has 'done the deed' and therefore bears an equal share of the guilt.

In her work on the role of women in Greek tragedy, Foley explains that the grand tragic heroines – Clytemnestra, Medea, Electra, Hecuba, Deianeira and, of course, Antigone herself – "frequently make important autonomous decisions, often in the absence of male guardians", which "deliberately flout the authority of their men."[34] Unlike these heroines, Foley claims that Ismene has willingly embraced the belief that "women should not… be independent moral agents at all".[35] Similarly, Tyrrell & Bennett state that she is a "paradigm [of] compliance and submission",[36] and Roisman that she has an "avowed temperamental incapacity to disobey the edicts of rulers".[37] Yet here we have quiet, timid Ismene taking the initiative to make an entirely autonomous decision, independent of any pressure or advice from anyone else, to proclaim, to Creon himself, that she has wilfully disobeyed his royal, male authority. That Ismene is lying or that Antigone refuses to endorse Ismene's claim, as Moro has pointed out, does not alter the effect of her declaration "inasmuch as she becomes immediately guilty in the king's eyes."[38] Like the other tragic heroines, therefore,

[31] North 1966: ix.
[32] Knox 1964: 68. Cf. *Ant.* 203, *El.* 947, 1049, *Ph.* 1277.
[33] Kitto 1956: 143.
[34] Foley 2002: 8.
[35] Foley 2002: 179, cf. 181
[36] Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 77.
[37] Roisman 2018: 70.
[38] Moro 2021: 118, 120.

Ismene directly challenges not only gender norms, but also the pervasive view of her character as a passive, compliant woman incapable of decisive action or moral agency. For her decision to publicly stand by Antigone, however, Ismene has for the most part only incurred further disdain.

And yet, unlike Antigone – for whom death is of 'no consequence' (οὐδὲν ἄλγος 466) – Ismene's display of loyalty requires her to confront her own limits and intentionally place herself at risk. The scholiast noted that Ismene first revealed her cautious nature when she labelled Antigone's as yet unspecified intention to act a 'danger' (κινδύνευμα);[39] he now comments that even though Ismene did not collaborate in the burial, 'she throws herself into danger' (ῥίπτει ἑαυτὴν εἰς κίνδυνον).[40] What is more, the 'danger' Ismene now willingly 'throws herself into' is far greater than that which she initially sought to avoid. When Antigone first resolved to transgress Creon's edict, it was by no means a foregone conclusion that she would be caught. When Ismene falsely admits her guilt, however, is it certain that the culprit 'will not escape the worst fate' (οὐκ ἀλύξετον μόρου κακίστου 488-489). It is a widely accepted view that Antigone is never for one moment conflicted over her decision to bury Polyneices: "In her there is no conflict between love and duty, between what she wishes to do and what she knows to be right."[41] Because of this, Antigone is never tested in the same sense that Ismene is. She is never forced to choose, as Ismene is, between 'what she wishes to do' and 'what she knows to be right'; never required to act against her own heroic resolve, against her own nature. Ismene is not only tested once in the play, but twice; and if she did indeed 'fail' in the prologue, does she not pass the test now?

[39] Σ *Ant*. 42.1-42.2: ἐκ τούτου ἤδη τὸ ἦθος ὅρα κινδύνευμα καλούσης τὸ ἔργον.
[40] Σ *Ant*. 561.2-561.3.
[41] Bowra 1944: 96. Cf. Whitman 1951: 84; Foley 2002: 192; Honig 2011: 48 n. 21; and Wauke 2020: 45.

Kirkwood and Bowra are among the few scholars who have recognised Ismene's act for what it truly is: 'courageous'.[42] It is also one of the finest moments in the play, as "this gentle creature" proves that she "can be noble too".[43] Although Carter has shown that "changes of mind are far from atypical in Sophocles", he is mistaken when he argues that she has "changed her mind completely"; that "she would prefer to have shared in the deed."[44] Ismene may have 'changed her mind' about risking her life, but this is not because her opinion about 'the deed' itself has altered in any way.[45] Webster is also mistaken when he claims that Ismene wants to share Antigone's fate because she now "recognises the superior right of the divine law."[46] Ismene always knew that the obligation to bury Polyneices was the 'right' thing (98-99). Similarly, Tyrrell & Bennett have claimed that Ismene now wishes to 'jump ship';[47] but Ismene has always been firmly on Antigone's side, even if she did not approve of her methods. Mogyoródi contends that Ismene "would now like to share the punishment" so that she can also claim a share of Antigone's 'honour'.[48] Unlike Antigone (72, 96-97, 502-504) however, Ismene has never once revealed the slightest interest in honour or glory. Jebb, Bowra and Bernadete have all argued that Ismene admits to the burial "on the assumption that intention counts as much as act"; that, because she shared Antigone's judgement of Creon's edict and "would herself [have] act[ed] in the same way if she had the courage", Ismene considers herself as guilty as Antigone.[49] This, too, is not quite right. For one thing, a lack of 'courage', as has now become clear, was never the issue; and for another, it is soon made apparent that is not so much Antigone's 'guilt' that Ismene is interested in sharing, but her death.

[42] Kirkwood 1958: 120; Bowra 1944: 80.
[43] Campbell & Abbott 1886: 169. However, Campbell & Abbott immediately follow their remark with the qualification "… when much enforced".
[44] Carter 2005: 167 n. 21; 176.
[45] Cf. Kells 1963: 56.
[46] Webster 1969: 77.
[47] Tyrrell & Bennett 2008-2009: 7.
[48] Mogyoródi 1996: 364.
[49] Bernadete 1999 ad loc; Bowra 1944: 80; Jebb 1888 ad loc.

μή μοι θάνῃς σὺ κοινά

As in the prologue, Ismene's attempt was bound to fail. The position Antigone has taken is so extreme that no show of support on Ismene's part could possibly atone for her earlier 'betrayal' (46). Antigone now keeps the promise made at 69-70 and refuses to allow Ismene any claim in the burial (538-539):

> ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐάσει τοῦτό γ' ἡ δίκη σ', ἐπεὶ
> οὔτ' ἠθέλησας οὔτ' ἐγὼ 'κοινωσάμην.
>
> No, justice will not allow you this, since you
> were not willing, and I gave you no part in it.

After the vocative particle ὦ, *koinon* was the first word of the play and the basis of Antigone's passionate appeal to the 'common' bond and 'common' blood that defined her relationship with Ismene. She now rejects any sense of commonality, of *koinia*, in precisely the same terms she used to evoke it in the prologue: οὔτ' ἐγὼ 'κοινωσάμην, 'I did not make common'; μή μοι θάνῃς σὺ κοινά, 'do not die a common death with me' (546).[50] Ismene tries to explain why her position has changed (540-541):

> ἀλλ' ἐν κακοῖς τοῖς σοῖσιν οὐκ αἰσχύνομαι
> ξύμπλουν ἐμαυτὴν τοῦ πάθους ποιουμένη.
>
> But in your troubles I do not shrink from
> making myself a fellow-voyager in your suffering.

In the prologue it emerged that Antigone's greatest 'trouble' (the need to guard Polyneices against a dishonourable death) was directly opposed to Ismene's greatest 'trouble' (the need to guard against the same fate as the rest of their family) and that it was precisely this fundamental distinction that transformed their initial closeness into bitter opposition. Griffith comments that "Ismene characteristically thinks of

[50] Goldhill 2006: 158: "From intense recognition to no recognition at all, from common blood to refusing the claim of the common."

maidenly shame, not fear, as the emotion to be overcome in 'voyaging' with Antigone in her troubles."[51] This is unfair. Firstly, it was not 'shame' that originally drove Ismene's resolve not to act. Haunted by their family's wretched past (11-17, 49-60), Ismene bowed to the inevitable (39-40, 67-68, 78-79, 90, 92) not out of feminine modesty, but rather her desperation to try and preserve its last two survivors: νῦν δ' αὖ μόνα δὴ νὼ λελειμμένα σκόπει / ὅσῳ κάκιστ' ὀλούμεθ', εἰ… (58-59). Now that Antigone herself is 'in trouble' (ἐν κακοῖς), however, and any hope of a life together free from further suffering is gone, things have shifted dramatically for Ismene; she now actively seeks that which she initially dreaded most: a 'common fate' (κοινὸν μόρον 56-57). Secondly, as Kamerbeek has pointed out, οὐκ *αἰσχύνομαι* is not used here in the sense of 'I am not ashamed to', but rather 'I would be proud to', 'I would make it a point of honour to'.[52] Ismene is not so much saying, then, that she is no longer 'ashamed' to stand by her sister – as if Antigone's transgressive behaviour had previously embarrassed her or been a source of shame in some way – but rather, as Fainlight & Littman have translated: "I would be proud to sail with you upon this sea of troubles."[53] Read this way, Ismene's loyalty towards Antigone becomes less a display of "sentimental and almost hysterical… remorse",[54] and instead begins to resemble Antigone's own devotion to Polyneices: Antigone also considers it 'a point of honour' to stand by her sibling in his time of need (45-46, 71-72, 89, 96-97); she also wishes to share her sibling's fate (73); and she also values the bonds of *philia* above her own life (465-468).

Resentful of Ismene's earlier 'cowardice', Antigone once again insists that she has no right to claim a share in 'the deed' (542-543):

[51] Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[52] Kamerbeek 1978 ad loc.
[53] Fainlight & Littman 2009.
[54] Jebb 1888: xxix.

ὧν τοὔργον, Ἅιδης χοὶ κάτω ξυνίστορες·
λόγοις δ' ἐγὼ φιλοῦσαν οὐ στέργω φίλην.

Whose deed it was, Hades and those below are witnesses.
I have no love for a loved one who loves in words alone.

The division between the two sisters is reflected everywhere in verbal antitheses. Whereas Antigone stresses at every point the difference between Ismene and herself through her persistent use of personal and possessive singular pronouns (σέ, ἐγὼ, μοι, σεαυτῆς, σύ, σοὶ, σεαυτήν, σὺ μὲν… ἐγὼ δέ), Ismene's language strains to recapture a sense of association with Antigone. In each of her first three speeches, Ismene uses some form of σύν, either as preposition or prefix, to convey a sense of 'being-with': ξυμμετίσχω (537), ξύμπλουν (541), σὺν σοὶ (545). As Wauke has pointed out, these σύν-compounds recall Antigone's own language from the prologue, when she first tried to recruit Ismene's cooperation (εἰ ξυμπονήσεις καὶ ξυνεργάσῃ σκόπει 41). With this "mirrored language", Wauke continues, "Ismene attempts to signal to her sister that she is on her side."[55] As we recall from the prologue, however, as soon as Ismene revealed her own intention not to 'share' in the burial, Antigone replaced her earlier use of the dual (3, 21) with differentiating 'you' *versus* 'me' constructions (71-72, 76-77, 80-81). This insistence on their disjunction continues throughout this second *agon*. Antigone rejects Ismene at every turn, countering each of her three σύνs with a marked ἐγώ (οὔτ' ἐγὼ 'κοινωσάμην 539, λόγοις δ' ἐγὼ φιλοῦσαν οὐ στέργω φίλην 543, ἀρκέσω θνήσκουσ' ἐγώ 547). Turning a deaf ear to Ismene's efforts at reconciliation, Antigone offers up her own σύν-compound (ξυνίστορες) to signify a connection not between Ismene and herself, but with Hades and the dead.[56]

[55] Wauke 2020: 43.
[56] Cf. Wauke (2020: 43), who argues that Antigone's echo of Ismene's language here is a deliberate 'mockery'.

What has "created [this] unbridgeable gulf" between Antigone and Ismene, as Brown has noted, is the "fact that one sister acted when the other did not".[57] Indeed, it is precisely on this basis that Antigone further defines away Ismene's relation to herself: λόγοις δ' ἐγὼ φιλοῦσαν οὐ στέργω φίλην. For Antigone, action and speech go hand in hand; because Ismene did not *act*, she has conclusively and irreversibly proven herself unworthy of Antigone's affection. A favourite polar expression in ancient Greek literature, Tyrrell & Bennett have argued that, for fifth century Athenians, "the antithesis of *logos*/*ergon*, word/deed [was] tantamount to falsehood/reality". They also point out, however, that while "the effect at the time may have been to prejudice views of the conflict toward Antigone's position, as has happened among many moderns… what must not be lost sight of in admiration for what Antigone does is what she does not do, that is, she no more than Ismene buries her brother."[58] Bernadete makes a similar point. Ismene's refusal in the prologue, he correctly argues, was "not based on any agreement with Creon"; "as far as… intention goes, [Ismene was always] on Antigone's side." So, "if those below look to intention and not to accomplishment, Ismene would be guaranteed as loving a reception as Antigone." Moreover, since Antigone's plan to bury Polyneices fails, "[o]ne cannot therefore help wondering whether Antigone's vehemence in insisting that act must be strictly understood does not arise from her fear that those below will hold her own act to be no more than an intention".[59] Antigone's accusation that Ismene shows her love 'only in words' is 'grossly unfair'[60] in another respect also: Ismene's false confession may only amount to 'words', but her desire to share Antigone's death is no less genuine than Antigone's own willingness to die for Polyneices. These are 'words' that can lead to her death, and they are only prevented from being realised as 'deed' by Antigone herself.

[57] Brown 1987: 166 n. 526-81.
[58] Tyrrell & Bennett 2008-2009: 7.
[59] Bernadete 1999: 14-15; 70.
[60] Brown 1987 ad loc. Cf. Blundell 1989: 112.

Ismene begs Antigone not to reject her (544-545):

> μήτοι, κασιγνήτη, μ' ἀτιμάσῃς τὸ μὴ οὐ
> θανεῖν τε σὺν σοὶ τὸν θανόντα θ' ἁγνίσαι.
>
> No, my sister! Do not deem me unworthy
> to die with you and consecrate the dead.

Ismene's σύν-repetitions also recall Antigone's famous description of her own *physis* in 523: οὔτοι συνέχθειν, ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν. While Antigone may claim that it is her 'nature to join in love rather than in hate', her conception of *philia* turns out to be "shockingly exclusive".[61] The sameness of their brothers' origin, for Antigone, outweighs any of their subsequent differences (510-521);[62] the claims of kinship-*philia*, as far as Antigone is concerned, also outweigh any of Polyneices' offenses, the nature of which she pointedly overlooks throughout the play. A mere 30 lines after this declaration of her "dedication to *philia* and rejection of enmity", however, Antigone "rejects her sister for a perceived disloyalty of a much more venial kind."[63] Kirkwood has argued that the reason Antigone refuses Ismene's plea is because she "knows that Ismene is even yet not in real sympathy with her spirit."[64] This, of course, is quite true. Ismene entreats Antigone not to deem her unworthy of fulfilling her sacred duty to the dead (τὸν θανόντα θ' ἁγνίσαι). While García's assessment that Ismene "only pretends to respect the dead"[65] is perhaps too harsh, there is no doubt that Polyneices is *not* her primary concern here. It is Antigone's fate alone that drives Ismene throughout this scene. As Winnington-Ingram has explained so succinctly:

> It would still be touching, if [Ismene] came before us full of remorse for a missed chance, longing to retrieve her moral position, but showing a pathetic incompetence in the pursuit of martyrdom. But that is not, I

[61] Hahnemann 2019: 11.
[62] Bernadete 1999: 71 n. 34.2.
[63] Blundell 1989: 113.
[64] Kirkwood 1958: 121. Cf. Brown 1987 166: n. 538-49: Ismenes' "repentance… has come too late and for the wrong reasons".
[65] García 2018: 30.

> think, how Sophocles presents her… By her transparent subterfuge, she does not seek death for the sake of the dead, but of the living now condemned to die. Of the dead she speaks three words at the end of a sentence, but the whole stress of the dialogue is upon Antigone and the desire to share her fate.[66]

Not sharing her own dedication to the 'unwritten laws' (454-455), however, is only one aspect of the motivation behind Antigone's rejection. There is also a strong element of spitefulness here, of wanting to punish Ismene for her initial unwillingness to honour her 'share' of their responsibility toward Polyneices. Because Ismene did not respond 'appropriately' (83 cf. 98-99) to Antigone's initial call to *koinia* (1), she now scornfully refuses to 'share' anything with her at all (546-547):

> μή μοι θάνῃς σὺ κοινά, μηδ' ἃ μὴ 'θιγες
> ποιοῦ σεαυτῆς· ἀρκέσω θνήσκουσ' ἐγώ.[67]
>
> Share not my death, no, nor claim for yourself those things in which you did not have a hand! My death is pleasing enough.

More importantly, Antigone also seeks to preserve for herself the glory which she so firmly believes will attend her death (72, 96-97, 502-504). As Knox has pointed out: "Like Achilles she has chosen a short life with glory… And like Achilles… she wants no other participants to lessen her full possession of the thing for which she gives her life."[68] Antigone has once again misunderstood Ismene's purpose. Ismene never shared her sister's heroic obsession with glory, fame or profit. Nor does she seek to 'claim any for herself' (μηδ' ἃ μὴ 'θιγες ποιοῦ σεαυτῆς) now. Although Kirkpatrick has argued that "Ismene is an archetype of undaring defiance" who "symbolically challenges Creon's power" and "manipulates traditional feminine roles… into a weapon",[69] and indeed even Creon assumes that Ismene is involved in a subversive attempt to 'rise against his throne' (531-533), this is not Ismene's intention. Ismene has

[66] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 133-134. Cf. Brown 1987 166 n. 540, 167 n. 545.
[67] Jebb (1888 ad loc.) points out that "the combination μή μοι… σὺ has a scornful, repellent tone."
[68] Knox 1964: 65-66.
[69] Kirkpatrick 2011: 403, 418.

no more interest in resistance, in forming a political alliance against Creon,[70] than she does in securing a glorious reputation or a noble death. Ismene's concern has only ever been for the continued well-being of what remains of their wretched family.

καὶ τίς βίος μοι σοῦ λελειμμένη φίλος;

The scholiast says that Antigone accuses Ismene of being concerned only for her own 'life' (τοῦ βίου); that she did not 'cooperate' in the burial because she is a 'life-lover' (ἐπεὶ φιλοζωοῦσα οὐ συνέπραξας).[71] In its most basic sense, of course, this is true. Ismene did choose 'life' in the prologue; but then, unlike for Antigone, 'life' still held some meaning for Ismene – as long as she and Antigone were alive there was still the possibility, however remote, that life might yet hold some 'pleasure' or 'good fortune' (11-12; 16-17).[72] Now that Antigone has been condemned to death, however, Ismene desires only to join her.[73] Mogyoródi agrees that it "would be erroneous to contend that [Ismene] undergoes some kind of reversal", but he argues that this is because "her blindness to the truth of the situation [remains] almost pathological." He claims that she confesses to the burial "partly because of her general submissiveness, partly because of some kind of heroic or desperate self-sacrifice… But either way, her motives are rather confused."[74] On the contrary, however, Ismene's 'motive' could not be simpler – without Antigone, life is no longer worth living (548):

> καὶ τίς βίος μοι σοῦ λελειμμένη φίλος;
>
> And what life is dear to me, left behind here without you?

[70] Cf. Moro 2021: 118.
[71] Σ *Ant*. 549.1-549.2.
[72] Bernadete 1999: 71 n. 34.2: "Life… for Ismene can be dear or hateful; life for Antigone is merely what she still lives."
[73] Wauke 2020: 42.
[74] Mogyoródi 1996: 364, 363.

Linforth and Foley have both argued that Ismene is not displaying any genuine concern for Antigone here, but only for her own loss; that she is acting neither out of principle nor *philia*, but rather from her own "fears of being totally abandoned".[75] Whitman concedes that "Ismene is neither a fool nor a weakling", but adds that "one can only wonder why [someone] whose standards vary with circumstances" has ever managed to "wi[n] so much approval".[76] When Ismene refused to act in the prologue, "her passive acceptance of evil"[77] earned her the label of unprincipled, self-serving coward; now when she takes it upon herself to willingly offer up her own life, she remains an unprincipled, self-serving sycophant.

It is certainly true that Ismene displays a strong preoccupation with being forsaken by loved ones (ἐστερήθημεν 13, λελειμμένα 58, λελειμμένῃ 548, ἀμπλάκω 554, τῆσδ' ἄτερ 566, στερήσεις 574),[78] but is this any wonder given their family history? Deprived of their mother, their father, and their two brothers, Ismene initially believed that the 'worst' thing would be that they 'two who have been left all alone' (νὼ λελειμμένα 58) should meet the same fate. She has now come to understand, however, that the 'worst' thing is not that she and Antigone should suffer the 'same fate' (μόρον κοινὸν 56-57) as the others, but rather that they should *not*; that Antigone should die, and she be 'left all alone' without her: σοῦ λελειμμένῃ. Although Tyrrell & Bennett have argued that, like Antigone, "Ismene offers her life… but without [Antigone's] ulterior motives",[79] there is no denying that Ismene is thinking of her own fate here as much as Antigone's. Surely this is no more self-serving, however,

[75] Foley 2002: 194; Linforth 1961: 211. Cf. Picklesimer (2000: 225), who argues that Ismene's attempt to die with Antigone is driven by her stereotypically feminine fear of being left without a protector: "… su temor a la soledad, ese miedo atávico al desamparo que late siempre en el subconsciente de la doncella mítica, el mismo que llevó a la joven Erígone a colgarse de un árbol cuando encontró a su padre Icario mue... Es cierto que Ismene era ya una mujer sola en el sentido mítico, porque carecía de un padre o de un hermano en quien apoyarse, pero en cierto modo el carácter valeroso de Antígona le ofrecía seguridad. Antes que perderla Ismene prefiere morir".

[76] Whitman 1951: 89.

[77] Bowra 1944: 80.

[78] 574 belongs to the chorus; the rest are spoken by Ismene.

[79] Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 76.

than Antigone's own pursuit of heroic self-assertion and a glorious death. Nor does it detract from Ismene's "utter devotion to her sister".[80] Indeed, Ismene's devotion to Antigone comes to mirror Antigone's own devotion to Polyneices in a number of key respects: Antigone is her κασιγνήτη, 'birth-sibling' (544, cf. 49) – the same term that Antigone reserves only for her brothers (21, 870, 899, 915); it is Antigone who makes life *philos*, 'dear', to Ismene – just as it is Polyneices who is most *philos* to Antigone (73, 81)[81]; and Ismene does not hesitate to die with Antigone – just as Antigone considers it 'of no regard' (465-468) to die for Polyneices.

Kitto, Cairns and Foley have all argued that although Ismene "recognised where her duty lay", she lacks the integrity to sacrifice her life "for a principle".[82] In her discussion of Zupančič's ethical reading of *Antigone*, however, Honig explains that what defines an ethical choice…

> … is a principle, idea, commitment, or affiliation without which life would no longer be what it is – without which life would no longer be worth living. It may be what Bernard Williams calls 'integrity.' Or it may 'appear, for instance, as a 'point of honour' but [whatever it is] it is always something in which the subject recognises his/her own being – something which determines the subject beyond life and death'… This is what makes sacrifice or martyrdom possible. This, for Lacan, is what Polyneices is to Antigone, the one irreplaceable thing that is the ground of all else.[83]

As Honig correctly points out, this is also precisely what Antigone is to Ismene – that 'one irreplaceable thing' without which life holds no meaning: καὶ τίς βίος μοι σοῦ λελειμμένη φίλος; 548; τί γὰρ μόνη μοι τῆσδ' ἄτερ βιώσιμον; 566. The difference between Antigone and Ismene, then, cannot simply be reduced to a crude antithesis

[80] Brown 1987: 167 n. 547.
[81] Cf. Knox 1964: 80: "The word which above all reveals Antigone's preoccupation is '*philos*', 'beloved,' dear.'" And Mader 2010: 161: "Ismene professes her love for Antigone in tones that resemble Antigone's passionate pleas for her brother's priority."
[82] Kitto 1962: 159; Cairns 2016: 47; Foley 2002: 194.
[83] Honig 2011: 53.

between 'nobility' and 'affection', between 'principled' and 'personal' motives,[84] since Ismene is in fact no less willing to stake her life on a principle than Antigone herself – it just so happens that Ismene's 'principle' rests on a living sibling rather than a dead one.[85]

Whereas Antigone has limited her devotion to the kinship bond to include only their dead relations, Ismene reframes *philia* as a commitment which prioritises the living over the dead.[86] Antigone, however, does not acknowledge this conception of *philia* any more than most critics have. To her sister's heartfelt plea (καὶ τίς βίος μοι σοῦ λελειμμένη φίλος; 548), she responds "brutally"[87] (549):

> Κρέοντ' ἐρώτα· τοῦδε γὰρ σὺ κηδεμών.
>
> Ask Creon! Since he is the one you are so concerned about.

Jebb attempts to soften the harshness of Antigone's reply here by citing a parallel verse from Xenophon's *Anabasis* (3. 1. 17) to show that Antigone is merely stating the truth: that Ismene 'plead[s] Creon's cause' in the prologue.[88] As Knox has pointed out, however, "Antigone's words are much more cutting". The word κηδεμών signifies 'one who has charge of' a person or thing, so a 'guardian' or 'protector'. In Homer it refers specifically to the mourners who tend over the dead. In later authors, and particularly in Sophocles, it often refers to the 'guardianship' of female relatives.[89]

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[84] As, for example, Kirkwood (1958: 121) and Foley (2002: 194) have argued.

[85] Cf. Brown 1987: 166 n. 526-81: "Ismene… is, in her way, as courageous and self-sacrificing as [Antigone]"; Saxonhouse 1992: 70: "Ismene cares for those who live… but not for those who have died. Antigone is the one who is beloved, not the dead brother"; and Wauke 2020: 42, 44-45: "Ismene and Antigone share an equally passionate and enduring love for their own siblings. The key difference is that Antigone directs this love toward the dead and dishonoured Polyneices, while Ismene directs hers toward the stubborn and living Antigone… Ismene acts under the influence of an equally strong moral obligation toward her family. However, her care manifests in an intense desire to preserve the living members of her family…".

[86] Moro 2021: 122.

[87] Knox 1964: 20. Cf. Winnington-Ingram 1980: 135, Brown 1987 ad loc.

[88] Jebb 1888 ad loc.

[89] LSJ s.v. κηδεμών.

What Antigone is really implying, then, is that the 'care' Ismene has shown for Creon and his edict ought, were she a 'true' κηδεμών, to have been directed towards Polyneices and herself.[90] This is yet another jibe at Ismene's failure to behave as a 'proper' sibling ought. As well as being "brutally spiteful", as Brown notes, Antigone's reply is also "manifestly untrue."[91] Like Antigone herself, Foley may claim that "Ismene initially permits the city and its leader to override her responsibility to her dead brother", Tyrrell & Bennett that she "chooses her *polis* over her *philoi*", and Mogyoródi that she is merely Creon's 'puppet',[92] but this is an oversimplified reading of a motivation Sophocles has portrayed with a great deal more subtlety. It is not that Ismene deemed Creon or the *polis* of more importance than Polyneices, but rather that she deemed life and the living of more importance than the dead – and this is precisely the same principle that drives her decision to confess to the burial: to die for the living rather than for the dead.

Antigone's unremitting cruelty to Ismene is the second aspect of this scene that scholars have found troubling, especially those who sustain a fiercely idealised view of Antigone and her sororal bond with Ismene. Given her unfailing devotion to Polyneices and the rest of their dead kin, as well as her own insistence at 523 that οὔτοι συνέχθειν, ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν, they feel uneasy about Antigone's malicious treatment of Ismene and try to downplay it to mitigate any criticism that might be levelled against our heroine. Jebb, for instance, has argued that Antigone's attitude towards Ismene "is prescribed [by her] regard for truth and right" – that her "sternness is only that of truth; the hardness is only that of reality";[93] Simpson & Millar that "Antigone typifies… Family Love", that she clearly "loves Ismene just as much as she loves Polyneices", and that her vicious threats in the prologue "express

[90] Knox 1964: 176 n. 7. Cf. Griffith 1999 and Brown 1987 ad loc.
[91] Brown 1987 ad loc.
[92] Foley 2002: 194; Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 38; Mogyoródi 1996: 364.
[93] Jebb 1888: xxix.

resignation no less, if not more, than anger";[94] Wiersma that although "Antigone's dramatic situation… leaves no room for the tender feelings of before… she is still capable of being affectionate" with Ismene;[95] Nussbaum that "Antigone's pursuit of virtue is her own. It involves nobody else and commits her to abusing no other person"[96]; and Foley that "those who stress Antigone's harshness toward Ismene must consider first the consequences of passively acquiescing to Ismene's initial objections or accepting her proposed self-sacrifice."[97] The scholiast, Jebb, Sheppard, Simpson & Millar, Adams, Griffith, Honig, Kirkpatrick and Moro have all gone one step further, claiming that Antigone's cruelty is in fact an act of kindness; that she is trying to save Ismene's life.[98] Jebb, Sheppard, Simpson & Millar, Adams, Honig, Kirkpatrick and Moro all argue along the lines that Antigone's cruelty towards Ismene is entirely feigned, "a staged theatrical performance internal to the play whose addressee is not actually Ismene but rather Creon"; in which Antigone bestows "the gift of survival to the sister who initially sought to survive".[99] Knox and Griffith concede that Antigone's anger is genuine, but nevertheless maintain, in Knox's words, that "she is trying to save Ismene's life by impressing on Creon that her sister had no part in the defiance of his orders."[100]

As Kirkwood, Easterling, Winnington-Ingram, Brown and Hahnemann have all argued, however, this reading is clearly mistaken.[101] This "vicious" line, as Winnington-Ingram refers to 549, is entirely sincere.[102] Not only is Antigone carrying

[94] Simpson & Millar 1948: 78.
[95] Wiersma 1984: 44.
[96] Nussbaum 1986: 66.
[97] Foley 2002: 198.
[98] Σ *Ant*. 538.1-538.4; Jebb 1888: xxix; Sheppard 1947: 54; Simpson & Millar 1948: 78-81; Adams 1955: 55; Griffith 1999: 212 n. 526-81; Honig 2011: 46; Kirkpatrick 2011: 411; and Moro 2021: 121. Kamerbeek (1978: 109) and Scodel (2005: 243), although undecided, find this reading plausible.
[99] Honig 2011: 46, 44.
[100] Knox 1964: 65; Griffith 1999: 212 n. 526-81.
[101] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 134. Cf. Kirkwood 1958: 121, Easterling 1977: 125-126; Brown 1987: 166 n. 538-49; and Hahnemann 2019: 2, 12.
[102] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 135. Cf. Brown 1987: 166 n. 538-49.

out her earlier threat at 69-70, all of her lines up until this point have been spoken with the same "fierce pride and indignation"[103] she displayed throughout the opening scene. Moreover, "some of her retorts", as Easterling, Kirkwood and Winnington-Ingram have pointed out, clearly "recall the harsh way she spoke to her sister in the prologue, when there was no third party present".[104] So while the effect of Antigone's rejection will ultimately be to convince Creon of Ismene's innocence (771), "that is not her purpose".[105] Hahnemann and Kirkwood regard this determined misinterpretation of Antigone's motives as part of the wider "impulse to make Antigone into the kind of heroine we would like her to be rather than to grapple with the complex character Sophocles has created".[106] Honig, for example, prefers the view that Antigone is intentionally trying to save Ismene's life because this makes her "much more of a tragic heroine than on other accounts" and "rid[s] us of the problem… that she is a sister dutiful to Polyneices but not to Ismene".[107] However, the fact that Antigone is being genuinely cruel to Ismene does not in fact lessen her heroic appeal. On the contrary.

As we have seen, Antigone initially regards Ismene as a 'second self' and therefore takes it for granted that she will 'share' the same assumptions about the need to bury Polyneices. When it becomes clear that she does not, Antigone – who is already overwrought with indignation at Creon – now suffers a double blow: firstly, the one person left to her in all the world, and whom she instinctively believed would be on her side, has let her down; and secondly, the realisation that she is going to have to face Polyneices' burial, and everything which it entails, on her own. Ismene's attempt to dissuade Antigone only makes matters worse, because she now unexpectedly finds herself in the position of having to defend herself to the very person from whom she

[103] Brown 1987: 166 n. 538-49.
[104] Easterling 1977: 125-126. Cf. Kirkwood 1958: 121; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 134-135.
[105] Brown 1987: 166 n. 538-49.
[106] Hahnemann 2019: 12; Kirkwood 1958: 121.
[107] Honig 2011: 49.

expected unwavering allegiance. In his study on the nature of the Sophoclean hero, Knox points out that it is precisely "the emotional appeal of those who have claims on [their] affection" that the heroes find "hardest to resist", and consequently also the hardest to tolerate.[108] Antigone feels that Ismene has violated that which she herself holds most sacred, that special bond which exists between those who share the same blood, especially siblings from the same parents.[109] When Ismene 'betrays' this bond to side with Creon, and Antigone realises that it has fallen to her alone to save their brother from an eternity of shame and dishonour, it is as if this overwhelming "sense of duty… drie[s] up all human feeling except love for her brother"[110] (ἐγὼ δὲ δὴ τάφον / χώσουσ' ἀδελφῷ φιλτάτῳ πορεύσομαι 80-81). To carry out her resolve to 'honour Polyneices above all others' (ἐκπροτιμήσασ' 913), Antigone is forced to proceed, as the chorus comments, to the 'uttermost limits of daring' (ἔσχατον θράσους 853). But this comes at a price. The firmness of her resolve leaves no room for sympathy or affection. So, rather than diminishing her appeal in any way, Antigone's cruelty towards Ismene serves to enhance our appreciation of her heroism because it goes some way towards showing us just how much it really costs her.

ἀλγοῦσα μὲν δῆτ', εἰ γελῶ γ᾽, ἐν σοὶ γελῶ

Scholars are also divided over whether Antigone and Ismene ever come to achieve some form of reconciliation. Honig, for example, argues that like any sisters who "fight like cats and dogs and soon again are best friends", Antigone's protestations of hatred in the prologue have no lasting effect; that Antigone has already forgiven

[108] Knox 1964: 11-12.

[109] 1, 21, 45-46, 48, 81, 466-468, 503, 511, 513, 897-903, 904-915.

[110] Bowra 1944: 82. Also on line 81: "If she seems to lack sisterly feelings, it is because she has them in abundance and lavishes them on her dead brother who needs them, not on her sister who does not. In her single-minded devotion to her task she has no place for compromise." Cf. Campbell & Abbott 1886: 169; Whitman 1951: 86; Kirkwood 1958: 12-121; Wiersma 1984: 44.

Ismene before their second meeting.[111] Kirkpatrick, on the other hand, typifies the more conventional reading: "By their final exchange, Ismene and Antigone's relationship is in tatters, destroyed by hurled insults, charges of mockery, and declarations of hatred."[112] Neither is correct. Ismene, hurt by Antigone's gibe at 549, asks Antigone why she treats her so cruelly when it does not benefit her in any way (τί ταῦτ' ἀνιᾷς μ', οὐδὲν ὠφελουμένη), to which Antigone replies (551):

> ἀλγοῦσα μὲν δῆτ', εἰ γελῶ γ᾽, ἐν σοὶ γελῶ.
>
> Truly, if I do mock you, it is with pain that I do so.

While Jebb and Simpson & Millar have both argued that this line "expresses that the taunt sprang from anguish, not from a wish to pain" – that "Antigone does not want to hurt Ismene, but that she must, in order to save her sister's life"[113] – Kells and Blundell have both argued the exact opposite: that Antigone takes 'pleasure' in mocking Ismene; that she feels "entitled γελᾶν, to triumph over" her sister, which is indeed precisely "the response due to an enemy".[114] I suggest that it is somewhat more complicated than either of these views allow. In the prologue, Antigone redefined Ismene's position from that of *philê* to *echthra* (86-87, 93-94). She has just confirmed that, as far as she is concerned, Ismene belongs to Creon's camp (549). She now says that she is 'mocking' Ismene for her earlier cowardice; a reading which is supported by the scholiast's gloss: 'I mock you because you were not willing to act with me'.[115] As both Brown and Carter have noted, however, there is also a "distinct softening" in Antigone's tone here.[116] It seems as if Ismene's wounded reaction at 550 has finally broken through Antigone's cold façade and she softens, as she will again in her final

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[111] Honig 2011: 40 n. 12, 45. Cf. Reinhardt (1979: 79), who also does not attach any lasting significance to the sisters' altercation in this scene, dismissing it as "a real girls' fight".
[112] Kirkpatrick 2011: 422. Cf. Kells 1963: 55-56; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 134-135; Goldhill 2006: 157-158; Tyrrell & Bennet 2008-2009: 7, 13-14; Cairns 2016: 95; and Hahnemann 2019: 1, 12.
[113] Jebb 1888 ad loc.; Simpson & Millar 1948: 79. Cf. Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[114] Blundell 1989: 112 and n. 27; Kells 1963: 55. Cf. Campbell 1871 and Campbell & Abbott 1886 ad loc.
[115] Σ *Ant*. 551.2-551.3: καταγελῶ σου ὅτι οὐκ ἠθέλησάς μοι συμπονῆσαι.
[116] Brown 1987 ad loc.; Carter 2005: 177. Also D'Ooge 1890 ad loc.

lament,[117] and admits that instead of the 'pleasure' this mockery ought to occasion, she feels only 'pain' (ἀλγοῦσα).[118]

In her own way, Ismene is no less tenacious than her formidable sister. Just as she held firm to her own assessment about the hopelessness of Antigone's plan in the prologue (39-40, 65-68, 78-79, 90, 92), even in the face of Antigone's mounting onslaught, so now she persists in her decision to stand by her sister, despite Antigone's continuing rejection. She implores Antigone to let her still be of some 'use' to her (552):

> τί δῆτ' ἂν ἀλλὰ νῦν σ' ἔτ' ὠφελοῖμ' ἐγώ;
>
> Please, what might I do, even now, to be of help to you?

Woolsey, Jebb, D'Ooge, Wells and Griffith have all argued that ἀλλὰ νῦν should be understood as 'now at least', conveying the sense: 'Even if I did not help you before, let me now, at least, be of some help to you'.[119] What this implies, however, is that Ismene (along with Antigone and most scholars) is censuring her own earlier refusal to 'help'; that she has now changed her mind about the burial and wishes that she had taken part. As we have already seen, this is not correct. As 556 clearly shows (ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἀρρήτοις γε τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις), Ismene has not changed her opinion about the burial, nor does she now regret her attempt to try and dissuade Antigone from going through with it.[120] Rather, ἀλλὰ νῦν should be understood with ἔτι to give a strong present force to the line. Ismene is not here concerned with what led up to this point, but with what she might still do *even now* to help her sister: *even now* that Antigone is

[117] Cf. Campbell 1871: 395; Kitto 1956: 170; Gellie 1964: 7; Blundell 1989: 110; Saxonhouse 1992: 69 n. 34; and Scodel 2005: 242.
[118] Cf. Brown 1987 ad loc.: "She still feels estranged from Ismene, but is prepared to admit her grief at the estrangement."
[119] Woolsey 1855, Jebb 1888, D'Ooge 1890, Wells 1900, and Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[120] Cf. Kells 1963: 56: "She cannot bear to be separated from Antigone. This does not mean that she has changed her mind about the burying of Polyneices. She thought before that Antigone's decision… was wrong because it was unpracticable, and she still thinks so… She is true to herself just as Antigone is, and she cannot… go back on her reasons."

in such grave trouble, *even now* that Antigone has refused to have anything to do with her: 'What might I do, *even now* at this point, to help you?'[121] – which, after all, is how Antigone understands the question: σῶσον σεαυτήν 553. Antigone's determination to repel Ismene's attempts at reconciliation is matched only by Ismene's own determination to stand by her side. When Antigone insists, for example, that she will be the 'only one' to die in 547, ἀρκέσω θνήσκουσ' ἐγώ, the firmness of her resolve is underscored by the fact that ἐγώ has been postponed to emphatic last-word position. As Tyrrell & Bennett have pointed out, however, Ismene's determination not to abandon her sister equals that of Antigone's when her own ἐγώ is also delayed to last-word position: τί δῆτ' ἂν ἀλλὰ νῦν σ' ἔτ' ὠφελοῖμ' ἐγώ;[122]

Antigone says that the only 'help' Ismene can now provide would be to 'save' herself (553):

> σῶσον σεαυτήν· οὐ φθονῶ σ' ὑπεκφυγεῖν.
>
> Save yourself. I do not resent you for your escape.

How do we read this line? Kells has argued that Antigone's words are "just as harsh, just as barbed" as her cruel taunt at 549, and Honig that they are a genuine "gift, a shift from her earlier position when she did, indeed, begrudge Ismene's focus on survival."[123] Once again, I think that the issue requires more subtlety than either of these two options allows. While there is no denying that there is now an irrevocable dividing line between the two sisters – between she who acted and she who did not (538-539, 542-543, 546-547), between she who chose death and she who chose life (555, 559-560) – Antigone's reply here, while perhaps not quite as 'conciliatory' as Carter

[121] Cf. Kells (1963: 56): "What then can I – still – do to help you?"; Fainlight & Littman (2009): "There must be some way I could help you!".
[122] Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 77.
[123] Kells 1963: 66; Honig 2011: 47.

suggests,[124] nevertheless seems, like 551, to lack her earlier hostility and resentment.[125] While Antigone once again repels Ismene's efforts to reestablish any sense of their earlier connectedness by categorically dissociating Ismene's fate from her own (σῶσον σεαυτήν), there also seems to be the first stirring of a new-found recognition about that which has led Ismene and herself on such divergent paths, and which cannot now be undone. While I would not go so far as to say that she now "affirms the path she earlier demeaned as cowardly: that of survival",[126] I do believe that we are meant to take Antigone at her word here: she will not have Ismene share her death, but nor does she any longer 'bear her ill-will' for her choices: οὐ φθονῶ σ' ὑπεκφυγεῖν.

σὺ μὲν… ἐγὼ δέ…

What Antigone has still not understood, however, is that 'life' is no longer an 'escape' for Ismene, not when she stands to 'be deprived' of her reason for living:

> οἴμοι τάλαινα, κἀμπλάκω τοῦ σοῦ μόρου;
>
> Oh what misery! Am I really to be deprived of your fate?

As Jebb has pointed out, the deliberative subjunctive (ἀμπλάκω) "can be used, not only in asking what one is *to do*, but also in expressions of despair as to what one must suffer".[127] Had Antigone not now been condemned to death, Ismene would no doubt have rejoiced at their having 'escaped' the same miserable fate that claimed the rest of their family. But now that Antigone is to die, and has refused Ismene's attempt to die with her (μή μοι θάνῃς σὺ κοινά 546) – now that any hope of a 'shared fate' (κοινὸν μόρον 56-57) has become 'your fate' (τοῦ σοῦ μόρου) – she is devastated. The sisters

[124] Carter 2005: 175.
[125] Cf. Kamerbeek 1978 ad loc.: "the acc. c. inf. dependent on φθονῶ is rare. I do not feel any bitterness in these words." Also Carter 2005: 177.
[126] Honig 2011: 45.
[127] Jebb 1888 ad loc.

are not, after all, to become true counterparts to their two brothers; they are not to share a κοινὸν μόρον (56-57, 147). Antigone attributes their divergent fates to the opposing choices they made in the prologue: 'You chose life. I, to die' (σὺ μὲν γὰρ εἵλου ζῆν, ἐγὼ δὲ κατθανεῖν 555). Knox argues that she says this 'proudly', as if she were still rebuking Ismene for her earlier cowardice. Kitto claims that what Ismene really 'chose' was to be "one of the insignificant majority" and that she has justly been "condemned to the life which she preferred to her duty". Mogyoródi also considers this line to be deservedly 'reproachful' in tone, since Ismene's "evasive attitude, anxious reservations, and submissive perturbation" have made her "*guilty* of her sister's isolation and fall". [128] Following upon 551 and 553, however, I would suggest that this lingering feeling of resentment towards Ismene belongs rather to the scholars themselves than to Antigone, who has finally come to recognise that the inherent differences between Ismene and herself were always bound to lead them on their different ways (555, 557, 559-560). Antigone no longer 'resents' Ismene (οὐ φθονῶ σ' ὑπεκφυγεῖν 553) for the choices she has made; nevertheless, each of their choices has a necessary consequence and they both need to accept that things can never again be as they were before.

Just like Antigone in the prologue, an emotionally overwrought Ismene is not to be persuaded by reason. To Antigone's σὺ μὲν γὰρ εἵλου ζῆν, ἐγὼ δὲ κατθανεῖν, she counters: ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἀρρήτοις γε τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις (556). This is a difficult line. Broeckh takes ἀλλ' οὐκ… as referring to Ismene's choice 'to live', and translates "But not without my unspoken consideration", so something like: 'Had I done what I really believe (which, like you, is that we ought to bury Polyneices), but which I kept secret, I would not have chosen to live (but rather, like you, to die)'.[129] D'Ooge takes a similar approach, but argues that ἀρρήτοις… τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις refers to Ismene's spoken reassurances in the prologue that she agreed with Antigone's view about the need to

[128] Knox 1964: 35. Cf. Kells 1963: 55; Kitto 1956: 161; and Mogyoródi 1996: 363-364.
[129] Boeckh 1844 ad loc.

bury Polyneices: "'true, I chose to live, *but not with my words left unspoken*'… Ismene desires to remind her sister that it was not from indifference to Polyneices (78, 90) that she tried to dissuade her from burying him, and that she was one with her in feeling."[130] Brown, on the other hand, takes ἀρρήτοις… τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις to refer to the arguments Ismene has made in this scene about her desire to share Antigone's death: "'if I am not to share your death, at least I have done my best, in my recent words, to ensure that I would'."[131] Given the critical tradition's largely negative reception of Ismene's character, however, it is not altogether surprising that the reading most favoured is the one that happens to be least flattering to Ismene, where ἀλλ' οὐκ… is taken to refer to Antigone's choice 'to die', and ἀρρήτοις… τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις to Ismene's arguments against the burial in the prologue (49-68): 'But at least you did not choose death without my arguments (against that course of action) having been expressed'.[132]

While I agree that this is the most natural translation of the Greek, I do not agree with the sanctimonious 'I told you so' colouring which most translators give to the line, as if Ismene were almost boasting about the fact that her own decision concerning the burial has now been justified. Wyckoff, for example, gives "At least I was not silent. You were warned"; and Watling: "Although I warned you that it would be so."[133] This type of translation allows scholars like Foley to claim that "to the end [Ismene] will not acknowledge that Antigone acted appropriately", which in turn serves to support her argument that Ismene considers Antigone guilty of "moral myopia" and that her "change of mind [is] so halfhearted that no one would believe it"[134] – which is clearly wrong. Given Ismene's visible anguish at the beginning of this scene (491-492, 526-

[130] D'Ooge 1890 ad loc.
[131] Brown 1987 ad loc.
[132] Woolsey 1855, Campbell & Abbott 1886, Jebb 1888, Wells 1900, Kamerbeek 1978, and Bernadete 1999 ad loc. Griffith (1999 ad loc.) believes that it refers to both their choices: "'But at least (we did) not (choose) without my views being expressed'".
[133] Wyckoff 2013; Watling 1974. Cf. Jebb 1888, and Fainlight & Littman 2009.
[134] Foley 2002: 199. Cf. 176, 197, 199 n. 94.

530), together with her sincere exclamations of anguish at the prospect of losing Antigone (544-545, 548, 554) and the fact that she has never once responded with anger or resentment to any of Antigone's cruel accusations or retorts, it is not likely that she would now risk alienating or antagonising Antigone further with the snide insinuation that she has in fact been 'right' all along. Rather than having a dig at Antigone, Ismene is trying to console herself about Antigone's death by attempting to allay her own sense of guilt at having failed to protect her sister from a course of action which has directly led to her death, precisely as she had known it would (58-59): '(Yes, you chose to die,) but at least there was nothing I left unsaid in my attempt to dissuade you.'[135]

Regardless of how we choose to read 556, what is clear, as Bernadete has pointed out, is that, unlike Antigone, "Ismene still believes that it could have been otherwise". When Antigone said that Ismene 'chose to live' whereas she 'chose to die', he continues, "Antigone did not mean that either chose what she did among other possibilities… Antigone's choice was not based on argument, on reasons that someone could possibly refute."[136] And neither, as Antigone has come to recognise, was Ismene's. Both sisters followed the course of action which 'seemed best' (cf. 71, 76, 98) according to the demands of her own *physis*.[137] For Ismene, this was ζῆν; for Antigone, κατθανεῖν. And because they were each driven by, and adhered to, their own sense of moral obligation, neither of them has any cause for reproach (557):

[135] Cf. Campbell 1871 ad loc.: "it is not unnatural that she should attempt to clear herself from having allowed Antigone to act rashly without a warning from her. The words lose their ungenerous tone if they are supposed to be spoken half to herself. She is thinking aloud, and replying to a possible accusation of her own mind"; Bernadete 1999 ad loc.: "Antigone implies that Ismene's choice of life and her own choice of death are irrevocable; Ismene replies that as Antigone's choice was made in the face of her own warning, the choice was… no more than a proof of her own inability to persuade Antigone"; and Kells' (1963: 57) translation: "But I would have saved you, if words could have saved you."

[136] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.

[137] Knox (1964: 64) also argues that neither sister had much of a 'choice' in that each did what she thought best.

καλῶς σὺ μὲν τοῖς, τοῖς δ' ἐγὼ 'δόκουν φρονεῖν.

Your judgement seemed noble to some. Mine, to others.

Neither Campbell & Abbot nor Griffith accept that Antigone is being genuine here.[138] Jebb, Wells, Kamerbeek and Brown concede that she is not being sarcastic, but claim that she is merely once again drawing a pointed contrast between her own devotion to an eternal higher power (75, 89, 94-95, 450-460) and Ismene's parochial adherence to the dictates of human law: 'Your way of thinking (σὺ… φρονεῖν, i.e. that we should abide by Creon's edict and not bury our brother) seemed wise (καλῶς… 'δόκουν) to some (μὲν τοῖς, with τοῖς referring specifically to Creon and his supporters); my way of thinking (ἐγὼ… φρονεῖν, i.e. that we have no choice but to honour our obligations to our brother and the gods below) seemed wise to others (τοῖς δ', with τοῖς referring specifically to the gods below and the shade of Polyneices)' – with the implication that Antigone still considers her own 'way of thinking' far superior to Ismene's.[139] While it is clear that Antigone is making a distinction between Ismene's 'way of thinking' and her own, she also says that they have both behaved 'nobly', καλῶς, the same term that up until this point she has exclusively reserved for her own 'judgement' (καλόν μοι τοῦτο ποιούσῃ θανεῖν 72, καλῶς θανεῖν 97).

Bernadete argues that Antigone absolves Ismene of any blame for her death, since "Ismene's arguments met with the full approval of the living, she herself with the full approval of the dead."[140] I agree that Antigone is trying to reassure Ismene, but that is not all she is doing. Most scholars have recognised that Antigone undergoes some kind of change before her death; "that emotional gearing-up is succeeded by emotional exhaustion"[141] so that, although she never regrets her decision, she does

[138] Campbell & Abbott 1886; Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[139] Jebb 1888; Wells 1900; Kamerbeek 1978; and Brown 1987 ad loc. Woolsey (1855 ad loc.) has an entirely different take on this line: "τοῖς,… refers to Ismene's words; τοῖς δέ, to Antigone's deed."
[140] Bernadete 1999 ad loc.
[141] Gellie 1964: 7.

come to "recognis[e] the costs of her stand; she develops a more complex sense of herself and her world, of what she has excluded… confronting death she recognises the limits of her conception of life".[142] I suggest that a similar process has taken place here; that Ismene's show of unwavering devotion and genuine anguish throughout this scene has to an extent complicated Antigone's previously rigid conception of the boundaries that separate *philos* and *echthros*, *eugenês* and *kakos*, loyalty and betrayal, forcing her to 'develop a more complex' understanding of what has led Ismene and herself to this point. While I would not claim that Antigone forgives Ismene, or even that she fully sympathises with Ismene's position, she has come to recognise that 'what seemed best to her' is not necessarily the only worthy course of action.[143] While I do not agree with Mulroy's assessment that the sisters are now 'emotionally reconciled', he does raise an excellent point. Antigone says that 'your views seemed καλῶς to some; mine, to others'. The conversation in which these views were expressed, however, "was a private one by design, outside the city gates before the arrival of the chorus or any other character. No one heard it – except for thousands of spectators in the Theater of Dionysus." While Antigone herself might primarily be referring to a distinction between 'the living' (τοῖς μὲν) and 'the dead' (τοῖς δέ), Mulroy suggests that Sophocles is "tacitly acknowledging that he has created a morally ambiguous situation" not only for the characters within the play, but also for his audience – some of whom might agree with Ismene, and some with Antigone.[144] When the two sisters parted at the end of the prologue, it was Ismene who tried to reassure an overwrought Antigone not only of her own continued affection, but also of her affirmation of Antigone's devotion to Polyneices (98-99). Here, it is a resigned

[142] Private letter from Peter Euben (dated September 15, 1991) to Arlene Saxonhouse. Quoted in Saxonhouse 1992: 69 n. 43. Cf. Campbell 1871: 395; Kitto 1956: 170; Blundell 1989: 110; and Scodel 2005: 242.

[143] Cf. Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 77-78: "Ismene insists that she argued for another, equally valid course of action. And Antigone seems to concur: 'Nobly you seemed to some, and I to others, to think'… 'Nobly' (*kalôs*) is Antigone's word for how she wants to die (97), and now she uses that same word which confers upon Ismene's decision to live a similar nobility."

[144] Mulroy 2013: l.

Antigone who tries to offer a distraught Ismene a parting consolation that she no longer 'resents' her for doing 'what seemed best' to her since they have each been *kalos* in their own way.

Just as Antigone refused to be appeased by any of Ismene's pleas in the prologue, so Ismene will not now be comforted by Antigone's reassurance; nor will she accept that the situation is beyond all hope. In a last-ditch effort to reclaim a sense of their earlier affinity, she reintroduces the dual in her very last line addressed to Antigone in the play: καὶ μὴν ἴση νῷν ἐστιν ἡ 'ξαμαρτία (558). This is another line over which scholars disagree. The prevailing view is that Ismene is merely reiterating ("still feebly", according to Campbell) what she said earlier in 536-537; that because she knew about and sympathised with Antigone's plan, she is as guilty (ἴση νῷν … ἐξαμαρτία) of the burial as Antigone herself, at least as far as Creon is concerned.[145] I am not convinced that this suits the context, either in terms of what Antigone has just said in 557 or of her rejoinder in 559-560. Woolsey's explanation fits the context – "your fault in not listening to my words, and mine in not cooperating with you. We should have acted together"[146] – but seems rather strained. Mulroy's "We both fell short of gaining what we sought"[147] suits both the context and the force of Ismene's words; that whereas Ismene 'fell short of' dissuading Antigone, Antigone 'fell short of' burying Polyneices. The problem with this interpretation, however, is that we do not find out that Antigone's attempt at the burial has failed until the appearance of Teiresias. Griffith's suggestion is the most plausible: since neither sister has met with unanimous approval, their "'fault is equal'… in the eyes of one side or the other".[148] However, since what Antigone is contrasting in 557 is the difference between each sister's 'thinking' (φρονεῖν), it is not implausible to take the equally common meaning

[145] Campbell 1871; Jebb 1888; D'Ooge 1890; Wells 1900; Kamerbeek 1978; Brown 1987; Bernadete 1999 ad loc.; Bowra 1944: 81; and Kells 1963: 57.
[146] Woolsey 1855 ad loc.
[147] Mulroy 2013: l.
[148] Griffith 1999 ad loc.

of ἐξαμαρτία as 'error in judgement', 'mistake' rather than 'offense' or 'transgression'.[149] The sense of Ismene's reply to Antigone's 'Your views seemed noble to some; mine, to others' would then be: 'And yet both of us has made an equally (bad) mistake. You, because your views have cost you your life; me, because my views have cost me you'.

As Hahnemann has pointed out, regardless of how we interpret this line the "significance of [Ismene's] choice of the dual form νῷν… is clear: it marks her last hope of mending the broken bond of their previous union."[150] Antigone immediately splits 'us two' into an insistent 'you' and 'me' (559-560):

> θάρσει· σὺ μὲν ζῇς, ἡ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχὴ πάλαι
> τέθνηκεν, ὥστε τοῖς θανοῦσιν ὠφελεῖν.
>
> Take courage – you live. My life has long since been
> surrendered to death, so that I might serve the dead.

This passage is again disputed. Campbell & Abbott argue that Antigone's θάρσει is said "ironically… Ismene was anxious to avoid death, and she has succeeded in doing it"; Jebb that it "is not said with bitterness (that could hardly be, after 551): rather it means, 'Take heart to live'"; Kamerbeek that it is "a real reassurance rather than a sneer"; Mogyoródi that it amounts to little more than a contemptuous "'pull yourself together'"; and Griffith that both lines are "dismissive" in tone, as Antigone "refuses further association with Ismene and all she 'lives' for".[151] Each of Antigone's last three exchanges contains a contrasting σὺ μὲν… ἐγὼ δέ… clause (555, 557, 559-60):

> σὺ μὲν γὰρ εἵλου ζῆν, ἐγὼ δὲ κατθανεῖν.
>
> καλῶς σὺ μὲν τοῖς, τοῖς δ' ἐγὼ 'δόκουν φρονεῖν.

[149] LSJ s.v. ἐξαμαρτία. Cf. 1024.
[150] Hahnemann 2019: 9.
[151] Campbell & Abbot 1886 ad loc.; Jebb 1888 ad loc.; Kamerbeek 1978 ad loc.; Mogyoródi 1996: 364; Griffith 1999: 212, 215 n. 559-60.

θάρσει· σὺ μὲν ζῇς, ἡ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχὴ πάλαι
τέθνηκεν, ὥστε τοῖς θανοῦσιν ὠφελεῖν.

As Hahnemann has correctly noted, this is the same "syntactical construction that heralded the rupture of [Antigone and Ismene's] bond in the prologue".[152] Unlike Ismene, who never once draws an emphatic distinction between Antigone and herself, even when asserting her own individuality (65-68, 78-79), Antigone – whose extremist, antithetical mentality naturally lends itself to binary distinctions – does not hesitate to separate herself from Ismene by switching out her initial duals (3, 21) for an antithetical μὲν-δέ clause as soon as Ismene fails to live up to her conception of a *philê*: σὺ μὲν τάδ' ἂν προὔχοι· ἐγὼ δὲ δὴ τάφον / χώσουσ' ἀδελφῷ φιλτάτῳ πορεύσομαι (80-81). While I agree with Hahnemann's assessment that Antigone's three successive σὺ μὲν… ἐγὼ δέ constructions at the end of this encounter have made it clear "that Antigone's rupture with Ismene is irrevocable", I do not share her view that they also serve as incontrovertible proof that "Antigone's disregard for Ismene is… complete".[153] What, in the prologue, had been a sharp contrast between Ismene's pathetic 'excuses' (σὺ μὲν τάδ' ἂν προὔχοι' 80) and her own superior heroic resolve (ἐγὼ δὲ δὴ τάφον χώσουσ' ἀδελφῷ φιλτάτῳ πορεύσομαι 80-81) has now become a recognition of the inherent differences which have led to their current alienation: the distinction between Ismene's concern for life and the living and her own proclivity for the past and the world of the dead (ζῆν… κατθανεῖν, μὲν τοῖς… τοῖς δ', ζῇς… τέθνηκεν… θανοῦσιν). What was an indignant insistence on the boundary between *philos* and *echthros*, *eugenês* and *kakos*, has instead become a recognition and acceptance of what has in effect always differentiated the two sisters: the boundary between life and death.

[152] Hahnemann 2019: 9.
[153] Hahnemann 2019: 12, 11. Cf. Goldhill 2012: 241. Kirkpatrick 2011: 422; Kells 1963: 55-56; Winnington-Ingram 1980: 134-135; Goldhill 2006: 157-158; Tyrrell & Bennet 2008-2009: 7, 13-14; and Cairns 2012: 95 also maintain that Antigone's enmity towards Ismene persists.

In addition, rather than merely making an explicit comment on how she and Ismene differ, Antigone's μὲν-δέ clauses also serve as an acknowledgement of how much they have in common: Ismene may have chosen 'life', and she 'death' – but they each 'chose' according to their own guiding moral principle; Ismene's reasoning may have won approval from 'some', hers from 'others', but they were both *kalos*; Ismene may 'live' while she 'dies', but they have both proven their commitment to that "one irreplaceable thing"[154] without which their life holds no meaning. The last two lines of their first meeting are given to Ismene; the final two of their second meeting to Antigone. Jebb is correct when he states that "[t]hese two verses quietly express [Antigone's] feeling that their lots are irrevocably sundered, and exhort Ismene to accept that severance",[155] but – like most critics – his primary focus is Antigone herself rather the intricacies of her relationship with Ismene. Antigone's θάρσει, as Tyrrell & Bennett have recognised, "is far grimmer" than Jebb's "be of good cheer" or Whitelaw's "take heart to live". Antigone does not lament her own death (ἡ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχὴ *πάλαι* τέθνηκεν), but she does now recognise what Ismene's 'life' will truly entail and just how much this 'severance' is going to cost her: that "Ismene will need all her courage" to go on 'living' without her.[156]

Κρέοντ' ἐρώτα

From this point on, neither sister addresses the other again. Although critics usually lose interest in Ismene at this point, dismissing her in much the same way they believe Antigone herself has done, Ismene's encounter with Creon not only serves to further illustrate her unfailing devotion to Antigone, it also once again works to challenge the pervasive view of her character as the "embodiment of conformity and subservience to male authority" who lacks both the "stomach for a rebellious act" and the

[154] Honig 2011: 53.
[155] Jebb 1888 ad loc.
[156] Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 78.

"temperamental [c]apacity" to contend with those in power.[157] When Ismene asked Antigone how she might possibly still 'be of use' to her (ὠφελοῖμ' 552), Antigone replied: σῶσον σεαυτήν (553). Ismene now finally accepts that Antigone will not be persuaded. However, rather than passively accepting their disparate fates and quietly retreating into the palace, she once again makes an autonomous decision. Taking matters into her own hands, she honours her earlier offer to 'help' Antigone in whatever way she can by confronting Creon directly to once again try and save her sister's life.

Despite having witnessed the clear alienation between the 'dead' Antigone and the 'living' Ismene, Creon once again refers to the sisters in the dual (cf. 533); this time, however, he makes a qualification (561-562):

> τὼ παῖδε φημὶ τώδε τὴν μὲν ἀρτίως
> ἄνουν πεφάνθαι, τὴν δ' ἀφ' οὗ τὰ πρῶτ' ἔφυ.
>
> These two girls! I say that one has just now shown herself foolish,
> while the other has been so from the very moment she was born.

Both sisters are 'senseless', but whereas Antigone's behaviour is entirely in keeping with what Creon has come to expect of her, Ismene's is not. The scholiast explains that what Creon is referring to is Ismene's recent impulse 'to throw herself into danger' (ῥίπτει ἑαυτὴν εἰς κίνδυνον) with her confession to the burial.[158] Creon terms this type of behaviour ἄνους, which is precisely how Ismene defined Antigone's reckless attitude in the prologue: τοῦτο δ' ἴσθ' ὅτι / ἄνους μὲν ἔρχῃ, τοῖς φίλοις δ' ὀρθῶς φίλη (98-99). Ismene does not claim to have been acting rationally, but defends both Antigone and herself[159] on the grounds that even innate 'sense' (νοῦς) is thrust aside

[157] Griffith 1999: 62; Elshtain 1989: 223; Roisman 2018: 70.
[158] Σ *Ant*. 561.2-561.3.
[159] Jebb (1888 ad loc) characteristically describes Ismene's explanation as an 'apology' rather than a 'defence', as D'Ooge (1890) and Wells (1900) do. Campbell 1871, Jebb 1888, D'Ooge 1890, and Wells 1900 ad loc. all argue that Ismene intends her justification to cover both Antigone's actions and her own.

in times of 'suffering' (κακῶς πράσσουσιν 563-564). This not only serves to further undermine those typically Antigone-centric readings that seek to reduce Ismene's role in the play to little more than a one-dimensional stereotype of prudence and timidity, persistently devaluing any of her more daring or rebellious qualities, it also acts as a further illustration of how Sophocles has worked to model Ismene's devotion to Antigone on Antigone's own devotion to Polyneices. Prudence might come far more naturally to Ismene than Antigone's impetuous daring, but both sisters are nevertheless rendered 'senseless' by their concern for a sibling. Indeed, as Tyrrell & Bennett have shown, Sophocles has "devised" this entire encounter between Ismene and Creon "to reflect" Antigone's earlier encounter with Creon;[160] but whereas Antigone's efforts centred primarily on her obligation to the dead Polyneices, Ismene's are concentrated solely around her commitment to the living Antigone.

Far from "allow[ing] herself to be silenced by men"[161], Ismene engages Creon in a stichomythic debate about her sister's fate – thereby performing "the very action which she earlier claimed was not suited to her nature as a woman"[162] (χρὴ… γυναῖχ' ὅτι ἔφυμεν, ὡς πρὸς ἄνδρας οὐ μαχουμένα 61-62). Critics have claimed that Ismene's role in the play "amounts to no more than a timid acquiescence in the conventions of feminine behaviour" and that she is simply "not brave enough to resist her masters".[163] While there is no denying that 'contending against men' is not as suited to Ismene's nature as it is to Antigone's, Ismene does make a public stand against Creon in a bid to save her sister's life. Moreover, as Cairns has pointed out, she does so in manner which Antigone herself "would never do"[164]: she entreats Creon, appealing first to his

[160] Tyrrell & Bennett 2008-2009: 12.
[161] Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 39.
[162] Wauke 2020: 46.
[163] North 1966: 54, 65. Cf. Whitman 1951: 86; Pomeroy 1975: 99-100; Sorum 1982: 206, 209; Mills 1986: 141; Johnson 1997: 385; Griffith 1999: 62, 53; Griffith 2001: 123; Foley 2002: 194 n. 78; Paul 2007: 433; Tyrrell & Bennett 2008-2009: 5; Cavarero 2010: 51; Holland 2010: 43 n. 23; Irigaray 2010b: 102; and Cairns 2016: 12.
[164] Cairns 2016: 18.

sympathy on her own behalf (τί γὰρ μόνῃ μοι τῆσδ' ἄτερ βιώσιμον; 566), and then to his love for his own son (ἀλλὰ κτενεῖς νυμφεῖα τοῦ σαυτοῦ τέκνου; 568). While it is true that Ismene maintains a deferential attitude towards Creon throughout their exchange, "bold action and bold manner are not the same"[165] and Ismene's quieter courage proves no less unsuccessful at convincing Creon than Antigone's openly rebellious stance.

Scholarly opinion on the attribution of lines 572, 574 and 576 remains divided:

> {ΙΣ.} ἀλλὰ κτενεῖς νυμφεῖα τοῦ σαυτοῦ τέκνου;
> {ΚΡ.} ἀρώσιμοι γὰρ χἀτέρων εἰσὶν γύαι.
> {ΙΣ.} οὐχ ὥς γ' ἐκείνῳ τῆδέ τ' ἦν ἡρμοσμένα.
> {ΚΡ.} κακὰς ἐγὼ γυναῖκας υἱέσι στυγῶ.
> { * } ὦ φίλταθ' Αἷμον, ὥς σ' ἀτιμάζει πατήρ. 572
> {ΚΡ.} ἄγαν γε λυπεῖς καὶ σὺ καὶ τὸ σὸν λέχος.
> { * } ἦ γὰρ στερήσεις τῆσδε τὸν σαυτοῦ γόνον; 574
> {ΚΡ.} Ἅιδης ὁ παύσων τούσδε τοὺς γάμους ἐμοί.
> { * } δεδογμέν', ὡς ἔοικε, τήνδε κατθανεῖν. 576
> {ΚΡ.} καὶ σοί γε κἀμοί. μὴ τριβὰς ἔτ', ἀλλά νιν
> κομίζετ' εἴσω, δμῶες…
>
> IS. Do you really intend to kill the bride of your own son?
> CR. No matter. There are other fields for him to plough
> IS. No, none that can rival the bond between him and her.
> CR. I would loathe a worthless wife for my son.
> * Oh my beloved Haemon! How your father dishonours you!
> CR. No, you are too vexing – you and your marriage both!
> * Will you really rob your own son of this girl?
> CR. It is Hades who will put an end to this wedding for me.
> * Then it is decided, it seems, that she is to die.
> CR. Yes, by you as well as by me. Do not delay anymore, but lead them inside, servants…

Brown, Lloyd-Jones & Wilson and Griffith give all three lines to Ismene, Dawe gives all three to Antigone. Broeckh, Campbell, Jebb and Kamerbeek give 572 to Antigone

[165] Miller 2018: 17.

and both 574 and 576 to the chorus; Woolsey, D'Ooge and Bernadete give 572 to Ismene and both 574 and 576 to the chorus; and Wells gives both 572 and 574 to Ismene and 576 to the chorus.[166] There are convincing arguments to support each scenario. All the manuscripts assign 572 to Ismene, all but one assign 574 to Ismene, and most assign 576 also to Ismene.[167] There are two main arguments against giving 572 to Ismene. Firstly, the passionate ὦ φίλταθ' Αἷμον is felt to be an odd way for Ismene to refer to her sister's fiancée and is far more appropriate, and dramatically effective, coming from Antigone. Secondly, if Ismene speaks 572, τὸ σὸν λέχος in 573 would have to mean 'the marriage of which you speak' rather than the considerably more natural 'your marriage'. On the other hand, it is felt to be equally unlikely that ὦ φίλταθ' Αἷμον should come from Antigone, who has so recently expressed her commitment to death (559-560) and who has never before given the slightest intimation of her relationship with Haemon. However, if we were to assign 572 to Antigone, Jebb argues, "this solitary reference to her love heightens in a wonderful degree our sense of her unselfish devotion to a sacred duty."[168] From a technical standpoint, however, "a third speaker's… interruption of a two-person stichomythia would be [so] unusual" that is in fact unparalleled in Sophocles.[169] Moreover, if Ismene were to speak the line, this would not only show "how far Creon has gone in the dismissal of his own" but also how Ismene continues to "work… on Creon's feelings as a father", choosing to speak only of Haemon this time without any reference to Antigone (cf. 568, 570).[170]

[166] Brown (1987), Lloyd-Jones & Wilson (1990), Griffith (1999); Dawe (1978: 106-108); Broeckh (1884), Campbell (1871), Jebb (1888), Kamerbeek (1978); Woolsey (1855), D'Ooge (1890), Bernadete (1990); Wells (1900).
[167] D'Ooge 1890 ad loc.
[168] Jebb 1888 ad loc.
[169] Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[170] Bernadete 1999: 74; Wells 1900 ad loc.

The same difficulties arise with 574. Given to Antigone, this would mean, firstly, that she is referring to herself in the third person (τῆσδε), which "would be clumsy"[171]; secondly, that she is 'breaking character' by entreating Creon to spare her life. Given to Ismene, however, it would mean that she is repeating the same question she has already asked in 568. Creon answered in 569, Ismene rejoined in 570, and Creon replied again in 571. While Jebb points out that "there is no unfitness in the question being repeated by a new intercessor, since to ask it thus is a form of mild remonstrance", giving 574 to the chorus once again raises the problem of an "unsignalled change of interlocutor".[172] The attribution of 576 is somewhat easier. The speaker comments 'it seems decided, then, that she must die', to which Creon replies in 577: 'Yes, by you and by me.' If 576 were spoken by Antigone, it would once again mean that she is referring to herself in the third person (τήνδε). It would also render Creon's words '(it has been decided) by you and by me' illogical, unless we were to understand that Creon regards "Antigone's own obstinacy… as a decision to sign her own death-warrant".[173] Similarly, given Ismene's repeated pleas on Antigone's behalf (566, 568, 570), it is unlikely that Creon would claim that she 'agrees' with his decision. Most commentators, therefore, assign 576 to the chorus, whom Creon has already tried to make complicit in his rulings (215 ff.).

Although Wauke is correct in claiming that the tendency to reassign some or all of these lines away from Ismene "fits the overall scholarly inattention" to her character, my own feeling is that the attribution of these lines does not affect Sophocles' portrayal of her character in any significant way. Whereas replacing Ismene with either Antigone or the chorus, Wauke continues, greatly "diminishes… Ismene's opposition to Creon", "maintain[ing] Ismene as the rightful speaker of these lines" allows us to "read both sisters' arguments with Creon as defenses of siblings." That Ismene

[171] Griffith 1999 ad loc.
[172] Jebb 1888 ad loc.; Brown 1987 ad loc.
[173] Dawe 1978: 106.

"quickly comes to her sister's defense" against Creon,[174] however, has already been established when she immediately defends both Antigone and herself against Creon's charge of 'folly' (56-564) and entreats him to spare Antigone's life (566, 568). If lines 572, 574 and 576 belong to another speaker, this would make 570 Ismene's final line in the play. When Ismene asks whether Creon 'really intends to kill the bride of his own son' in 568, he replies with what Brown refers to as "perhaps the coarsest line in Greek tragedy"[175]: 'No matter. There are other fields for him to plough.' With what is arguably her very last line of the play, Ismene protests against Creon's crass dismissal of Antigone's value as a woman, firmly defending her sister's worth as an individual and the validity of her relationship with Haemon: 'No, none that can rival the bond between him and her.' Giving all or some of the problematic lines to Ismene might extend and reinforce Ismene's opposition to Creon, but her defense of Antigone is not significantly affected without them. Sophocles, and Ismene, have made their point: Ismene has proven her unfailing devotion to Antigone.

At the play's opening, the two sisters entered together as a 'pair' from the palace doors. At the end of the prologue, they departed separately. Now, they are physically reunited for the last time as both are led captive back through the palace doors. Antigone will later emerge from the same doors to give her final lament to the chorus as she is led off to her death through the side-entrance. Throughout this scene she will speak as if Ismene had ceased to exist: φίλων ἄκλαυτος (847); ἄκλαυτος, ἄφιλος… (876); οὐδεὶς φίλων στενάζει (882); λοισθία 'γὼ… κάτειμι (895-896); ἔρημος πρὸς φίλων (919); τὴν βασιλειδᾶν μούνην λοιπήν (941). Ismene – the sibling to whom the entire opening line of the play is addressed – is neither seen nor heard from again. The only other reference to her in the play is when Creon changes his mind about punishing 'her who did not touch' the corpse (τήν γε μὴ θιγοῦσαν) in 771.

[174] Wauke 2020: 45-51.
[175] Brown 1987 ad loc.

Conclusion

When Ismene refuses to risk her life for Polyneices in the prologue, she is reviled by Antigone and critics alike for being an unprincipled, traitorous coward. When she now offers to die with Antigone at the beginning of this scene, she is still reviled for being an unprincipled, self-serving sycophant. The widespread misconception of Ismene's courageous determination to stand by Antigone throughout this second meeting is based in large part on a misinterpretation of Sophocles' portrayal of her character in the prologue – which in itself stems from a critical tradition that has persistently overvalued the heroic at the expense of those secondary figures, like Ismene, whose real function it is not to valorise the death-oriented extremism of the ideologues, but to complicate it. While a wealth of detailed scholarly investigation has been afforded to every facet of Antigone's characterisation, Ismene is generally deemed worthy of attention only insofar as she serves as an extension of Antigone. Nussbaum is so dismissive of Ismene's role and her sororal relationship with Antigone that she describes *Antigone* as a "play about brothers".[176]

As the play's opening lines announce, however, this is not just a play 'about brothers', but the complex network of relations between all four siblings: κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον; νῷν ἔτι ζώσαιν; δυοῖν ἀδελφοῖν ἐστερήθημεν δύο (1, 3, 13). It is Antigone's sense of obligation to the sibling-relationship that precipitates the rift between Ismene and herself. It is also the intensity of her commitment to that obligation that has earned Antigone such lasting admiration: "her devotion to her *philoi*", says Griffith, "knows no limits"; she is "the last member of her family", says Foley, "willing to act in that family's interest".[177] And yet, as Sophocles has made clear throughout this scene, Ismene is no less fiercely devoted to the sibling bond than Antigone herself. While there is no denying that Ismene's display of loyalty is far less outwardly 'heroic' or

[176] Nussbaum 1986: 57.
[177] Griffith 2001: 130; Foley 2002: 180.

revolutionary, the fact remains that Sophocles gives us *two* sisters who fight to protect a sibling, not just one; *two* sisters who value that sibling above their own life, not just one. Moreover, to prove her loyalty both to Antigone and the audience, Ismene is repeatedly required to confront her own limits by acting against her natural inclination for caution, deliberately 'throwing herself into danger': their clandestine meeting outside the palace (18-19), her offer to be Antigone's co-conspirator (84-85), her display of public mourning (526-530), her false admission to the burial (536-537), and finally her confrontation with Creon (563-570). Antigone's commitment to Polyneices, on the other hand, never conflicts with what Antigone herself wants to do. She never for one moment entertains any course of action that would require her to act against her heroic self-assertion, even if it might aid in the accomplishment of the very goal which she claims is so all-important – Ismene's advice to act in secret (84-87), for instance, or appealing directly to Creon, as both Ismene and Haemon do. Can we really say that it is Antigone, then, whom Sophocles portrays as the sister whose 'devotion to her *philoi* knows no limits'?

Just as this scene works to challenge our understanding further of the difference between the two sisters, so too does it heighten the complexity of their relationship. The reception of this scene has typically followed an either/or approach: either Antigone continues vehemently to reject Ismene and everything she stands for, or she loves her sister so much that her cruelty is merely a ploy to save Ismene's life.[178] What Sophocles has in fact given us, however, is a great deal more complicated. The sense of alienation that first arose in the prologue persists throughout their second encounter, but what begins with Antigone's pejorative contrast between *eugenês* and *kakos* (37-38) ends with her acceptance of the insuperable disjunction between

[178] For the former view, see Kells 1963: 55-56; Winnington- Ingram 1980: 134-135; Griffith 1999: 212-213 n. 526-81, 215 n. 559-60; Goldhill 2006: 157-158; Tyrrell & Bennett 2008-2009: 7, 13-14; Kirkpatrick 2011: 422; Cairns 2016: 95; and Hahnemann 2019: 1, 12. For the latter, see Jebb 1888: xxix; Sheppard 1947: 54; Simpson & Millar 1948: 78-81; Adams 1955: 55; Honig 2011: 40 n. 12, 45-46; and Moro 2021: 121.

Ismene's concern for the living and her own attachment to the dead (559-560). "Unlike the disagreement between Antigone and Creon," as Mulroy has pointed out, "that between Antigone and Ismene remains unresolved even in retrospect"[179]: καλῶς σὺ μὲν τοῖς, τοῖς δ' ἐγὼ 'δόκουν φρονεῖν (557). Even though Antigone herself admits that they have both behaved 'nobly', scholars persist in valorising Antigone and belittling Ismene.

And yet, as Ismene says, it is not only that they have both displayed a similar nobility, but that they have both been 'equally mistaken' in their choices: ἴση νῷν ἐστιν ἡ 'ξαμαρτία (558). Like Achilles, Antigone chooses a glorious death over an ignoble life.[180] As Achilles himself tells us from the Underworld, however, even the most ignoble existence is preferable to death.[181] While Antigone does not ever regret her decision, she does come to recognise that "the death that awaits her… is not at all what she had in mind when she imagined that her death would be… *kerdos* (461-2)".[182] Instead of the 'noble' death she envisioned (72, 97), Antigone goes to a death that is "the most miserable of a miserable lot"[183] (κάκιστα δὴ μακρῷ 895). Moreover, the actual manner of her death – lamentation followed by suicide – is not only a stereotypically 'feminine' but also a "somewhat cowardly mode of death".[184]

Ismene's initial choice 'to live' (555) also proves to be a mistake. Not because it sprang from cowardice or a lack of integrity, but because – like the chorus (οὐκ ἔστιν οὕτω μῶρος ὃς θανεῖν ἐρᾷ 220) – she considered death to be the 'worst' fate (cf. 59). What characterises the heroes and heroines of tragedy, says Lefkowitz, is their "acquisition of knowledge through suffering."[185] Creon certainly 'learns through suffering', and

[179] Mulroy 2013: l.
[180] Knox 1964: 65-66.
[181] *Od.* 11.488-491.
[182] Cairns 2016: 91.
[183] Gellie 1964: 7.
[184] Pomeroy 1975: 101. Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1989: 148.
[185] Lefkowitz 1981: 4.

what he finally comes to understand at the play's close is the very same lesson that Ismene evinces in this scene: the 'worst' fate is not death, but to be deprived of that which makes life worth living. And for Creon, as for Ismene, it turns out that what makes life worth living has nothing to do with the heroic aspiration to honour and precedence, but one's *philoi*. Having been deprived of his loved ones, Creon too laments that his existence is now 'little more than nothing' (οὐκ ὄντα μᾶλλον ἢ μηδένα 1325, cf. 1288, 1165-1167, 548, 566), and he too yearns for death (1328-1333).

Similarly, if the title 'hero' is earned through some kind of tragic sacrifice, then Ismene fulfils this requirement too. Martyrdom, Zupančič's explains, "may demand not [only] the sacrifice of one's life but of one's reason for living." So why is Antigone's fate considered to be so much worse, and therefore so much more admirable, than Ismene's? Ismene may well survive – which in itself is quite the achievement given that, with the exception of Creon, every other member of their extended family is dead by the end of the play – but she does so at the cost of that "one irreplaceable thing that is the ground of all else".[186] Even though Antigone says that she does not 'grudge' Ismene her escape (οὐ φθονῶ σ' ὑπεκφυγεῖν 553), scholars have continued to hold this against Ismene, refusing to recognise that her decision to grant Antigone's final appeal (θάρσει· σὺ μὲν ζῆς 559) requires no less of an heroic determination than Antigone's own sacrifice. In fact, it may even require more. Mogyoródi concedes that Ismene "gets her share of afflictions" but argues that her fate cannot be considered "tragic in the same sense as her sister's". "Ismene", he claims, "is a simple case of 'ordinary' misfortune" because her decision to live barely constituted a 'choice' at all: "broken by sheer necessity", she "evades action", lacks an "unswerving adherence to her principles" and "fail[s] to undertake a crucial existential challenge for herself".[187]

[186] Honig 2011: 59; 53. Cf. 61: "… one dies for her cause in her own way on her own terms, the other lives for it, in her own way and not on her own terms. Both sacrifice".
[187] Mogyoródi 1996: 360, 369, 362, 364.

While this may perhaps be the case with Ismene's initial choice in the prologue, it is certainly not true of her subsequent actions, neither of her attempt to share Antigone's death nor of the quiet fortitude with which she agrees to go on living in the home of the man responsible for her sister's death.[188] Antigone chooses to 'devote her life to death' so that she might escape a life 'surrounded by misery' (559-560, 463-464). Like every other woman in their family, she hangs herself. Sophocles could easily have had Ismene do the same, revealing her death at the same time he does Eurydice's; instead, he has her live and thereby abide by the same moral principle she has fought so hard to defend throughout the play. We end where we began: one sister dies for the dead, the other lives for them. But to go on living *after* the 'worst' has truly happened – is this not also a form of resistance, and one which requires an even greater act of courage?

[188] Cf. Honig 2011: 33: "When Ismene, who wants to die with Antigone, agrees to go on living without her, Ismene does not… choose survival and avoid death. Instead, she performs what Lacan calls an ethical act: she confronts her own limit and does not back down. Her limit is not death but rather a living death".

Chapter 3

Antigone & Ismene, Electra & Chrysothemis

I now turn to a chapter in the history of another cursed family: the House of Atreus. The audience would once again have been aware of the mythological background that informs Sophocles' *Electra*, but this time – due to the earlier productions of Aeschylus' *Choephori* and Euripides' *Electra*[1] – they would have been much more familiar with the general events of the play itself, particularly the reunion of Electra and Orestes and the murders of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. One of the most significant differences in Sophocles' treatment of the material, however, is the introduction of Electra's sister, Chrysothemis. Although Sophocles did not invent the character of Chrysothemis,[2] he is the only extant dramatist to give Electra a sister; no living sister is mentioned in either Aeschylus' *Choephori* or Euripides' *Electra*. Had Sophocles "merely wanted a confidante for Electra," as Mossman points out, "a Nurse would have been an easy choice, or she could have been as dependent on the Chorus for that function as Deianeira." Mossman has argued that giving Electra a sister who "is in the same situation as Electra, but behaves differently… suggest[s] that Sophocles wanted to allow his audience to make comparisons between these two sisters and Antigone and Ismene."[3]

Because the theoretical framework of Sophoclean scholarship has for so long been weighted in favour of the primary distinction between 'the heroic and the

[1] Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy was first staged in 458 BCE. While the exact date for Sophocles' *Electra* remains uncertain, with the evidence placing it somewhere between 426 and 409, many scholars are prepared to accept that Euripides' *Electra*, which was most likely produced before 413, came first (Kamerbeek 1974: 6-7).

[2] According to Homer, Agamemnon had four children: one son, Orestes, and three daughters – Chrysothemis, Laodice and Iphianassa (*Il*. 9. 142 ff.). In the sixth century BCE, the lyric poet Xanthus (*PMG* 700 = Ael. *v.h.* 4.26 ii.71 Hercher) claimed that Laodice and Electra were in fact the same person; her original name was Laodice, but she came to be known as Electra (ἄλεκτρος, 'unwedded') because she remained unmarried for so long (Jebb 1894: xix; March 2001: 151 n. 164-5).

[3] Mossman 2012: 497. Cf. Kamerbeek 1974: 10, and Winnington-Ingram 1980: 241, 1983: 253.

commonplace',[4] the scholarly tradition has, for the most part, focused only on what these two pairs have in common: two sets of sisters who believe themselves to be the last remnants of a cursed family who, when faced with the death of a beloved brother, are forced to choose between heroic action and timid acquiescence. Like Antigone, Electra chooses loyalty to the dead and appeals to her sister for help; like Ismene, Chrysothemis chooses to yield to those in power and turns her sister down. These surface similarities have been enough to once again impose an overly reductive reading onto Sophocles' characterisation of the two pairs. Antigone and Electra are the 'strong' sisters: brimming with heroic righteousness, they resolve to act in defiance of authority and risk their own lives in service of a higher principle. Ismene and Chrysothemis are the 'weak' sisters: conventional and submissive, they willingly abandon not only their siblings but also what they know to be right in favour of their more worldly preoccupation with safety and prudence.

Ismene and Chrysothemis, as Pounds-Williams has noted, are typically "brushed off as copies of one another":[5] 'ordinary' women whose primary dramatic function is to serve as 'foils' to their eminently more remarkable sisters.[6] This association between the two 'weaker' siblings stretches as far back as the ancient commentaries on the play.[7] Within the modern critical tradition, Chrysothemis has suffered the same reductive tendencies as Ismene,[8] and is often described in the same dismissive terms: "the timid irresolution of her sister Chrysothemis" (Blaydes 1873: 4); "the weak and

[4] See, for example, Jebb 1894: 51 n. 338 ff.
[5] Pounds-Williams 2017: 144.
[6] See, for example: Campbell & Abbott 1886: 309, Jebb 1894: xlii, Shillington 1968: 139, Kamerbeek 1974: 10, Winnington-Ingram 1980: 241, Steiner 1984: 145, Sicking 1998: 45, March 2001: 11, Lloyd 2005: 41, 50, Jacobs 2007: 178, and Apfel 2011: 291.
[7] Σ *El*. 328.2-328.5: ἐπίτηδες τοῖς ἀγρίοις ἤθεσιν ἀντιπαρατάττουσι πρᾶα καθάπερ νῦν τῇ Ἠλέκτρᾳ Χρυσόθεμιν συνέζευξεν καὶ τῇ Ἀντιγόνῃ τὴν Ἰσμήνην ἕνεκα τοῦ διαποικίλλειν ταῖς ἀντιρρήσεσι τὰ δράματα. Coo (2013a) has traced this 'assimilation' of Ismene and Chrysothemis back to the early fourth century.
[8] Coo 2021: 89: "Time has not been kind to this more pragmatic sister. In English-language criticism, she has acquired her own epithet, 'timid'… For many critics, she is a shallow and conventional figure whose main function is to act as a foil to the exceptional Electra."

charming Chrysothemis" (Sheppard 1920: 102); "her passive acceptance of injustice… a moderate posture of acquiescence" (Waldock 1951: 176, 185); "the model of feminine sophrosyne" (Gellie 1972: 234); "a girl on the level of common humanity… [whose] shallow nature…" (Kamerbeek 1974: 10, 13); "Chrysothemis the collaborator… customary and conventional" (Powell, B J 1990: 51-52).[9]

In many respects, Chrysothemis has had it even worse than Ismene. Since it is a commonly held view that she most likely "owe[s] her dramatic existence to the proved utility of Ismene",[10] any proper consideration of her individuation as a character is frequently precluded when she is dismissed as "another Ismene".[11] In addition, whereas the recent trend of reinvestigating canonical texts from interdisciplinary perspectives that draw on philosophy, feminism and political theory has occasioned a new interest in Ismene as a symbol of 'quiet resistance',[12] Coo and Pounds-Williams have both pointed out that Chrysothemis, who is an even less popular figure than Ismene,[13] has yet to benefit from the same "consciously rehabilitative impulse".[14] And so Chrysothemis has, for the most part, remained a disregarded, marginal figure within the field of Sophoclean studies: "You probably don't remember Chrysothemis… she didn't kill anyone, and no one ever paid much attention to her."[15]

[9] See also: Jebb 1894: xlii: "a weaker, though amiable, sister"; Whitman 1951: 156: "weak and shallow"; Winnington-Ingram 1983: 237: "the time-serving Chrysothemis"; Sicking 1998: 45-46: "prompted by weakness… morally… inferior to Electra; March 2001: 11: "weaker sister… Chrysothemis' caution and timidity… motivated by expediency and self-interest"; Jacobs 2007: 179: "a marginal and unmemorable position… [of] seeming insignificance"; van Nortwick 2015: 15: "conventional and timid"; and Roisman 2018: 67, 70: "the timid Chrysothemis".

[10] Winnington-Ingram 1983: 243.

[11] Norwood 1948: 144. See also: Jebb 1894: xlii, Steiner 1984: 145, and Roisman 2018: 69.

[12] See, for example, Frank 2006, Honig 2011, Kirkpatrick 2011, García 2018, Hahnemann 2019, and Moro 2021.

[13] Whitman (1951: 156) calls Chrysothemis "almost the least attractive" Sophoclean character.

[14] Coo 2021: 91; Pounds-Williams 2017: 104; 39: "Chrysothemis is, by far, the most disregarded by adaptors and scholars."

[15] Brantley 1995.

What Ismene and Chrysothemis do have in common, however, is that their reception within the scholarly tradition can be directly related to that of their sisters. Since the critical tradition has persistently overvalued Sophocles' heroic protagonists at the expense of his secondary figures, Ismene and Chrysothemis are generally regarded as extensions of the heroes themselves rather than fully delineated characters in their own right. Moreover, since one of the most distinguishing features of Sophoclean tragedy is the dramatist's characteristic refusal to provide authorial judgement on the various ethical dilemmas he creates, scholarship has too often fallen victim to the tempting but prescriptive dynamics of an either/or binary: if Creon is wrong, then Antigone must be right; and if Antigone is right, then Ismene must necessarily be wrong. In the *Electra*, as with his *Antigone*, Sophocles once again centres the action of his play around various sets of competing moral principles. As with Ismene, the reception of Chrysothemis is typically based less on a thorough consideration of her character or the validity of her arguments, and more on our attitude towards Electra. For those who see Electra as a courageous and revolutionary idealist who risks her life to avenge her murdered father and overthrow a corrupt regime, Chrysothemis is a self-serving coward who willingly collaborates with her father's murderers to ensure her own physical and material comfort.[16] Conversely, those who take a darker view of Electra's fanatical and life-denying intransigence have a more sympathetic view of Chrysothemis' counsels on the need for compromise and commonsense.[17]

Pounds-Williams and Coo are among the few scholars who have taken a more substantial interest in the individuation of Chrysothemis' character, defending her more realistic pragmatism against Electra's rigid, death-oriented heroism.[18] The focus

[16] See, for example, Campbell & Abbott 1886, Jebb 1894, Waldock 1951, Whitman 1951, Kamerbeek 1974, Powell, B J 1990, Sicking 1998, March 2001, and Van Nortwick 2015.
[17] See, for example, Shillington 1968, Apfel 2011, Pounds-Williams 2017, Roisman 2020, and Coo 2021.
[18] Pounds-William 2017, and Coo 2021. Iriarte (2000) has also challenged the pervasive assumption that Ismene and Chrysothemis' only dramatic function is to highlight the extent of their sister's heroism, arguing that the encounters between the two sets of sisters is meant to represent the confrontation between two divergent types of femininity: Ismene and Chrysothemis' femininity, which is consistent

of this chapter, however, is not to explore the ethical merits of each sister's case, but to redress the typically narrow focus on the apparent similarities between Ismene and Chrysothemis to allow for a more thorough understanding of the key differences in Sophocles' portrayal of the two characters. Kirkwood, Reinhardt and Winnington-Ingram all highlight some of the crucial differences between the two 'weaker' siblings, but their treatment of the subject is brief and somewhat cursory in nature, restricted to a page or two at most.[19] Winnington-Ingram cautions that where Sophocles "seems to repeat an effect", as in his treatment of the two scenes Chrysothemis shares with Electra, the differences are often more "instructive" than the similarities.[20] As far as I am aware, however, there has been no extended, comprehensive examination of the idea that Sophocles deliberately sets Chrysothemis up in the role of an Ismene to show not how much these two characters have in common, but rather how much they differ. This chapter will explore the inherent differences in Sophocles' characterisation of Ismene and Chrysothemis and aims to reveal just how significantly Ismene's relationship with Antigone differs from that of Chrysothemis and Electra.

Orestes and his men; Electra and her women

For those who have the prologue of the *Antigone* in mind, the difference with the opening scenes of the *Electra* is immediately apparent. The earlier play opens with Antigone's passionate appeal to the sibling bond she shares with Ismene (ὦ κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἰσμήνης κάρα 1) and a rapid succession of duals through which both sisters emphasise the special bond uniting the four children of Oedipus: with their two brothers now dead (13-14, 21, 55-57), only Antigone and Ismene, the remaining 'pair', are left. (3, 21, 50, 58, 61-62). This initial sense of 'oneness' between the two sisters,

with what the *polis* expects of its citizen women, and Antigone and Electra's femininity, which is simultaneously excessive and defective, and therefore poses a threat to the civic order.

[19] Kirkwood 1958: 139-140; Reinhardt 1979: 143-145; and Winnington-Ingram 1980: 241-242, 1983: 237.

[20] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 241.

who are momentarily presented as indistinguishable at the play's opening, is thus established right off the mark. Not so in the *Electra*, where instead of projecting unity among the children of Agamemnon, Sophocles creates a strong sense of dissonance by establishing pre-existing bonds not between the siblings themselves, but between the siblings and other characters.

Like the *Antigone*, the play opens with an elaborate address intended to instill a feeling of obligation in the addressee: 'O son of he who once served as our general in Troy, son of Agamemnon' (ὦ τοῦ στρατηγήσαντος ἐν Τροίᾳ ποτὲ / Ἀγαμέμνονος παῖ 1-2).[21] This time, however, it is not a sibling who opens the play by voicing their expectation that Orestes carry out his familial duty to the dead, but a surrogate parent: the Paedagogus to whom Electra entrusted the young Orestes when she first rescued him from the palace. During the intervening years the Paedagogus has 'reared' Orestes to 'avenge his murdered father' (13-14) and, together with Orestes' friend, Pylades, the trio has now returned to Mycenae to carry out their revenge against Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. A conspiratorial tone pervades the scene, and Sophocles establishes a strong sense of common urgency and purpose among the three men through the repeated use of the first-person plural forms 'we' and 'us' (8, 17, 21, 24, 28, 41, 51, 53, 57, 75, 81, 83, 85). Orestes' relationship with both Pylades and the aged Paedagogus is characterised as one of affectionate intimacy: while Pylades is his 'dearest of friends' (φίλτατε ξένων 15), the Paedagogus is his 'dearest follower' (φίλτατ' ἀνδρῶν προσπόλων 23). When Orestes resolves that the Paedagogus should approach the palace and pretend to be a Phocian stranger bringing the (false) news of Orestes' recent death, while he and Pylades make their way to Agamemnon's tomb,

[21] Kells 1973 ad loc.: "The natural, or prose word-order would be ὦ παῖ Ἀγαμέμνονος τοῦ στρατηγήσαντος κτλ. The present word-order puts an emphasis on τοῦ στρατηγήσαντος ἐν Τροίᾳ, hence upon the fact that Orestes was a young man of brilliant parentage of whom much was to be expected."

the unity between the two young avengers is further reinforced when Orestes refers to himself and Pylades in the dual (νὼ δ' ἔξιμεν 75).

In the *Antigone*, both sisters refer to themselves in the dual not only to emphasise their shared origin, but also to try and evoke a sense of common purpose. For Antigone, this purpose is the fulfilment of the obligation which she feels they both owe Polyneices (21); for Ismene, it is the overwhelming drive to escape the same fate as the rest of their family (58-60). There, it is precisely because the pair hold such opposing views on the proper course of action regarding Polyneices' burial that their initial sense of identification collapses into disaffection. Here, Sophocles already undermines any future potential that the three children of Agamemnon will unite in avenging their father's death by deliberately identifying the very sibling whom the audience knows is destined to perform that act of vengeance with someone else. It is not Orestes and his sisters who are united in common purpose against their father's murderers, but Orestes and Pylades (cf. 21, 1297, 1367, 1376, 1401). Sophocles reinforces this initial sense of dislocation by having Electra call out from inside the palace immediately after Orestes' dual in 75: ἰώ μοί μοι δύστηνος (77). Although Orestes is sympathetic toward his sister's suffering (80-81), she is nevertheless excluded from the alliance of men: rather than take Electra into their confidence, the three men quickly depart; the Paedagogus exits to the left, and the 'pair' of avengers to the right.[22]

Whereas Antigone and Ismene enter together as a pair from the central palace door, Electra now enters alone to sing a lyric lament. As March points out: "[t]his is the only extant play of Sophocles in which he brings a principal actor onstage to perform a

[22] Kells 1973: 87 n. 80f: Orestes' "*prosaic*" remark "contrasts ironically with Electra's passionate lament of which 77 is the prelude. In this context the young man's dissociation from his sister's troubles (of which he evidently knows full well) seems to reflect a remarkable callousness"; Dunn 2012: 99: "Her voice interrupts the plans of Orestes and the Pedagogue, and they abruptly leave the stage… The Pedagogue and Orestes have carefully laid their plans [which] do not seem to include Electra… As far as these two are concerned, Electra belongs to the world of the royal house"; Mossman 2012: 498: "the male characters feel no need to take her into their confidence".

monody before the entry of the Chorus, and by doing so here, he emphasises in the solitary figure of Electra the pathos of her extreme isolation".[23] In contrast to the conspiratorial atmosphere of the preceding scene, therefore, Electra's opening scene is marked by a pervasive sense of alienation.[24] The use of 'we' and 'us' which served to establish a sense of connection between the three men is now replaced by singular pronouns, possessives, and first-person endings. It is Electra, alone, who has been lamenting the death of Agamemnon by day and by night (86-95), it is from Electra, alone, that pity is voiced for his cruel death (100-102), and it is because Electra has for so long been carrying this burden of grief all on her own (μούνη 118) that she is now nearing the end of her strength (118-120). In none of this does Electra make any mention of a sister. Demonstrating the characteristic resolve of a Sophoclean hero, Electra asserts that she will never cease from her public display of mourning: ἀλλ' οὐ μὲν δὴ λήξω… (104-109). Antigone does not express her first heroic resolution (οὐ γὰρ δὴ προδοῦσ' ἁλώσομαι 46) until after she has asked Ismene to 'share in the labour and the deed' (41); Electra reveals hers before we even know that Chrysothemis exists. Similarly, in the *Antigone*, 'our father' (3, 49-50) and 'our brothers' (21, 13, 55-58) is not redefined into a strongly contrasted 'my brother, who also happens to be your brother' (τὸν… ἐμὸν καὶ τὸν σόν… ἀδελφόν 45-46) until after Ismene has revealed her hesitation to share in Polyneices' burial. Here, Electra begins with an emphatic 'my father' (ἐμὸν… πατέρ 94-95) and 'my brother' (τὸν ἐμὸν… ἀδελφόν 117). Whereas the opening scene of the *Antigone* serves to evoke a strong sense of commonality between the heroine and her sister, the purpose of Electra's opening lament is not to establish what this heroine has in common with her sister, but what sets them apart.

This idea, that Sophocles is already working to characterise a very different type of sororal relationship from that shared by Antigone and Ismene, is further reinforced

[23] March 2001 ad loc. Cf. Dunn 2012: 98.

[24] Finglass 2007: 121 n. 86-120: Electra "begins the drama in a more isolated condition than any other extant Sophoclean hero". See also Blundell 1989: 154.

when he has Electra end her lament by invoking the powers of the underworld to send Orestes back to her: καί μοι τὸν ἐμὸν πέμψατ' ἀδελφόν (117). Whereas Antigone's first reaction to Creon's edict is to summon Ismene forth from the palace so that she can enlist her support (1-10, 18-19, 37-38), we learn that Electra has been 'carrying this burden of grief alone' throughout all these years (119-120). Now that her strength is failing, Electra does not turn to the sister who, as we are about to discover, is just within the palace, but to the brother whom she has not seen in years. Nor is it this sister who, following upon this admission of the heroine's distress, now comes to offer a show of comfort and support, but a chorus of local Mycenaean women loyal to Agamemnon and his children. Unlike the chorus of elderly Theban citizens from the *Antigone*, whose gender, age, status and experience ostensibly serves to position them as supporters of Creon rather than Antigone,[25] and who never once assert that Antigone is right, Sophocles gives Electra a chorus of women who are naturally inclined to sympathise with the heroine's plight. Not only do the chorus repeatedly praise Electra's resolve (252-253, 464-465, 1058-1097), they also come to assume the role of a confidante for whom Electra displays a level of genuine affection and respect[26] – one she never demonstrates towards Chrysothemis, not even when the two sisters are seemingly united in feeling and action.

In contrast to Electra's opening lament, with its emphasis on the heroine's isolation, in which any mention of a sister to share her burden is notable only by its absence, "the parodos (121-150) at once establishes an intimacy between Electra and the chorus."[27] Jebb argues the Electra's lyric dialogue with the chorus "strikes the key-note of the play by illustrating Electra's constancy."[28] This is of course quite right; however, as always, Jebb is so exclusively focused on the hero and the precise nature

[25] Griffith 1999: 11.
[26] For a detailed discussion on "the comity and warmth that Electra and the chorus display toward one another" throughout the play, see Gardiner 1987: 139-163.
[27] Gardiner 1987: 142.
[28] Jebb 1894 ad loc.

of their heroism that he fails to recognise that the parodos also functions to establish significant aspects of Electra's relationship with both the chorus and Chrysothemis. Whereas the *Antigone* opens with a powerful sense of identification between Antigone and Ismene, here it is the chorus who immediately identify themselves with the heroine. In direct opposition to Clytemnestra's failings as a mother (121, 125), the chorus present themselves in the role of a 'true mother' (μάτηρ ὡσεί τις πιστά 234)[29] who has come to comfort, advise, and commiserate with her 'child' (121, 153, 173, 251). Any rebukes the chorus may seem to level against Electra (121-126, 137-144, 219-220, 235) are soon revealed not to stem from any criticism of her motives but rather, as with Ismene (49-68, 82), from a heartfelt concern for Electra's safety and well-being:[30] it is 'from love', the chorus says, that they speak, to prevent her from 'adding misery to miseries' (233-235). Similarly, it is quickly established that the chorus shares Electra's condemnation of Agamemnon's murder (124-126, 193-200), her contempt for his murderers (125-126, 234), her concern for the safe return of Orestes (160-163, 317-318ff.), and her desire for vengeance (126-127, 176-184, 251-252).[31] It is not simply that the chorus agrees with Electra, however, but rather that there is clear process of assimilation between the two – much as Antigone initially tries to assimilate or 'ingest' Ismene into herself.[32] In 193-196 the chorus becomes so "moved by Electra's misery" that they leave off trying to dissuade her from antagonising her enemies and instead "join with her in bewailing" Agamemnon's pitiable death;[33] in 251-252 they explicitly identify their own interests with Electra's (ἐγὼ μέν, ὦ παῖ, καὶ τὸ σὸν σπεύδουσ' ἅμα / καὶ τοὐμὸν αὐτῆς ἦλθον)[34]; and in 253 they submit themselves entirely to Electra's

[29] Finglass 2007 ad loc.: "The adjective πιστά, not elsewhere found as an epithet for μήτηρ, brings out this implicit contrast between the chorus and Clytemnestra."
[30] See also Gardiner 1987: 143, March 2001: 149 n. 141, and Finglass 2007: 165 n. 213-20.
[31] Cf. Budelmann 2000: 252.
[32] Steiner 1984: 209.
[33] Jebb 1894 ad loc. Cf. Kells 1973 ad loc.: "The Chorus and Electra are now at one"; and Finglass 2007: 159 n. 193-200: "The chorus acknowledges the horror of Agamemnon's death just as much as Electra herself does".
[34] Cf. Jebb 1894 ad loc.: "her interests are to them as their own"; March 2001 ad loc.: "here the Chorus clearly identify their interests with those of Electra (and indeed throughout the play they are fully on

will: σὺ νίκα· σοὶ γὰρ ἑψόμεσθ' ἅμα.[35] As Budelmann points out, this sense of identification between Electra and the chorus is so strong that "[a]t times it is as though there were sixteen, rather than one, Electras on stage."[36]

For Electra's part, her opening address to the chorus clearly establishes that theirs is a relationship of mutual affection: she addresses them as women who are 'true to their noble birth' (γενέθλα γενναίων 128), and whose 'affection answers my own in every way' (παντοίας φιλότητος ἀμειβόμεναι χάριν 134). As Blundell has correctly pointed out, however, Electra's address also reveals that she defines φιλότης, 'friendship' or 'love', as a relationship that is primarily based on reciprocity (ἀμειβόμεναι).[37] In the absence of the brother she longs for, or the sister she has yet to acknowledge, Electra 'knows and recognises' (οἶδά τε καὶ ξυνίημι 131) that the chorus has come to 'soothe her sorrows' (129). The chorus asks Electra why she is always pining away in ceaseless lamentation for a father who has been dead for so many years (122-126). Chrysothemis will open with exactly the same sentiment in 327-328. Whereas Electra will later answer her sister's words with the cruel accusation that Chrysothemis is nothing more than their mother's puppet (341-344), here she politely acknowledges the chorus' kind intentions (129-136). Like Ismene, the chorus suggests a compromise: not to relent from her hatred of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, but to adopt a more prudent approach by trusting to others, to Orestes or the gods, to accomplish the vengeance (176-184, cf. *Ant*. 84-85). Like Antigone, Electra rejects this proposition. Antigone's response is a vicious outburst in which she threatens Ismene with hatred (86-87). Electra, once again, does not respond to the chorus with anger;

her side); and Finglass 2007 ad loc.: the chorus "claims that its welfare is inextricably bound up with hers."

[35] Cf. March 2001 ad loc.: "Electra has converted the Chorus to her point of view and they will no more urge her to moderate her behaviour". Gardiner (1987: 145) has argued that the chorus "is not a crowd of starry-eyed idealists or frenzied partisans, but fifteen sensible and concerned adults whom Electra persuades to her view of the right way to proceed."

[36] Budelmann 2000: 252. Cf. Gardiner 1987: 159.

[37] Blundell 1989: 150. Cf. Kells 1973 ad loc.

instead, she calmly and sadly explains that she has neither the strength nor the time to wait for someone else to champion her cause (185-189). Similarly, when the chorus warns Electra that she should not seek to engage in conflict with 'the strong' (τοῖς δυνατοῖς 219) – the same argument used by both Ismene (59-64) and Chrysothemis (332-340, 396, 995-1008) – instead of reacting with hostility or drawing an emphatic distinction between the chorus and herself, Electra admits that her 'passion' (ὀργά) is excessive (222). Not only does she continue to address the chorus with terms of endearment throughout the parodos (ὦ φιλία γενέθλα 226, φίλαι 307), she later goes to on to ask for their forgiveness (αἰσχύνομαι 254, σύγγνωτε 257).[38]

Finglass claims that "Electra's lack of contempt for her advisors" and "her recognition of the unpleasant aspects of her behaviour reveals a self-awareness" that sets her apart from the other Sophoclean heroes, particularly Antigone: "There is more to her than monolithic defiance."[39] There are two crucial points, however, that Finglass has failed to take into consideration. Firstly, while it is evident that Sophocles has Electra display an undiminished affection toward the chorus which is clearly lacking in Antigone's dealings with Ismene, this same forbearance, as we shall see, is certainly not in evidence in her two scenes with Chrysothemis. Secondly, the fact that Electra shows herself capable of entertaining advice and alternative points of view without immediately resorting to hostility, and capable of recognising that her own behaviour is open to criticism, means that we cannot simply attribute her conflict with Chrysothemis to the intensity of her heroic resolve, as we do with Antigone and Ismene's disagreement. It is not merely their opposing attitudes to the crisis confronting their family that drive Electra and Chrysothemis apart, as is the case with Antigone and Ismene, but something deeper.

[38] Finglass 2007 ad loc.: "requests for forgiveness are not often found in the mouths of Sophoclean protagonists."
[39] Finglass 2007: 139-140. Cf. Knox 1964: 34 ("the most self-analytical of all the Sophoclean heroes") and Winnington-Ingram 1980: 223.

The fundamental difference between Sophocles' depiction of the two sets of siblings in the *Antigone* and the *Electra* is that Sophocles never allows the children of Agamemnon to display the same 'oneness' that he initially grants to Antigone and Ismene. One of the ways in which Sophocles works to undermine the possibility that Orestes, Electra and Chrysothemis will ever achieve this same level of unity, as we have seen, is to use the opening scenes of the play not to focus directly on the dynamics between the siblings themselves, as he does in the *Antigone*, but rather to set about firmly establishing their bonds with other characters. For all that Electra repeatedly expresses her hope for the triumphant return of Orestes (117-120, 164-172, 303-306, 319 ff.), any hope that she and her brother will form a 'true pair' has already to a certain extent been undermined by the fact that Sophocles has opened his play by linking Orestes with Pylades (21, 75, cf. 1297, 1367, 1376, 1401). Similarly, Chrysothemis is never going to be what Ismene was to Antigone because Sophocles has, essentially, already given that role to the chorus.

At the same time as emphasising the bond between Electra and the chorus, Sophocles also works to establish a sense of separation between Electra and Chrysothemis. In the *Antigone*, the initial identification between the two sisters is soon replaced with an increasingly pronounced sense of their estrangement, as soon as Sophocles sets about characterising each sister's opposing personality and worldview through their opening interaction with one another. Scholars have assumed that Sophocles takes the same approach here; that it is not until the actual appearance of Chrysothemis (328 ff.) that the 'contrast' between the two sisters is first introduced.[40] Rather than waiting until the two sisters share their first encounter, however, Sophocles lays the groundwork for their future antagonism before Chrysothemis even sets foot on stage. When the chorus points out that 'neither lament nor prayer' will bring Agamemnon back to life (137-139), Electra responds that 'any child who forgets a parent's pitiable

[40] Jebb 1984: 41 n. 251-471. See also Kells 1973: 103 n. 324-384, and March 2001: 150: n. 157, 162 n. 328-403.

death' is a 'fool' (νήπιος 145). Far more 'fitted' or 'suited' to her own mind (ἀλλ' ἐμέ γ'… ἄραρεν φρένας 147), she says, are the eternal mourners Procne and Niobe. When the chorus tries to dissuade Electra from adding 'misery to miseries' (235), she explains that it can never be *kalon* (237) to neglect the dead and that she herself would never dishonour her father in exchange for a life of 'carefree ease' (εὔκηλος 241).[41] And when she entreats the chorus to pardon her excessive mourning (254-257), she says that there is no way that any woman of 'noble' nature (εὐγενὴς γυνή 257)[42] could possibly behave any differently when confronted with the many atrocities she has had to endure. In such a situation, she claims, there is simply no room for 'moderation' (σωφρονεῖν 307). Sophocles therefore uses Electra's opening exchange with the chorus not only to establish that theirs is a bond based on mutual affection and common purpose, but also to allow his heroine to illustrate her moral standpoint to the audience.[43] Like Antigone (37-38, 72, 97), Electra believes that she is proving her worth as an *eugenês* by holding true to what is *kalon* at the expense of all else. The manner in which Sophocles has Electra frame this moral standpoint, however, is such that it allows him to prefigure the future opposition between Electra and Chrysothemis by implicitly casting Chrysothemis in the role of the 'fool' who has 'forgotten' her dead father and abandoned what is *kalon* in favour of an 'easy' life – a role which Sophocles sets out to confirm the moment we learn of Chrysothemis' existence.

In her distress at discovering Creon's edict, Antigone's first reaction is turn to her sister. Electra – despite her insistence that her strength is failing (118-120, 186) – looks only to her absent brother for aid (117, 164-172, 303-305, 319 ff.), never giving even the

[41] Jebb 1894; Kells 1973; and Finglass 2007 ad loc.

[42] Like Antigone (37-38), Electra's use of the term *eugenês* combines the ideas of 'noble' birth and 'noble' conduct. Cf. Jebb 1894, March 2001, and Finglass 2007 ad loc., Kirkwood 1958: 177-180, Knox 1964: 28, and Dover 1974: 94-95.

[43] A moral standpoint which, as Gardiner (1987: 145) has pointed out, "stands unchallenged" by the chorus.

slightest intimation that she has a sister. It is the chorus who reveals that Electra is not quite as 'alone' as she presents herself to be (154-157):

> οὔτοι σοὶ μούνᾳ, τέκνον, ἄχος ἐφάνη βροτῶν,
> πρὸς ὅ τι σὺ τῶν ἔνδον εἶ περισσά,
> οἷς ὁμόθεν εἶ καὶ γονᾷ ξύναιμος,
> οἵα Χρυσόθεμις ζώει καὶ Ἰφιάνασσα…
>
> And yet not to you alone of mortals, child, has come the pain
> which you suffer more excessively than those within,
> your sisters of common birth and blood,
> Chrysothemis and Iphianassa, who still live…[44]

After Electra's repeated emphasis on the abject isolation of her own position (86-95, 100-102, 118-120), the revelation that there is a sister who is apparently alive and well inside the palace comes as something of a shock. It also lends an added significance to Electra's 'loneliness'. At the same time as he stresses the sisters' common origin (ὁμόθεν εἶ καὶ γονᾷ ξύναιμος), Sophocles undermines any sense of their commonality by drawing an explicit contrast between Electra's 'excessive' (περισσά) vigil outside the palace and Chrysothemis' more moderate grief and "comfortable life"[45] within. The fact that Electra passes over this reference to Chrysothemis entirely and simply reiterates her longing for Orestes' return (164-172)[46] only serves to enhance the sense of disaffection between the two sisters.

Just how 'unsuited' (cf. 147) to one another the sisters really are becomes even clearer when the chorus furtively raises the issue of Orestes' return and his revenge on Aegisthus (310 ff.). Their exchange takes on the same conspiratorial atmosphere as the

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[44] Iphianassa is one of the four children of Agamemnon mentioned by Homer (*Il*. 9. 142 ff.). She is never referred to again in this play. For more on the origin and role of her character, see Jebb 1894, Fitton Brown 1966: 20 ff., Kells 1973, Winnington-Ingram 1980: 336, March 2001, and Finglass 2007 ad loc.

[45] Campbell & Abbott 1886 ad loc.: "**οἵα Χρυσόθεμις ζώει,** 'like the happy Chrysothemis.' **οἵα** is equivalent to an adverb, and **ζώει** includes the idea of joyous existence".

[46] March 2001 ad loc: "The name of Orestes is dramatically emphasised by being withheld to the very end of a long sentence." See also Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.

earlier discussion between Orestes and the Paedagogus in the prologue.[47] When Electra expresses her disappointment over Orestes' failure to return, the chorus tries to console her with the assurance that he is too 'noble' (πέφυκεν ἐσθλός) to abandon his *philoi* (322). It is just as Electra affirms this assessment of her brother as someone who is loyal to his *philoi* (323) that Chrysothemis emerges from the palace. Any lingering hope that her arrival might herald the same level of intimacy which characterises Antigone and Ismene's opening speeches is further dispelled when the chorus abruptly warns Electra to keep quiet (324-326):

> μὴ νῦν ἔτ' εἴπῃς μηδέν· ὡς δόμων ὁρῶ
> τὴν σὴν ὅμαιμον, ἐκ πατρὸς ταὐτοῦ φύσιν,
> Χρυσόθεμιν, ἔκ τε μητρός…
>
> Do not say anymore now. For I see your sister coming
> from the house, born from the same father –
> Chrysothemis – and from the same mother…

Blundell has argued that the elaborate hyperbaton of 325-326[48] focuses our attention on the fact that we are once again dealing with a "divided family" in which "the natural relationships of family *philia*… have been seriously disrupted": a 'mother no-mother' (μήτηρ ἀμήτωρ 1154) whose decision to murder her husband in revenge for killing their daughter has "forced her children to choose between their parents".[49] Since it has already been made abundantly clear to which parent Electra has dedicated her allegiance, the insertion of Chrysothemis' name between 'father' and 'mother' also suggests that the fate of Electra and Chrysothemis' relationship rests not on their shared origin but on where Chrysothemis' loyalty lies.[50] Scholars often compare these two lines with Antigone's opening address to Ismene;[51] and yet it is not merely the

[47] Gardiner 1987: 146: "The play began with a conspiracy of men coming from abroad; the parodos initiates a conspiracy of women at home."
[48] Kells 1973 ad loc.: "The natural order would be ὡς ὁρῶ τὴν σὴν ὅμαιμον, ἐκ πατρὸς ταὐτοῦ ἔκ τε μητρός (sc. ταὐτῆς) φύσιν, Χρυσόθεμιν…".
[49] Blundell 1989: 157, 152.
[50] Cf. Kells 1973 ad loc., Coo 2021: 93, and Finglass 2007: 195 n. 325-6.
[51] See, for example, Kamerbeek 1974, March 2001, and Finglass 2007 ad loc.

exaggerated emphasis on kinship ties that makes these constructions so similar but rather the implication that it is only if Ismene and Chrysothemis share the same views as their sisters that these sibling bonds will be upheld.

The crucial difference is that Antigone's opening address (ὦ κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἰσμήνης κάρα 1) is in itself an expression of her belief that she and Ismene are one another's 'other selves' and will thus necessarily share the same view regarding Polyneices. In the *Electra*, Sophocles does not begin with the premise that Electra and Chrysothemis' common origin will automatically translate into a common purpose. On the contrary, he sets to work gradually building up a sense of their disaffection from the moment Electra comes on stage, both through his characterisation of the bond Electra shares with the chorus and by creating an implicit contrast between each sister's position regarding their murdered father. As Chrysothemis now approaches to deliver her opening speech to a sister who has yet to acknowledge her existence, Sophocles once again has his chorus draw attention to the sisters' shared origin in a manner which simultaneously illustrates their lack of mutual affinity (cf. 154-157). For not only is Chrysothemis to be excluded from the special confidence shared by Electra and the chorus[52], just as Electra herself was excluded from Orestes' secret plans with Pylades and the Paedagogus, but the implication that she is not to be trusted with any news concerning Orestes and his anticipated revenge serves to effectively align Chrysothemis with her sister's *echthroi*.[53]

[52] Gardiner 1987: 146: "The chorus' act of suddenly warning Electra to silence at the appearance of Chrysothemis reinforces the secretive mood of the scene, which ends on a note of complete agreement among the conspirators."

[53] Jebb 1894 ad loc: "The Chorus wish Electra to cease speaking of Orestes, because they regard Chrysothemis as a partisan of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus".

Electra and Chrysothemis: The First Meeting

All our suspicions regarding the nature of Electra and Chrysothemis' relationship – that these are two sisters who, despite being in the same position as regards their common blood and family history (156, 325), are nevertheless opposed in both character and outlook – are confirmed as soon as Chrysothemis arrives. Electra, who tells us that she has been forced into the position of a despised servant in her father's household as punishment for her insolent behaviour, is dressed in rags (189-192, 451-452). As a visual symbol of the contrast between the two sisters, Chrysothemis now appears in what would have been a noticeably more elaborate costume.[54] For all that the scholiast claims that Sophocles once again 'sets a passionate character against a mild one, just as he paired Antigone with Ismene,[55] there is nothing particularly 'mild' about our first impression of Chrysothemis, who immediately goes on the attack (328-331):

> τίν' αὖ σὺ τήνδε πρὸς θυρῶνος ἐξόδοις
> ἐλθοῦσα φωνεῖς, ὦ κασιγνήτη, φάτιν,
> κοὐδ' ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ διδαχθῆναι θέλεις
> θυμῷ ματαίῳ μὴ χαρίζεσθαι κενά;
>
> What is this talk that you have once again
> come forth to publicly declaim, sister –
> will you not learn through any length of time
> not to indulge in vain your pointless anger?

Like the chorus, Chrysothemis begins with the issue of Electra's excessive lamentation. Whereas the chorus' rebuke is tempered by their sympathy for the heroine and their affinity with her views (121-126), the accusatory tone of Chrysothemis' reproach[56] clearly casts her in the role of antagonist. Unlike Ismene or

[54] March 2001: 162 n. 328-403; Finglass 2007 ad loc.

[55] Σ *El*. 328.2-328.5: ἐπίτηδες τοῖς ἀγρίοις ἤθεσιν ἀντιπαρατάττουσι πρᾶα καθάπερ νῦν τῇ Ἠλέκτρᾳ Χρυσόθεμιν συνέζευξεν καὶ τῇ Ἀντιγόνῃ τὴν Ἰσμήνην ἕνεκα τοῦ διαποικίλλειν ταῖς ἀντιρρήσεσι τὰ δράματα.

[56] Cf. Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.: "The disagreeable effect (μακρῷ is emphasised) is in keeping with the tone of Chrysothemis' introductory words"; Finglass 2007: 196 n. 332: "καίτοι often has 'a certain

the chorus, Chrysothemis has not come to offer her comfort and support, but to berate her sister and defend what she clearly deems to be her own 'superior' position. In fact, Chrysothemis has not come for Electra at all. She is on an errand for Clytemnestra (404 ff.); but in her frustration at discovering that Electra is 'once again indulging in pointless anger', she cannot resist the opportunity to voice her disapproval.[57]

Coo has argued that "even as she urges her sister to moderate her behaviour", Chrysothemis' "opening stance is one of identification with Electra".[58] On the surface, this certainly seems to be the case. Chrysothemis asserts that she herself is no less distressed by the current situation and that, if she could but 'find the strength', she would show their enemies 'what she thinks of them': ἀλγῶ 'πὶ τοῖς παροῦσιν · ὥστ' ἄν, εἰ σθένος / λάβοιμι, δηλώσαιμ' ἂν οἵ' αὐτοῖς φρονῶ (333-334). As Finglass has pointed out, however, after Electra's emotional accounts of her own suffering in the opening scenes (86-120, 128-136, 145-152, 164-172, 185-192, 201-212, 221-232, 236-250, 254-309), the "very bland" ἀλγῶ 'πὶ τοῖς παροῦσιν "sounds trite" and somewhat insincere.[59] Similarly, since Electra has somehow managed to 'find the strength' to openly oppose Clytemnestra and Aegisthus all on her own (118-120, 186), Chrysothemis' avowal of hatred for their common enemies comes across more as an excuse for her own moral cowardice than an expression of solidarity. Finally, although she professes to share Electra's attitude towards their father's murderers, even in private she cannot muster enough conviction to define what this attitude is (δηλώσαιμ' ἂν οἵ[α]… φρονῶ) or name them directly (αὐτοῖς).[60]

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combative tone' (Denniston 556): its occurrence twice over a short section (cf. 338) accentuates the quarrelsome mood of Chrysothemis' speech."

[57] Kells 1973: 103 n. 324-384: "We realise, of course, that the clash has taken place many times before in their lives. But, since this is theatre, all the basic issues have to be stated as if for the first time, so that the audience may know what the significant differences are between them."

[58] Coo 2021: 94.

[59] Finglass 2007 ad loc.

[60] Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.: "it is of course in keeping with Chrysothemis' character that she does not mention them by name and that she makes use of a neutral phrase to express her real state of feeling". March (2001 ad loc.) argues that it is Chrysothemis' 'typically cautious' nature that accounts for her 'guarded' language.

What might therefore appear to be a declaration of Chrysothemis' conviction that, for all that she and Electra have chosen such different paths, they are nevertheless "linked through shared loyalties and common enemies",[61] instead only serves to illustrate that Chrysothemis is not wholly in sympathy with Electra's feeling. This is true for Ismene too, of course, who never really shares Antigone's dedication to the 'unwritten laws' (454-455). The crucial distinction, however, is that despite their many differences in personality and moral conviction, Ismene never wavers in her devotion to Antigone, readily putting aside any consideration of her own safety to 'sail beside Antigone in her time of trouble': ἀλλ' ἐν κακοῖς τοῖς σοῖσιν οὐκ αἰσχύνομαι / ξύμπλουν ἐμαυτὴν τοῦ πάθους ποιουμένη (540-541). As Chrysothemis moves on to justify her position through the use of her own sailing metaphor, this fundamental distinction between the two characters starts to become apparent (335-340):

> νῦν δ' ἐν κακοῖς μοι πλεῖν ὑφειμένῃ δοκεῖ,
> καὶ μὴ δοκεῖν μὲν δρᾶν τι, πημαίνειν δὲ μή.
> τοιαῦτα δ' ἄλλα καὶ σὲ βούλομαι ποεῖν.
> καίτοι τὸ μὲν δίκαιον οὐχ ᾗ 'γὼ λέγω,
> ἀλλ' ᾗ σὺ κρίνεις· εἰ δ' ἐλευθέραν με δεῖ
> ζῆν, τῶν κρατούντων ἐστὶ πάντ' ἀκουστέα.
>
> Now in these times of trouble, what seems best to me is to lower my sails,
> and not to give the impression of doing something, and yet inflict no harm –
> and I wish that you would also do the same!
> However, justice is not with what I advise,
> but with the course you have chosen. But if I am to live in freedom
> our rulers must be obeyed in all things.

'In times of trouble' (ἐν κακοῖς), Ismene's affection for Antigone supersedes everything else. For Chrysothemis, it is her own safety and well-being that takes precedence. Similarly, although both characters claim that they are forced to obey those in authority, the difference is once again quite striking. In Ismene's case, the penalty for disobedience is death. Up until this point, the only risk Chrysothemis has

[61] Coo 2021: 94.

faced is to suffer the same deprivations as Electra.[62] So whereas Ismene is quite literally trying to save her sister's life (58-64), Chrysothemis merely seeks to safeguard her own physical and material comforts.[63] Coo takes issue with those scholars who have claimed that Ismene is a more attractive character than Chrysothemis,[64] excusing Chrysothemis' impatience with her sister's reckless intransigence on the grounds that "Chrysothemis has been living with Electra's mourning for years and is weary of what she views as her sister's futile and repetitive behaviour".[65] While the two situations are indeed quite different, it is equally accepted that Sophocles nevertheless intended his audience to compare the two sets of sisters;[66] and there is simply no denying that Chrysothemis has effectively abandoned Electra to face a life of misery and deprivation on her own so that she herself can continue to enjoy the comforts of her privileged position.

What Chrysothemis initially presents as the distinction between 'us' and 'them' (cf. αὐτοῖς 334)[67] quickly turns into the contrast between my 'sensible' attitude and your 'senseless' one.[68] Although she admits, as Ismene does, that her sister's chosen course is morally superior to her own (338-339, cf. *Ant*. 65) and, again like Ismene, argues for the necessity of obeying those in power (339-340, cf. *Ant*. 58-68), Chrysothemis hardly comes across as the 'underdog' in this situation.[69] Indeed, with Chrysothemis on the attack and Electra being the one who has to defend her position, Chrysothemis is far

[62] Blundell 1989: 160: "Chrysothemis [has been] refusing to participate in a form of vengeance well within her power."
[63] Cf. Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.: "her notion of ἐλευθερία is limited to the possibility of enjoying the material advantages of a princess."
[64] See, for example: Winnington-Ingram 1983: 237, Blundell 1989: 158 n. 38, and Roisman 2018: 75.
[65] Coo 2021: 92.
[66] See, for example: Mossman 2012: 497, Kamerbeek 1974: 10, and Winnington-Ingram 1980: 241, 1983: 253.
[67] Coo 2021: 94: "Chrysothemis… differentiates between 'us', the two sisters, and 'them', Clytemnestra and Aegisthus."
[68] Jebb 1894 ad loc.: "The first μή affects all that follows it. Such a combination of independent negatives is especially frequent in denials of illogical conduct". Chrysothemis frequently emphasises the need for common sense (384, 394, 398, 429, 992-993, 1038, 1055-1056).
[69] Kells 1973: 105 n. 337.

more akin to Antigone here than she is to Ismene: like Antigone, she would prefer a sister who thinks and behaves precisely as she does (337, cf. *Ant*. 1, 37-38);[70] like Antigone, she unfairly accuses her sister of being all talk and no action (331, 336, cf. *Ant*. 543);[71] and, like Antigone, she dismisses her sister's opposing views with an air of superiority and contempt (331-2, 336, cf. *Ant*. 45-46, 71, 76-77, 80-81, 83, 89, 95-97).[72] Moreover, although she immediately acknowledges Electra as her 'sister' with the somewhat perfunctory ὦ κασιγνήτη (329),[73] her opening speech contains none of the characteristic features Ismene uses throughout the play to express both her affection and her desire for connectedness with Antigone (dual endings, first-person plurals and pronouns, σύν-compounds etc.: 13, 39, 58-64, 82, 85, 99, 537, 541, 544-545, 548, 552, 554, 558). Instead, her frequent first-person assertions (332, 333, 334, 337, 338)[74] and emphatic ἐγώ… σὺ… distinctions (338-339) closely resemble Antigone's language after Ismene refuses to take part in the burial (45-46, 69-77, 80-81, 83).

Although Chrysothemis has essentially expressed the same sentiments as the chorus on the dangers of Electra's position of open defiance and the ineffectiveness of her opposition (cf. 121-126, 137-143, 173-183, 213-220, 233-235), gone now is any semblance of the affection or the ability to recognise that her own excessive behaviour might be open to criticism which Electra earlier displayed with the chorus.[75] Instead, she launches a fervent counterattack in which she vehemently rejects any notion that she and Chrysothemis are united either through their shared loyalties or their common

[70] Jebb 1984 ad loc.: "She wishes Electra's behaviour to be a faithful copy of her own."
[71] Finglass 2007 ad loc.: "Chrysothemis' criticism of Electra does not do justice to the pain which the latter's laments cause Clytemnestra (cf. 287-98, 355, 783-7)." See also Blundell 1989: 157.
[72] Kamerbeek 1974: 59 n. 336: "The paratactic construction… renders still more unmistakable the dig at Electra's behaviour"; Finglass 2007: 197 n. 338-9: "Chrysothemis ironically pretends to defer to Electra's judgment."
[73] Compare Chrysothemis' address with Ismene's emotive appeals (49, 544) and the chorus' affectionate 'child' (121-122, 153, 173, 251).
[74] In her sum total of 60 lines, Ismene makes only twelve first-person assertions (16, 40, 66, 67, 78, 82, 536-537, 540, 552, 554); Chrysothemis has seven in her opening speech alone.
[75] Gardiner 1987: 146: "Electra, who was intense but polite when she answered the motherly chorus on the same subject, now displays a passionate anger towards her… sister."

enemies:[76] whereas her own loyalty to Agamemnon is absolute, Chrysothemis has forgotten their father and cares only for Clytemnestra (341-342, 365-366); while she has been doing everything in her power to avenge their father (349), Chrysothemis has not merely failed to give her any assistance (οὔτε ξυνέρδεις 350), but willingly consorted with his murderers (φονεῦσι τοῦ πατρὸς ξύνει 358).[77] The scholiast points out that Electra's accusation that Chrysothemis only 'cares for her mother' (τῆς δὲ τικτούσης μέλειν 342) recalls Antigone's cruel taunt to Ismene at 549: Κρέοντ' ἐρώτα· τοῦδε γὰρ σὺ κηδεμών.[78] Indeed, in her increasingly scornful attack,[79] Electra makes all the same accusations that Antigone levels against Ismene over the course of the play: that Chrysothemis shows her allegiance only 'in word' rather than 'in deed' (μὲν λόγῳ… ἔργῳ δὲ 357-358, cf. *Ant.* 543); that she has 'betrayed' her *philoi* (φίλους προδοῦσα σούς 368, cf. *Ant*. 46); and that she forsaken her noble heritage (341-342), preferring the life of a κακή to that of an *aristos* (366-367, cf. *Ant*. 37-38).[80]

As he does in the *Antigone*, Sophocles does not limit himself to the portrayal of two sisters and their contrasting approaches to the same situation, but also the opposing value and moral systems that underpin each of those approaches.[81] Chrysothemis' main argument was that her own prudence is a far more sensible course of action than Electra's 'pointless anger' (331), which gives the impression of 'doing something' (δοκεῖν δρᾶν τι 336) but in effect gains her 'nothing' (κενά 331).[82] Electra now counters

[76] Coo 2021: 95: "She… categorically rejects Chrysothemis' presentation of herself, which had positioned the sisters as complicit in their shared knowledge of the injustice of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra."
[77] Parker 1983: 122: "numerous texts speak of voluntary association with a kinsman's killer as the worst of crimes".
[78] Σ *El*. 343.1-343.3: ταῦτα ὅμοιά ἐστι τοῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀντιγόνῃ ὅπου τῇ Ἰσμήνῃ λοιδορεῖ καί φησιν αὐτὴν τὰ Κρέοντος φρονεῖν.
[79] Cf. Kamerbeek 1974: 61 n. 357, 8, and Finglass 2007: 198 n. 341-68.
[80] Like Antigone, Electra also issues an ultimatum (345-346, cf. *Ant.* 37-38).
[81] For a fuller discussion on the opposing values Electra and Chrysothemis attach to concepts such as honour and dishonour, *kalon* and *kakon*, profit and loss, and sense and folly, see esp. Kirkwood 1958: 137-139 and Blundell 1989: 157-161.
[82] Foley 2002: 150: "Good sense", for Chrysothemis, "entails collaboration and self-protection, a pursuit of material comfort and an avoidance of suffering." See also: Kirkwood 1958: 137, and Segal 1966: 489.

that she does in fact 'profit' (κέρδος 353) from her behaviour, since her continued mourning serves not only to 'grieve' her enemies, but also to 'bring honour to the dead' (355-356). She consents that she lives 'wretchedly' (κακῶς 354) but prides herself on her refusal to 'yield' (οὐδ'… ὑπεικάθοιμι 359-361).[83] Chrysothemis, she argues, might 'pride herself on the gifts' (τὰ σὰ… δῶρ', ἐφ' οἷσι νῦν χλιδᾷς 359-360)[84] which she now enjoys, but if she were truly 'prudent' (σώφρων 365)[85] she would recognise that the only thing this 'life of luxury' (περιρρείτω βίος 362) has in fact gained her is the loss of her integrity (363-364, 366-367).[86]

The sisters clearly hold such opposing views on what constitutes 'profit' and 'prudence' that the chorus now steps in to try and resolve the quarrel: 'There is profit (κέρδος) for both of you (ἀμφοῖν) in what is said, if you [sc. Electra] would learn to take her counsel, and she yours' (369-371).[87] Thus far we have had a 'pair of avengers' (Orestes and Pylades: 21, 75) and a 'pair of murderers' (Aegisthus and Clytemnestra: 206); this is the first time that the dual form is used of Electra and Chrysothemis and, as with the previous references to their shared origin (153-157, 325-326), it comes not from the sisters themselves but from the chorus. Sophocles never has his chorus intercede in Antigone and Ismene's dispute, and yet its kindly efforts here are still not enough to reconcile these fundamentally disparate sisters. The dual falls flat, and rather than promoting any sense of connectedness between the two sisters, the three-way dialogue which the chorus' intervention produces only serves to further

[83] Kitto (1958:11-12) on 359-360: "The nineteen words, fourteen of them monosyllables, convey by their very clatter Electra's biting scorn."
[84] Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.: "τὰ σὰ δῶρα is extremely malicious as it implies the rewards of her compliance."
[85] Blundell 1989: 159: Chrysothemis is "endowed with *sophrosune* in the conventional sense of restraint and decorum… Electra earlier acknowledged her own deficiency in this virtue, but now paradoxically redefines it and reclaims it for herself (307, 356)." Foley 2002: 150-151: "a remarkable redefinition of the term… *Sōphrosunē* is in this speech no longer a matter of female discretion, self-control, and obedience to her guardians, but of an active piety, courage and even self-respect".
[86] Kirkwood 1958: 242: "'sense'… means to Chrysothemis self-protection and submission; to Electra it means awareness of moral duty."
[87] Jebb 1894 ad loc.: "Electra is in need of caution, and Chrysothemis of loyalty."

underscore their fundamental dislocation: Electra addresses Chrysothemis, the chorus addresses Electra, and Chrysothemis now directs her answer not to Electra,[88] but to the chorus (372-375):

> ἐγὼ μέν, ὦ γυναῖκες, ἠθάς εἰμί πως
> τῶν τῆσδε μύθων· οὐδ' ἂν ἐμνήσθην ποτέ,
> εἰ μὴ κακὸν μέγιστον εἰς αὐτὴν ἰὸν
> ἤκουσ', ὃ ταύτην τῶν μακρῶν σχήσει γόων.
>
> I at least, women, am well enough accustomed to
> this kind of talk from her. Nor would I have even mentioned anything,
> had I not heard that the greatest misfortune was coming her way,
> which will keep this one from her interminable wailing.

Chrysothemis immediately replaces the chorus' dual with an emphatic ἐγὼ μέν which, through its implicit contrast with the unexpressed σὺ δὲ,[89] once again illustrates how entirely different Electra's relationship with the chorus is from that with her sister: '*I* at least am pretty much (πως) used to this one's abuse, even if *you* are not'. Chrysothemis might well "adop[t] an injured tone" here,[90] but Electra's scornful treatment of Chrysothemis is immediately matched by Chrysothemis' own spitefulness towards Electra when she then goes on to add that she would not have even bothered speaking to Electra in the first place, had she not wanted to deliver a warning: unless Electra ceases from her public mourning for Agamemnon, she is to be locked away in some underground dungeon far away (377-384). It is widely accepted that Sophocles 'borrows' this idea of Electra's imprisonment from the *Antigone*.[91] That Sophocles models Electra's impending punishment on the fate that Antigone herself ultimately suffers allows his audience to draw significant parallels between the two heroines;[92] but it also invites comparison between Ismene and Chrysothemis' reactions to each situation. Once again, the differences are striking.

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[88] Finglass 2007 ad loc.: "both an indication of her inability to reply to Electra's charges, and a snub."
[89] Kells 1973 ad loc. See also: Finglass 2007 ad loc.
[90] Campbell & Abbott 1886 ad loc.
[91] Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.; cf. Kells 1973; March 2001; Finglass 2007 ad loc.
[92] For more on this, see Seaford 1990: 76-90.

Kamerbeek has argued that when Chrysothemis reveals that she has come to warn Electra, "we are meant to understand that [she] does care for her sister."[93] While it would be crass to suggest that Chrysothemis holds no affection for Electra whatsoever, the manner in which Sophocles has Chrysothemis deliver her warning suggests that her 'concern' may be neither as altruistic nor as sincere as may first appear. The eagerness with which Chrysothemis launches into her account (378), making sure to emphasise every horrible detail of the fate that awaits her sister (380-382), together with her scornful references to Electra's 'interminably dreary' laments (375, 382)[94] and the menacing edge to her final warning (383-384)[95] suggests more than a hint of enjoyment. Weary of the self-righteous abuse she has put up with for years (372-373), Chrysothemis is, at least in part, relishing this opportunity to deliver the news that proves all her own views on the dangers of Electra's excessive behaviour have been proven correct.

Antigone and Electra might both sarcastically dismiss their potential fates as 'this dreadful thing' (τὸ δεινόν 376, cf. *Ant*. 96), but for Chrysothemis, as for Ismene, the punishment that threatens her sister is 'the greatest evil' (κακὸν μέγιστον, cf. *Ant*. ὅσῳ κάκιστ' ὀλούμεθ' 59). When Antigone is sentenced to death by Creon, Ismene's first impulse is to join her. When that fails, she risks her life again by confronting Creon directly. Chrysothemis makes it perfectly clear that she has no intention of joining Electra: as Finglass points out, the αὐτὴν… ταύτην… repetition in 374-375 "emphasises that this is a problem which Electra and no-one else will face."[96] While Chrysothemis does indeed try to save Electra, her disclosure of what Aegisthus and Clytemnestra are planning involves the least effort and absolutely no risk for Chrysothemis herself. Moreover, Ismene never takes the slightest satisfaction when

[93] Kamerbeek 1944 ad loc.
[94] Cf. Cambell & Abbott 1886 and Finglass 2007 ad loc. Kells' (1963 ad loc.) take on 381-382 is even more damaging to Chrysothemis: "*Then* (Chrysothemis means) you will have *something to cry about*."
[95] Jebb 1894 ad loc.
[96] Finglass 2007 ad loc.

her own views on the consequences of Antigone's defiance also turn out to be correct (ὅσῳ κάκιστ' ὀλούμεθ' 59, cf. κάκιστα δὴ μακρῷ κάτειμι, πρίν μοι μοῖραν ἐξήκειν βίου 895-896). On the contrary, she blames herself for failing to have successfully dissuaded Antigone (556, 558). Chrysothemis, far from blaming herself or suggesting that there was more she could have done or might still do to prevent this disaster, bluntly informs Electra that she now considers her duty discharged; whatever Electra does now is 'on her' and she can expect no further help from her end: 'So think about this, and do not blame me afterwards when you are in trouble' (πρὸς ταῦτα φράζου, καί με μή ποθ' ὕστερον / παθοῦσα μέμψῃ 383-384).[97] Judging her sisterly duty to have been duly performed, Chrysothemis voices no further concern for her sister's safety.

As the sisters begin their stichomythic exchange, Sophocles repeats many of the elements from Antigone and Ismene's exchange in the prologue; and yet, again, it is the differences that are more telling than the similarities. As with Antigone and Ismene, what Chrysothemis holds to be 'the greatest evil' (κακὸν μέγιστον 374) turns out to be of no consequence to Electra (ἀλλ' ἐξίκοιτο τοῦδέ γ' οὕνεκ' ἐν τάχει 387, cf. *Ant*. οὕτως ἔμοιγε τοῦδε τοῦ μόρου τυχεῖν παρ' οὐδὲν ἄλγος 465-466).[98] On the contrary, like Antigone, she considers her intended punishment to be 'gain' since it will allow her 'to get as far away as possible from all of you' (ὅπως ἀφ' ὑμῶν ὡς προσώτατ' ἐκφύγω 391, cf. *Ant*. 461-464). Although Electra had previously accused her sister of associating with their father's murderers (358), she now replaces the 'them' (348, 355, 361) she had previously used when referring to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus with a plural 'you' (ὑμῶν), thereby explicitly identifying Chrysothemis

[97] March 2001 ad loc.: "Chrysothemis feels that she has played her part by warning Electra of her impending punishment, so can now disclaim all responsibility for what may happen."

[98] The scholiast (Σ *El*. 387.1-387.2) remarks that Electra's attitude here reveals 'how exceedingly' Sophocles has modelled Electra's character on Antigone: ἁρμόζει λίαν τὸ πρόσωπον Ἠλέκτρας τῇ Ἀντιγόνῃ.

with her enemies.[99] Reinhardt has argued that this comment is more hateful than anything Antigone ever says to Ismene, and he has a point.[100] Although Antigone twice threatens Ismene with the hatred that is due to one's enemies (86-87, 93-94), it is a threat which she never carries out; she never actually goes so far as to directly refer to Ismene as an 'enemy'.

Where Ismene expressed agonised concern for her sister's safety (47, 49-60, 82, 84-85) Chrysothemis voices incredulous exasperation (388, 390, 392) at Electra's refusal to show any 'sense' (εὖ φρονεῖν 394). Both Ismene and Chrysothemis question their sister's reasoning, but whereas Ismene is simply trying to ascertain what Antigone is planning (ποῖ γνώμης ποτ' εἶ; 42), Chrysothemis' question is coloured by her own contempt for Electra's state of mind (ποῦ ποτ' εἶ φρενῶν; 390). Ismene and Chrysothemis both address their sisters as τάλαινα, 'wretched one'. Both of Ismene's addresses occur after Antigone draws an emphatic contrast between Ismene's fate and her own (81, 554), eliciting a heartfelt expression of Ismene's distress at the prospect of losing Antigone: οἴμοι ταλαίνης, ὡς ὑπερδέδοικά σου (82); οἴμοι τάλαινα, κἀμπλάκω τοῦ σοῦ μόρου; (554). In contrast to Ismene's affectionate usage, however, Chrysothemis' address merely serves to convey her irritation at Electra's recklessness: τίν', ὦ τάλαινα, τόνδ' ἐπηράσω λόγον; (388).[101] For Ismene, Antigone is the one thing without which life would not be worth living (καὶ τίς βίος μοι σοῦ λελειμμένη φίλος; 548); Chrysothemis, to whose mind one's own comfort and well-being should always take precedence, cannot fathom how anyone could possibly 'have no thought for life'

[99] The scholiast (Σ *El*. 391.1-391.2) notes: 'Very bitterly, she counts even her sister amongst those whom she condemns' (πάνυ θυμικῶς καὶ τὴν ἀδελφὴν αὐτοῖς συγκαταλέγει ὡς τὰ αὐτῶν αἱρουμένην). See also: Campbell & Abbott 1886, Jebb 1894, Kells 1973, March 2001, and Finglass 2007 ad loc.

[100] Reinhardt 1979: 145.

[101] Finglass 2007 ad loc.: "**ὦ τάλαινα**: 'The word can express not only pity for suffering… but [also] contempt for folly". Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc. "ὦ τάλαινα: the nuance is well caught by Jebb's 'misguided'".

(βίου… οὐ μνείαν ἔχεις; 392).[102] Finally, both Ismene and Chrysothemis recognise that they are in need of forgiveness for failing to honour their obligations to the dead. But whereas Ismene says that she will 'beg forgiveness from those beneath the earth' (ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν αἰτοῦσα τοὺς ὑπὸ χθονὸς ξύγγνοιαν ἴσχειν 65-66), Chrysothemis, with the same "daunting certainty"[103] Antigone displays when she claims to 'know' that she is 'pleasing those whom she is most bound to please' (89), claims to 'know' that this forgiveness has already been granted: πατὴρ δὲ τούτων, οἶδα, συγγνώμην ἔχει (400).[104]

Perhaps the biggest difference between the two stichomythic passages, however, is that whereas Ismene never retaliates in anger to her sister's increasingly cruel attack, nor once resorts to insults or aspersions on Antigone's character, Chrysothemis "often gives as good as she gets".[105] As their exchange becomes more heated, the sisters freely trade insults – Electra accusing Chrysothemis of being a 'fawning' κάκη (395, 397, 401); Chrysothemis accusing Electra of being a 'fool' for refusing 'to yield before the strong' (396, 398) – as each tries to score "debating points [over the other] as speedily and effectively as possible."[106] Whereas their opening speeches had centred around their opposing conceptions of 'prudence' and 'gain', they now argue over the definitions of *kalon* and *kakon*:[107] for Electra, betraying your *philoi* makes you a *kakos* (μή μ' ἐκδίδασκε τοῖς φίλοις εἶναι κακήν 395); for Chrysothemis, it is *kalon* not to bring about your own downfall through 'foolishness' (καλόν γε μέντοι μὴ 'ξ

[102] Kells 1973 ad loc.: "At 385 [Electra] was unprepared for death. At 387 she is ready and eager for it. Her resolution is achieved in a split second, and astonishes her sister, who is so different from Electra that she did not foresee the effect on the latter of her news."
[103] Apfel 2011: 277.
[104] Finglass 2007 ad loc.: "Ismene's words at *Ant*. 65-66… though formally similar, are different in a crucial respect: she begs for the forgiveness of the dead, while Chrysothemis claims to have it already".
[105] Apfel 2011: 291. Pounds-Williams 2017: 115: "Sophocles' Chrysothemis does fearlessly go head to head with her sister".
[106] Kells 1973: 106 n. 385-404.
[107] Kells 1973: 110 n. 395ff.

ἀβουλίας πεσεῖν 398).[108] Although Ismene also accuses Antigone of 'lacking sense' for refusing to give way to those in power (67, 99), she never tries to claim that her own course of action is *kalon*. On the contrary, she affirms that Antigone has chosen the path of a 'properly loving' *philê*: ἀλλ', εἰ δοκεῖ σοι, στεῖχε· τοῦτο δ' ἴσθ' ὅτι / ἄνους μὲν ἔρχῃ, τοῖς φίλοις δ' ὀρθῶς φίλη (98-99).

Several scholars have commented that Chrysothemis is a great deal more outspoken with Electra than Ismene is with Antigone. Kells, for example, has claimed that "Chrysothemis is a solider character than Ismene… and less inclined to settle for being a shadow of her stronger-willed sister."[109] Rather than taking this as a further indication of Ismene's timidity, however, we should see it as a testament to her greater affection for Antigone. Whereas Ismene is desperate to retain a sense of connectedness with Antigone, Chrysothemis evidently does not think that she has anything to lose, nor that she has anything to fight for. Antigone and Ismene's stichomythia comes to an abrupt end when Antigone storms off through the side-entrance, leaving Ismene to depart back into the palace on her own. Here, it is Chrysothemis who brings an end to the agonistic section of their exchange as soon as it becomes evident that Electra will not 'give way' to her advice (οὐχὶ… συναινέσεις ἐμοί 402). In contrast to Ismene's dogged determination to stand by Antigone's side, regardless of how they may differ or what it might cost her, Chrysothemis does not hesitate to abandon Electra to whatever fate awaits her: χωρήσομαι τἄρ' οἷπερ ἐστάλην ὁδοῦ (404).[110] She is only prevented from leaving when Electra enquires after her errand.

[108] Kirkwood 1958: 137: "Their notions of good and bad are just as far apart. Chrysothemis never thinks with any moral implication, only of material advantage or loss".
[109] Kells 1973: 103 n. 324-384.
[110] March 2001 ad loc.: "Chrysothemis has given up the attempt to persuade her sister to her way of thinking."

As Coo has pointed out, there is "a drastic shift" in Electra's demeanour as soon as she learns about Clytemnestra's dream.[111] Believing the dream to have been sent from Agamemnon and that vengeance may finally be near at hand, she resolves to replace Clytemnestra's funeral offerings with her own. Since she herself is forbidden to stray beyond the palace, she requires Chrysothemis' assistance. Having never, to this point, acknowledged Chrysothemis as her sister or displayed the slightest warmth towards her, Electra now uses affectionate addresses (ὦ φίλη 431, ἀδελφή 461), first-person plurals (στέφωμεν… δωρούμεθα 458), and appeals to their 'common father' (κοινῷ πατρί 463). Having labelled Chrysothemis a *kakê* (367, 395, 401) and identified her as an enemy (391), she now aligns Chrysothemis with herself against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (ἡμῖν… ἐχθροὺς 454). Coo is one of several scholars who have recognised that this use of associative language, "rather than an expression of genuine affection", is "a deliberate tactic" to enlist Chrysothemis' aid.[112] Her plan works: persuaded by Electra's appeal, Chrysothemis agrees to do as her sister bids and a scene which began in opposition and quickly progressed into open hostility now ends in conciliation – thus reversing the pattern of Antigone and Ismene's opening encounter, which begins with intimacy and ends in discord.

Although Coo casts Chrysothemis as the innocent victim of Electra's emotional manipulation,[113] what she does not consider is *why* Electra feels compelled to lay it on so thick in the first place. For all that Chrysothemis might claim that she longs to 'show their enemies what she thinks of them, if she could but find the strength' (εἰ σθένος λάβοιμι, δηλώσαιμ' ἂν οἵ' αὐτοῖς φρονῶ 333-334), thus far "Chrysothemis [has been] refusing to participate in a form of vengeance well within her power."[114] Electra knows

[111] Coo 2021: 97.
[112] Coo 2021: 98. See also: Segal 1966: 502-503, Blundell 1989: 153-154, and Roisman 2020: 11. Jebb (1894: 64 n. 431), however, claims that Electra's "bitter" feelings for Chrysothemis have now "passed away… and she speaks with affectionate earnestness." See also: March 2001: 168 n. 431-63, and Finglass 2007: 220 n. 431-63.
[113] Coo 2021: 89-108.
[114] Blundell 1989: 160.

that Chrysothemis has no real interest in collaborating with her against their enemies, not when it comes at the expense of her own physical comfort. Whereas Antigone takes it for granted that her *koinon autadelphon* will agree, Electra seems to take it for granted that Chrysothemis will refuse. So too, it seems, does the chorus. Fearing that Electra's appeal to their commonality might still not be enough to sway Chrysothemis, the chorus once again steps in. Unlike the neutral tone of their earlier intervention (369-371), this time the chorus explicitly sides with Electra and urges Chrysothemis to comply (464-465):

> πρὸς εὐσέβειαν ἡ κόρη λέγει· σὺ δέ,
> εἰ σωφρονήσεις, ὦ φίλη, δράσεις τάδε.
>
> The girl speaks piously. And you, friend,
> if you too would show sense, you will do as she asks.

With the chorus defining Electra's proposition as both 'pious' and 'sensible' – the very quality which Chrysothemis has repeatedly claimed as hers alone (394, 398, 429) – there is no way that Chrysothemis can refuse without incurring reproach – something we know she is anxious to avoid from her earlier concern to clear herself of any 'blame' in Electra's fate (με μή ποθ' ὕστερον… μέμψῃ 383-384). And so she agrees (466-467):

> δράσω· τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οὐκ ἔχει λόγον
> δυοῖν ἐρίζειν, ἀλλ' ἐπισπεύδειν τὸ δρᾶν.

That Chrysothemis still does not feel any true affinity with Electra is made clear when she once again directs her reply not to Electra, but to the chorus (cf. 372-375); rather than reciprocating any of Electra's affectionate language, it is the chorus she addresses as φίλαι (469).[115] As Jebb has pointed out, these verses allow for two possible interpretations. Either: "'With regard to what is (clearly) right, it is unreasonable for two persons to dispute; rather both should hasten on the doing (of it)'"; or

[115] Although it is sometimes argued that Chrysothemis includes Electra in this address, the scholiast (Σ *El*. 469.1-469.2) seems to take it for granted that Chrysothemis is only addressing the chorus: εὐλαβὴς οὖσα ἡ Χρυσόθεμις κρύπτειν ἀξιοῖ τὸν χορόν.

alternatively: "'that which is clearly right does not *afford any ground* (οὐκ ἔχει λόγον) for two persons to dispute'".[116] Jebb and Finglass prefer the former, Campbell & Abbott, Kamerbeek and Kells the latter.[117] There is also the possibility, as Hermann proposed, that the dual (δυοῖν) refers not to Electra and Chrysothemis, but to Electra and the chorus: "'The right view (of the matter) affords no ground for me to contend against you both'".[118] Finglass dismisses this reading on the grounds that it "raises the unhelpful possibility that [Chrysothemis] is merely giving way to superior numbers. Nor should the chorus be represented as a partner in the argument alongside Electra".[119] Yet it is precisely that the chorus *has* essentially taken what ought to be Chrysothemis' place as Electra's 'partner' that Sophocles has worked so hard to establish. Chrysothemis has already shown herself capable of abandoning Electra at the slightest provocation; it is the chorus who aligns their welfare with Electra's own (251-253) and stands determinedly by her side throughout the play. Similarly, while Jebb has argued that it is not "a majority of voices" to which Chrysothemis yields, but "a new perception of her duty",[120] it soon becomes apparent that Chrysothemis' priorities have not changed in the slightest (468-471):

> πειρωμένῃ δὲ τῶνδε τῶν ἔργων ἐμοὶ
> σιγὴ παρ' ὑμῶν πρὸς θεῶν ἔστω, φίλαι·
> ὡς εἰ τάδ' ἡ τεκοῦσα πεύσεται, πικρὰν
> δοκῶ με πεῖραν τήνδε τολμήσειν ἔτι.
>
> But as I attempt this task,
> by the gods, my friends, keep it quiet,
> because if my mother finds out, I think
> I shall yet pay dearly for this enterprise.

Both Ismene and Chrysothemis' final words in their opening scene reveal the guiding principle by which they are governed throughout the play. For Ismene, it is her

[116] Jebb 1894 ad loc.
[117] Jebb 1984; Finglass 2007; Campbell & Abbott 1886; Kells 1973; Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.
[118] Jebb 1894 ad loc; Hermann 1826 ad loc.
[119] Finglass 2007 ad loc.
[120] Jebb 1894 ad loc.

unwavering affection for Antigone (τοῖς φίλοις δ' ὀρθῶς φίλη 99); for Chrysothemis, it is the concern for her own well-being.

Swept up in the excitement and the rush of sisterly feeling occasioned by Clytemnestra's dream, Electra and Chrysothemis have seemingly united in common purpose, but neither sister's priorities have changed. Their first meeting may begin in opposition and end in conciliation, but in the same way in which Sophocles worked to pre-establish their lack of mutual affinity prior to their first encounter, so too any hope that this present state of collaboration will last has already been undermined when we leave this scene with the same sense of their fundamental dislocation with which we entered it. Chrysothemis goes off through the side entrance to make the offerings at Agamemnon's grave, and we are essentially right back where we started: Chrysothemis is off on her own, and the chorus immediately goes back to addressing Electra as 'child' (478) and expressing their condemnation of Agamemnon's murder and their hopes of future vengeance. Sophocles may repeat the pattern of two sisters who are opposed in personality and moral values, but if Antigone and Ismene's initial encounter is characterised by the breakdown of *koinia*, then Electra and Chrysothemis' is characterised by the complete absence of it.

The Second Meeting

In the same way in which scholars have assumed that Sophocles does not begin characterising the initial discord between the two sisters until Chrysothemis arrives on stage, it has been taken for granted that it is not until Chrysothemis refuses to take part in Electra's plan to murder Aegisthus that Sophocles begins to "revers[e] the pattern" of their first encounter. Finglass is correct when he argues that "[t]he progress made earlier in the sisters' relationship is… turned back on itself",[121] but this is a

[121] Finglass 2007: 371 n. 871-1057.

process which actually begins long before Chrysothemis makes her second appearance. When the Paedagogus arrives with the false news of Orestes' death, all of Electra's hopes for avenging their father are destroyed, and she right along with them: οἳ 'γὼ τάλαιν', ὄλωλα τῇδ' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ (674); ἀπωλόμην δύστηνος, οὐδέν εἰμ' ἔτι (677).[122] In her misery, Electra instinctively reverts to the conception of herself she displayed in the opening scenes of the play: now that she been 'deprived' of both her father and her brother (σοῦ τ' ἀπεστερημένη καὶ πατρός 813-814), she is 'alone' (μόνη… εἰμι 813) and 'friendless' (ἄφιλος 819). Antigone makes the same claims shortly before she is led off to her death (847, 876, 882, 895, 919, 941), but here it is not a case of the division between 'she who chose life' and 'she who chose death' (σὺ μὲν γὰρ εἵλου ζῆν, ἐγὼ δὲ κατθανεῖν 555), since Electra and Chrysothemis have now seemingly joined in collaboration and Chrysothemis is at this very moment doing her sister's bidding at Agamemnon's grave. Antigone, when faced with the revelation of Creon's edict, instinctively turns to her sister for help; Electra, upon hearing the news of Orestes' death, immediately goes back to pretending that her sister does not exist. Similarly, in the same way in which Ismene's drop in Antigone's esteem is accompanied by a redirection of all Antigone's familial affection onto Polyneices, Chrysothemis' return to non-existence is paired with Orestes' rise in status; but whereas Polyneices is not promoted to the position of ἀδελφός φίλτατος (81) until after Ismene turns Antigone down, Orestes takes his place beside their father as Electra's 'most beloved' (Ὀρέστα φίλταθ' 808) while she and Chrysothemis are ostensibly at their closest. Of the fifteen times Electra uses this term – where even the chorus and Paedagogus classify as *philtatoi* – she never once applies it to her sister.[123]

[122] Wiersma 1984: 48: "The audience is faced with a woman whose life hangs on to vengeance but who does not hold herself to be the most likely avenger. That is why Orestes' 'death' means to her the end of all existence".

[123] Agamemnon as *philtatos*: 462, 1233; Orestes: 808, 1126, 1158, 1163, 1208, 1224, 1273, 1286, 1354, 1449; the chorus: 1227, 1398; and the Paedagogus: 1357. Chrysothemis applies the term to both of her siblings: Electra in 871; Orestes in 903.

As in the parodos, Sophocles not only undermines Electra's relationship with Chrysothemis; he also emphasises the closeness of her bond with the chorus. The prologue ends with Electra admitting that she 'has no more strength to carry the burden of grief all alone' (μούνη 118). It is straight after this that the chorus arrives to proclaim both their affection and support. Here, Electra's solitary lament once again ends with a reference to her desolation (ἄφιλος 819); and once again, it is not her sibling that Sophocles has approach to offer comfort, but the chorus. It is the chorus to whom Electra turns in her darkest moment, as she will again in her happiest (1227-1229). The chorus soon abandon their attempt to console Electra and instead end up mourning Orestes' death with her, "finally becom[ing] so involved in the sorrow that they themselves cry out (867: παπαῖ)."[124] It is into this atmosphere of communal grief that Chrysothemis makes her reappearance. Although the two sisters have now apparently united in common purpose, we still get the sense that Chrysothemis is arriving more in the role of an unwelcome intruder rather than a fellow conspirator. This time it is not the doubts surrounding her loyalties that set Chrysothemis apart (324-326), but the jarring contrast between each sister's mood.

Chrysothemis arrives at her father's grave only to discover that someone else has already placed their own gifts at Agamemnon's burial mound. From the lock of hair that she finds lying beside the grave, she correctly surmises that Orestes has returned. In a flurry of excitement, Chrysothemis rushes in to convey the joyous news of their brother's long-awaited return, creating a striking contrast[125] with the sombre mood of the preceding *kommos* (871-874):

> ὑφ' ἡδονῆς τοι, φιλτάτη, διώκομαι
> τὸ κόσμιον μεθεῖσα σὺν τάχει μολεῖν.
> φέρω γὰρ ἡδονάς τε κἀνάπαυλαν ὧν
> πάροιθεν εἶχες καὶ κατέστενες κακῶν.

[124] Gardiner 1987: 153.
[125] Cf. Kamerbeek 1974, March 2001, and Finglass 2007 ad loc. (also 370 n. 871-1057).

> It is joy that has made me hurry here, dearest sister,
> forsaking any concern for decorum to come with all speed.
> For I bring joyful news to relieve you
> of the miseries you have suffered and wept over for so long.

Chrysothemis, still operating under the assumption that she and Electra are now at one, affectionately addresses her sister as φιλτάτη. As will become increasingly apparent, however, the two sisters are no more in tune with one another now than when Chrysothemis first arrived to deliver the news concerning Electra's impending punishment. With Antigone and Ismene's relationship, it is precisely when Antigone is 'in trouble' that Sophocles reveals the true depth of Ismene's unfailing devotion towards her sister: ἀλλ' ἐν κακοῖς τοῖς σοῖσιν οὐκ αἰσχύνομαι / ξύμπλουν ἐμαυτὴν τοῦ πάθους ποιουμένη (*Ant.* 540-541). Not so with Electra and Chrysothemis. In 'times of trouble' (cf. 335), far from rallying to one another's side, the sisters seem to instinctively turn against one another. They might have banded together at the end of their first encounter, but this was brought about more by the emotional excitement surrounding Electra's interpretation of the dream than by any genuine affection. Such is the nature of their relationship that they only come together when things are going well. As soon as Electra discovers that her hopes have come to nothing and that she now has only additional 'miseries' (κακῶν 763) to endure, Chrysothemis is promptly demoted back from φίλη (431) to non-existence (813, 819). Similarly, it is striking that Kamerbeek should comment that the phrase ὑφ' ἡδονῆς… διώκομαι "is suggestive of a fair wind propelling a ship",[126] since it is precisely Chrysothemis' joy at their apparent change in fortune that occasions this sudden display of affection towards Electra.[127] Kells has argued that Chrysothemis' address demonstrates that she "feels strong affection for her sister";[128] but this 'affection', as we shall see, is largely contingent upon her belief that 'trouble' is now behind them (κἀνάπαυλαν… κακῶν

[126] Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.
[127] As Finglass (2007 ad loc.) points out: "in the first episode Chrysothemis had avoided the φίλ-root when addressing her sister."
[128] Kells 1973 ad loc.

874). In 'troubled waters', as we well know, Chrysothemis' primary concern is her own well-being (ἐν κακοῖς μοι πλεῖν ὑφειμένη δοκεῖ 335); it is only now, when she believes that they are sailing with 'a fair wind' (cf. 916-919), that this affection for her sister rises to the fore; she will never again refer to Electra as a φιλτάτη.

Electra is convinced that Orestes is dead; Chrysothemis is convinced that he has returned. The contrast between Electra's pain and Chrysothemis' joy obviously adds to the dramatic tension of this scene, but it also illustrates just how disjointed these two sisters are. Chrysothemis' warm exuberance is met with cold contempt: 'And where could *you* have possibly found help for my suffering…?' (πόθεν δ' ἂν εὕροις τῶν ἐμῶν σὺ πημάτων / ἄρηξιν… ; 875-876).[129] From appealing to their 'common father' (κοινῷ πατρί 463) to enforce a sense of their shared familial obligation, Electra now excludes Chrysothemis from the impact of Orestes' death (τῶν ἐμῶν… πημάτων, cf. ἐμὸν… πατέρ 94-95, τὸν ἐμὸν… ἀδελφόν 117). When she wanted Chrysothemis' help, Electra redefined Chrysothemis' status from that of *echthros* (391) to *philos* (431, 454). She now accuses Chrysothemis of 'mocking' her troubles (κακοῖσι… τοῖς ἐμοῖς γελᾷς; 880), thereby casting her back into the role of an *echthros*.[130] She also refuses to even entertain the possibility that Chrysothemis might be right. To create the powerful mood of dramatic irony which pervades this scene, Sophocles needs Electra to reject her sister's story, but the manner in which he has her do so also serves to illustrate how little Electra thinks of Chrysothemis. Even though, in her excitement, Chrysothemis initially exaggerates her account by implying that she has seen their brother 'in bodily presence' (ἐναργῶς 878),[131] Electra does not

[129] Kells 1973 ad loc.: "The lines are contemptuous, and the contemptuous tone is helped by the emphasis put upon σύ by its eccentric positioning (via hyberbaton) between τῶν ἐμῶν and πημάτων, instead of before ἂν εὕροις." Kamerbeek (1974) and Finglass (2007) also comment that the "bitter emphasis" on σύ "suggests Electra's 'contempt". Jebb (1984), although agreeing that σὺ is "emphatic", argues that Electra's tone "is not scornful, but rather compassionate."

[130] Wright 2005: 180: "Chrysothemis, though a 'friend', is being described in terms of an 'enemy'". Cf. 277, where Electra says that Clytemnestra is 'exulting (ἐγγελῶσα) in her deeds'.

[131] Campbell & Abbott 1886 ad loc.

hesitate to contemptuously dismiss her sister's story as the ravings of a madwoman (879, 888-889) or a gullible fool (884) whose judgement is not to be trusted, refusing to recognise that Chrysothemis' account is in fact "no less credible" than that of the Paedagogus.[132] In the end, she only agrees to hear Chrysothemis out because she is tired of arguing with her, not because she has any interest in anything Chrysothemis might have to relate (σὺ δ' οὖν λέγ', εἴ σοι τῷ λόγῳ τις ἡδονή 891).[133]

The two sisters are so out of sync that while Electra sets about reimposing the initial distance between Chrysothemis and herself, Chrysothemis – convinced that their 'troubles' are finally behind them (ἡ δὲ νῦν… πολλῶν ὑπάρξει κῦρος ἡμέρα καλῶν 918-919) – now reciprocates Electra's associative language from the end of their first meeting: she addresses Electra as φίλη (916), just as Electra had earlier addressed her in 431; she swears by their father's hearth (μὰ τὴν πατρῴαν ἑστίαν 881), just as Electra had appealed to their father's gods (ὦ θεοὶ πατρῷοι 411); she uses personal and possessive pronouns to identify Electra's interests with her own (ἡμίν 877, ἐμοῦ καὶ σοῦ 909), just as Electra had done (ἡμῖν 454, σοί θ'… ἐμοί τ' 461-462); she labels Orestes 'the dearest of all mortals' (φιλτάτου βροτῶν πάντων 903-904), just as Electra had earlier referred to Agamemnon (φιλτάτῳ βροτῶν πάντων 462-463); and, like Electra (κοινῷ πατρί 463), she insists on their commonality (νῷν 882, 918).

None of this has any effect on Electra, who "dismisses her sister's lengthy account with crushing brevity."[134] Although she claims to 'feel compassion' for how much the 'truth' is going to hurt Chrysothemis (ὥς σ' ἐποικτίρω 920), she delivers the news of

[132] Wiersma 1984: 48. Finglass 2007 ad loc.: "ὧδε πιστεύεις ἄγαν in 884 is especially contemptuous… Electra assumes that Chrysothemis' account is only second hand: ironically, however, her contempt for her sister's news itself arises from her own all too quick belief in a story which she has heard." See also Kamerbeek 1974: 122 n. 887,8.

[133] Campbell & Abbott 1886 ad loc.: "**σὺ δ' οὖν λέγ'**, 'speak on then', said with listless acquiescence"; Finglass 2007 ad loc.: "εἴ σοι τῷ λόγῳ τις ἡδονή: supremely indifferent".

[134] Finglass 2007: 389 n. 920-46.

Orestes' death "as brutally as possible"[135] – as if she derives some gratification in inflicting this pain: τέθνηκεν, ὦ τάλαινα (924).[136] Jebb, Kitto and March all attempt to soften the callousness of Electra's tone by translating the vocative τάλαινα as 'poor girl'.[137] As Finglass has argued, however, "the starkness of Electra's language tells against" any feelings of commiseration and instead only serves to "expres[s] Electra's contempt for what she sees as her sister's foolishness" (cf. 388).[138] As it did for Electra, Orestes' death signifies the destruction of Chrysothemis' hope (924-925): not that their father will be avenged against his enemies (808-814, 846-848, 856-859), but that their fortune has at last taken a turn for the better: οὐκ εἰδυῖ' ἄρα / ἵν' ἦμεν ἄτης· ἀλλὰ νῦν… / τά τ' ὄντα πρόσθεν ἄλλα θ' εὑρίσκω κακά (935-939). Instead of the πολλῶν καλῶν (919) she anticipated with such 'joy' (σὺν χαρᾷ 934), Chrysothemis discovers that they have merely been subjected to additional κακά. In contrast to the communal suffering that characterised Electra's preceding exchange with the chorus, Electra now looks down on Chrysothemis' grief with an air of detached condescension: far from displaying any empathy (cf. 920) for her sister's wretchedness, she seizes the opportunity afforded by her own (supposedly) superior knowledge to belittle Chrysothemis as the type of fool who lacks even the sense to distinguish fantasy from reality (920, 922).[139]

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[135] Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.

[136] Finglass 2007 ad loc.: "The crushing 'fact' of Orestes' demise is communicated in three devastatingly brief sentences… The tone is blunt and direct".

[137] Jebb 1894; Kitto 1962; March 2001. Watling (1953) and Grene (1960) both give 'my dear'. Jebb 1894: xlii: "The stronger nature, when brought into conflict with the feebler, almost inevitably assumes, at certain moments, an aspect of harshness: yet the union in Electra of tenderness with strength can be felt throughout". Cf. Jebb's introduction to the *Antigone* (1888: xxix).

[138] Finglass 2007 ad loc.

[139] Kamerbeek 1974: 127 n. 922: "*οὐκ… φέρῃ*: *id est* you live in a world of mere delusion far removed from realities. The common metaphor in *ὅποι γνώμης φέρῃ* is as it were expanded and vivified by *ὅποι γῆς*. 'insana Chrysothemidis laetitia cum immenso itinere comparatur, peregrinante ad extremi quasi orbis fines aliqua fatali necessitate abrepto' (Ellendt)." Finglass 2007: 390 n. 920: "The accusation of ἄνοια, referring to Chrysothemis' credulity, is cutting"; 390 n. 922: "Assured of her own superior knowledge, Electra adopts a lofty tone… **οὐκ οἶσθ' ὅποι γῆς… φέρῃ:** the expression denotes a state of complete ignorance or other psychological deficiency".

Just as Electra used the excitement surrounding the revelation of Clytemnestra's dream to her own advantage in their first encounter, she now seizes upon the emotional impact of Orestes' supposed death as an opportunity to once again enlist her sister's aid to further her own goals. As in their first meeting, there is a marked change in Electra's demeanour towards Chrysothemis, as she shifts from contempt to collusion.[140] From scornfully rejecting the idea that Chrysothemis could ever find the means to relieve her suffering (πόθεν δ' ἂν εὕροις τῶν ἐμῶν σὺ πημάτων ἄρηξιν… ; 875-876), Electra now claims that it is Chrysothemis who has the power to 'ease the burden of their present suffering': οὕτως ἔχει σοι ταῦτ'· ἐὰν δέ μοι πίθῃ, / τῆς νῦν παρούσης πημονῆς λύσεις βάρος (938-939). As Finglass points out, οὕτως ἔχει σοι ταῦτα is the same phrase Antigone uses in line 37 when she turns from relaying the news of Creon's edict to attempting to enlist Ismene's aid.[141] The ultimatum with which Antigone immediately follows this phrase turns out to be the crux on which their relationship depends: οὕτως ἔχει σοι ταῦτα, καὶ δείξεις τάχα / εἴτ' εὐγενὴς πέφυκας εἴτ' ἐσθλῶν κακή (37-38). Ismene refuses to help Antigone bury Polyneices, thereby proving herself a *kakê* instead of an *eugenês*, and the sisters never manage to reclaim their initial sense of 'oneness'. Rather than a sternly worded ultimatum, Electra proposes a seemingly innocent condition: 'if you will be persuaded by me, then….' (ἐὰν δέ μοι πίθῃ…). The sisters only reconcile at the end of their first encounter because Chrysothemis agrees to do as Electra bids. Had Chrysothemis refused, there is little doubt that the enmity that opened their exchange would have persisted. Electra's condition might be less explicitly threatening than Antigone's ultimatum, but the implication that her regard for her sister rests solely on Chrysothemis' continued willingness to cooperate is nevertheless clear.

[140] Finglass (2007 ad loc.) also notes a marked shift to "a new conspiratorial atmosphere" from 938 onwards.
[141] Finglass 2007 ad loc.

Chrysothemis' answering question, just like Ismene's (τί δ', ὦ ταλαῖφρον, εἰ τάδ' ἐν τούτοις, ἐγὼ / λύουσ' ἂν εἴθ' ἅπτουσα προσθείμην πλέον; 39-40), "shows how far she is from conceiving that the present situation leaves any possibilities of action":[142] 'But how could I ever raise the dead to life again?' (ἦ τοὺς θανόντας ἐξαναστήσω ποτέ; 940). Unlike Ismene, however, who resolutely stands by her initial judgement on the 'impossibility' of the situation throughout the prologue (67-68, 78-79, 90, 92), Chrysothemis pledges her cooperation before Electra has even revealed her plan: 'I will not refuse' (οὐκ ἀπώσομαι 944); 'I will share the burden in everything' (ξυνοίσω πᾶν 946). Although Finglass has argued that "there is no reason to doubt her sincerity",[143] the conditions that Chrysothemis carefully attaches to these declarations suggest otherwise. Chrysothemis says that she 'will not refuse' whatever Electra may ask of her, but only *if* it secures 'some profit' or 'advantage' (ἀλλ' εἴ τις ὠφέλειά γ' 944). Given what we already know about Chrysothemis' conception of 'profit' and how it relates to her own physical comfort, it is clearly not any 'moral' benefit she is referring to here, but material ones – such as the πολλῶν καλῶν (919) she was so excited about when she thought Orestes had returned.[144] Moreover, as Jebb, Kells, Kamerbeek and Finglass have all pointed out, the ἀλλ'… γ' combination conveys a clear sense of "reluctant acquiescence" rather than ready enthusiasm.[145] Similarly, although she promises to 'share the burden', she makes a point of stipulating that she will do so *only* 'so far as her strength allows' (ὅσονπερ ἂν σθένω 946). Again, given that Chrysothemis has already excused her failure to participate in Electra's opposition against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus on the grounds that she does not have

[142] Jebb 1894 ad loc. See also: March 2001 ad loc.: "that there might be any possibility of action in the present situation has not entered Chrysothemis' head."
[143] Finglass 2007: 390 n. 920-46.
[144] Kirkwood 1958: 240: "… to Chrysothemis 'good' and 'bad' have only a material, never a moral, meaning: 'good' means comfort and well-being, 'bad' means suffering and disadvantage. Electra thinks primarily, almost exclusively, of the moral connotations; 241: "[in their second meeting] Chrysothemis is still morally unconscious. When rejoicing because she thinks that Orestes has returned, she exclaims that 'the present day will perhaps provide πολλῶν καλῶν' (919); she clearly means not the moral triumph of revenge but its material advantages."
[145] Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc. Jebb 1894; Kells 1973; and Finglass 2007 ad loc.

the 'strength' (333-334, 347-350) – when in fact the only thing preventing her from acting is the threat of losing her privileged position – it is clear that it is not the extent of Chrysothemis' 'strength' that will determine her cooperation here, but the extent to which whatever Electra happens to be proposing will prove detrimental to her own comfort and well-being.

Whereas Ismene immediately turns down Antigone's request to 'share in the labour and the deed' (ξυμπονήσεις καὶ ξυνεργάσῃ 41), Chrysothemis initially shows herself willing to collaborate. The manner in which she frames her agreement, however, comes across less as a declaration of support and more as though Chrysothemis were deliberately laying the groundwork for later justifying her refusal. Should Electra's plan turn out to conflict with her own objectives – as indeed she already suspects[146] from Electra's warnings that the task will require 'daring' and 'hard work' (τλῆναί σε δρῶσαν 943, πόνου 945) – then Chrysothemis need only base her refusal on the conditions she has already set in place. Essentially, then, Chrysothemis is making sure that she has an 'out'. Electra has often been accused of manipulating Chrysothemis,[147] but Chrysothemis is no less calculating in her own way. Whereas Electra's affinity for Chrysothemis is contingent upon Chrysothemis' cooperation, Chrysothemis' willingness to stand by Electra is in turn contingent upon the security of her own position. And while Chrysothemis may profess herself ready to proceed to the very limits of her ability (ὅσονπερ ἂν σθένω) to 'share the burden' (ξυνοίσω 946), it is in fact Ismene who, despite her initial refusal, willingly confronts her own limits to claim an equal 'share' of the responsibility: δέδρακα τοὔργον, εἴπερ ἥδ' ὁμορροθεῖ, / καὶ ξυμμετίσχω καὶ φέρω τῆς αἰτίας (536-537).

[146] Jebb 1894: 132 n. 944: "**ὠφέλειά γ'**: the particle… implies her belief that these counsels will prove ἀν-ωφελῆ."
[147] Segal 1966: 502-503; Blundell 1989: 153-154; Roisman 2020: 11; and Coo 2021: 89-108.

As noted, whereas Antigone's identification with Ismene is so strong at the play's opening that she takes it for granted that her *koinon autadelphon* will necessarily share her own reaction to Creon's edict, as well as her fierce resolve to defy it, no such bond exists for Electra and Chrysothemis. Chrysothemis might have been successfully persuaded to replace Clytemnestra's funeral offerings with their own, but Electra knows that Chrysothemis is not really in sympathy with her own devotion to Agamemnon. As March has correctly noted, "Electra knows [that her radical proposal] will probably be rejected"[148] (cf. 1017-1018); so, as hard as Electra worked in the first episode to persuade Chrysothemis to undertake a task which – for all that it may have been characterised as some daring feat of heroic enterprise by Chrysothemis (πειρωμένη δὲ τῶνδε τῶν ἔργων 468, πεῖραν τήνδε τολμήσειν)[149] – carried only a slight risk,[150] she is going to have to work considerably harder now if she is to have any chance of convincing Chrysothemis to engage in a task that is substantially more dangerous.

Electra now brings all her powers of persuasion to bear in a desperate bid to persuade Chrysothemis to aid her in her new goal: assassinating Aegisthus.[151] As Finglass remarks, that her attempt ultimately fails is certainly not "from a want of trying on Electra's part."[152] She begins by appealing to the obligations of their kindred bond:

[148] March 2001: 197 n. 945. Cf. Jebb 1894: 132 n. 941; Finglass 2007: 372 n. 871-1057.
[149] Campbell & Abbott 1886 ad loc.: "Chrysothemis speaks like a person about to set out on a perilous venture"; Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.: "πειρωμένη: what she is going to do is a πεῖρα: *periculum experiendo factum*"; Finglass 2007 ad loc.: "πεῖραν… suggests a dangerous venture".
[150] Kirkwood 1958: 139: "Ismene is ready to give her life for Antigone, Chrysothemis is timid about only a slight risk."
[151] Electra does not say anything about murdering Clytemnestra. Jebb (1894: 134-135 n. 957), Linforth (1963: 103), Gellie (1972: 119), Gardiner (1987: 165), March (2007: 197 n. 955-7) and Finglass (2007: 398-340 n 957) argue that it was never her intention to kill Clytemnestra; Kirkwood (1942: 90), Waldock (1951: 184), Lloyd-Jones (1972: 224), Kells (1973: 168 n. 957), Kamerbeek (1974: 130 n. 957), Segal (1981: 284) and Blundell (1989: 160-161 and n. 46) argue that she deliberately keeps this part of her plan secret from Chrysothemis.
[152] Finglass 2007: 395 n. 947-89.

since only Chrysothemis and herself remain (μόνα λελείμμεθον 950),[153] it falls now to Chrysothemis to help her avenge their father's murder (εἰς σὲ δὴ βλέπω 954, ξὺν τῇδ' ἀδελφῇ 956). She points out that as long as Aegisthus is alive, Chrysothemis will never enjoy her rightful inheritance, nor be allowed to marry and bear children (958-966). She paints a glorious picture of the various honours they stand to gain: the praise of the dead, freedom, a worthy husband, universal acclaim and veneration, and eternal glory (967-985).[154] She concludes, as she began in 938-939, by emphasising that their deliverance rests solely on Chrysothemis' willingness to cooperate (ὦ φίλη, πείσθητι, συμπόνει πατρί, / σύγκαμν' ἀδελφῷ, παῦσον ἐκ κακῶν ἐμέ, / παῦσον δὲ σαυτήν 986-988). As with her earlier attempt in their first encounter (431-463), Electra once again intensifies her appeal with an array of associative language which plays on the ties of their sibling bond to unite the two sisters in mutual obligation and common purpose, but to a far greater degree than before: kinship terms (956, 977), σύν-constructions and compounds (956, 986), φίλ- words (948, 981, 986, 987), and the plural pronouns 'we' and 'us' (949, 975).[155] In addition, whereas Electra has never once used the dual form in reference to Chrysothemis and herself, she now does so sixteen times.[156]

Several scholars have commented that Electra's speech demonstrates "her limited grip on reality".[157] As Coo has pointed out, it is precisely where Electra is at her "most delusional" that the majority of her dual forms are concentrated: there are fourteen

[153] For the exceptional rarity of this first-person dual form, see Jebb 1894 and Finglass 2007 ad loc. Coo 2021: 100: "Electra returns to the categorisation that she had once rejected: Chrysothemis is no longer one who betrays and forgets her φίλοι but may now be included among them."

[154] Mossman (2012: 500) discusses the difference between the "bombast of Electra's fantasy" and the public praise Haemon attributes to Antigone in 692-700.

[155] Coo 2021: 100: "Electra reverts to [the] use of personal pronouns and adjectives to align rather than to differentiate their experiences and prospects."

[156] μόνα λελείμμεθον 950; τώδε τὼ κασιγνήτω 977; ὦ… ἐξεσωσάτην 978; ὦ 979; ἀφειδήσαντε, προὐστήτην 980; τούτω… τώδε 981; τώδ' 982; νὼ 984; ζώσαιν θανούσαιν 985.

[157] Mossman 2012: 497-498. See also: Knox 1964: 179 n. 31, Woodard 1964: 189, Minadeo 1967: 121, 123, Gellie 1972: 108, 117, 120, Kells 1973: 172 n. 990-1057, Segal 1981: 250, 274, and Winnington-Ingram 1983: 242-243.

duals in 977-985.[158] However, her 'delusion' lies not only in the vision of 'glory', 'reverence' and 'honour' (973, 981, 983, 985) that she and Chrysothemis (cast in the role of the Athenian tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton)[159] will be accorded for their heroic display of 'masculine prowess' (ἀνδρείας 983),[160] but also in the idea that these two fundamentally disparate sisters could ever achieve this kind of unity. In an effort to secure her sister's collaboration, Electra uses the dual to impress upon Chrysothemis that it is only when they join together in mutual solidarity that they can successfully bring an end to their present *kaka*:[161] ἀλλ', ὦ φίλη, πείσθητι… παῦσον ἐκ κακῶν ἐμέ, παῦσον δὲ σαυτήν (986-988). Similarly, she carefully tailors her speech around what she knows is her sister's driving force: the various *kala* from which they stand to benefit.[162] And yet, for Electra's strategy to work, both sisters would need to share the same conception of what constitutes *kalon* and *kakon* – which, as we already know from Sophocles' earlier characterisation of their opposing moral values in the first episode, is certainly not the case. *Kalon*, for Electra, is loyalty to one's *philoi*, even at the expense of one's own life (399); to betray this duty for the sake of one's own comfort and well-being is not only *kakon* (395, 401), but *aischron* (989). For Chrysothemis, it is precisely the opposite: it is foolishly endangering one's own well-being that is *kakon* (398, 429), and it is not merely 'living' that is *kalon*, but living as

[158] Coo 2021: 100.

[159] For discussions on this topic, see Juffras 1991: 99-108, MacLeod 2001: 140-148, Goldhill 2012: 242-244, and Mossman 2012: 497-499.

[160] For Electra's 'heroic' and 'masculine' vocabulary, see Jones 1962: 145, Schein 1982: 76-77, Foley 2002: 160-161, Wheeler 2003: 379 and Finglass 2007: 403-404 n. 973-85, 407 n. 983..

[161] Σ *El*. 964.1-964.3: προειποῦσα τὰ δεινὰ τὸ χαλεπώτερον ἐπιφέρει, ὡς οὐδὲ μεταβολῆς τυχεῖν ἐλπὶς ἔνεστιν. Finglass 2007: 395 n. 947-89: "in her frequent use of the dual… Electra also attempts to portray Chrysothemis and herself as a natural pair. This theme reaches its climax in the peroration… Only when the sisters work together, goes the subtext, can they succeed in overcoming their enemies." See also: March 2007: 197 n. 949-50, and Lewis 2015: 233-234.

[162] The scholiast remarks (Σ *El*. 975.1-975.4, 975.10-975.12:) that Electra emphasises 'all the good things' (πάντα τὰ ἀγαθὰ) and 'deliberately does away with the less appealing aspects' (ἑκοῦσα τοὺς δειλοτέρους τῶν λόγων ὑπεξεῖλεν) of her plan to avoid drawing attention to its 'dangers' (ὥστε μηδὲ εἰς ἔννοιαν τῶν κινδύνων ἐκείνην καταστῆσαι). Kamerbeek 1974: 131 n. 959: "Her argumentation is well-adapted to what she rightly regards as her sister's main concern."

prosperously as one can possibly manage, even at the expense of one's principles and one's *philoi* (345-350, 354, 357-358, 361-368, 392-394).

Electra will soon claim that she expected Chrysothemis to refuse (1017-1018); and yet she must have believed that she had at least some chance of persuading her, or she would not have made such an impressive go of it.[163] The audience, however, can hardly have been expected to feel similarly. Scholars have frequently remarked that Electra's speech is "badly misjudged"; that her starry-eyed vision of heroic daring and public acclaim was never going to convince timid, conventional Chrysothemis.[164] The simple fact, however, is that Chrysothemis was never going to be persuaded. Electra barely managed to persuade Chrysothemis to undertake a task that posed only a minimal threat to her well-being;[165] Chrysothemis was never going to agree to risk her life. Electra might try to emphasise the disadvantages of their present situation, but "Chrysothemis has been happy to put up with [these disadvantages] until now (339-40)."[166] Similarly, while Electra might try to create an impression of mutual solidarity through her prolific use of the dual, Chrysothemis has also shown herself 'happy', if need be, to abandon her sister in order to enjoy the privileges which are available to her.

As they did in the sisters' first encounter (369-371), the chorus intervenes in an effort to maintain the peace and prevent things from getting out of hand: 'In times such as these, forethought (προμηθία) is a helpful ally to both speaker and listener' (990-991). As well as trying once again to promote a sense of unity between the two sisters (cf.

[163] Cf. Finglass 2007:417 n. 1017.
[164] Coo 2021: 99. See also: MacLeod 2001: 140-142, and Finglass 2007: 395-396 n. 947-89. Cf. Jones 1962: 145 and Dover 1974: 100.
[165] Finglass 2007: 395 n. 947-85: "The assassination is a considerably graver matter than the act proposed by Electra in the first episode, where she only just persuaded her sister".
[166] Finglass 2007: 395 n. 947-85. Coo (2021: 91) defends Chrysothemis on the grounds that "her concern [for] preserving life, even in intolerable circumstances", makes her "a better model for an ethics of life than her sister"; but Chrysothemis can hardly be said to be living 'in intolerable circumstances'.

τοῖς λόγοις ἔνεστιν ἀμφοῖν κέρδος 369-370), their warning also tacitly acknowledges that Electra's proposal is a reckless one,[167] and they fear Chrysothemis will react badly to it. This suspicion is immediately confirmed. As in the first episode, once again Chrysothemis directs her contemptuous response not to Electra, but to the chorus (992-994 cf. 372-375).[168] Chrysothemis' refusal recalls many of the arguments Ismene makes to Antigone in the prologue; indeed, as the scholiast remarks, 'if someone were to compare' Chrysothemis' response with that of Ismene, 'he would recognise that Sophocles was using the same sentiments'.[169] Chrysothemis argues that, as women, they cannot possibly contend against more powerful adversaries (997-998, cf. *Ant*. 58-68); that there is no possibility of their success (1001-1002, cf. *Ant*. 67-68, 90, 92); that this course of action will only serve to worsen their current sufferings (1003-1004, cf. *Ant*. 49-60); and that they have no choice but to yield to those in power (1013-1014, cf. *Ant*. 59-60, 63-64, 66-67).[170] As with so many of the parallels between Ismene and Chrysothemis, however, the differences are far more significant than the similarities.

Like Electra, Antigone conceives of her plan as noble as glorious (*El*. 972, 973, 977-985; *Ant*. 72, 97, 502) Like Chrysothemis, Ismene turns her sister down because she sees neither honour nor glory, but only further suffering and death (*El*. ὅρα κακῶς πράσσοντε μὴ μείζω κακὰ κτησώμεθ' 1003-1004, λύει γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν οὐδ' ἐπωφελεῖ / βάξιν καλὴν λαβόντε δυσκλεῶς θανεῖν 1005-1006; *Ant*. νῦν δ' αὖ μόνα δὴ νὼ λελειμμένα σκόπει / ὅσῳ κάκιστ' ὀλούμεθ'… 58-59). Unlike Chrysothemis, however, Ismene's agonised concern for her sister's safety is evident throughout the

[167] Jebb 1894 ad loc.: "These words of the Chorus, though neutral in tone… imply that Electra's plan is over-bold"; Finglass 2007 ad loc.: "The chorus' support for προμηθία constitutes a criticism, albeit indirect, of Electra's scheme". See also: Kells 1973 and March 2001 ad loc.

[168] Finglass 2007 ad loc.: "As at 372-5… Chrysothemis expresses her distaste for her sister's words by addressing her opening remarks to the chorus".

[169] Σ *El*. 977.1-977.3: ταῦτα πάντα ὅμοιά ἐστι τοῖς ἐν Ἀντιγόνῃ, εἰ δέ τις παραβάλοι εἴσεται τοῖς αὐτοῖς διανοήμασι χρησάμενον Σοφοκλέα.

[170] These "pragmatic objections" will prove no more successful than Ismene's, since, like Antigone, Electra "is not motivated solely by the prospect of successfully enforcing justice. Although she paints a picture of glorious success, she also regards it as honourable to die in the attempt (989, 1320 f.)" (Blundell 1989: 161).

play: οἴμοι ταλαίνης, ὡς ὑπερδέδοικά σου (*Ant.* 82).[171] Coo has argued that, despite her "vehement refusal", Chrysothemis' continued use of associative language (the duals in 1003 and l006 and first-person plurals in 1004, 1005, and 1010) proves that she still "conceiv[es] of the sisters as a joint unit" and that "[h]er primary motivation remains their joint safety and protection".[172] However, the manner in which Chrysothemis "castigates [Electra] for her foolishness"[173] – recalling as it does her earlier attitude towards Electra at the beginning of their first encounter – suggests rather that she, like Electra after she hears about Orestes' 'death', has also started to revert to the habitual dissonance that characterises the sisters' relationship.

Several scholars have noted that Ismene's tone, despite her firm refusal, is more conciliatory than that of Chrysothemis.[174] Ismene, of course, is desperate to retain her bond with Antigone. Chrysothemis once again shows that she feels no such compulsion. Chrysothemis had earlier warned Electra that 'now is the time for prudence' (νῦν γὰρ ἐν καλῷ φρονεῖν 384).[175] Her initial willingness to participate was based on Electra's assurance that her cooperation would secure an end to their 'sufferings' (ὦ φίλη, πείσθητι… παῦσον ἐκ κακῶν ἐμέ, παῦσον δὲ σαυτήν 986-988, cf. 938-939). She is now outraged to discover not only that Electra's judgment has not improved in the slightest (φρενῶν… κακῶν 992-993), but that she has also attempted to lure her into a course of action that will not relieve their sufferings, but increase them (ὅρα κακῶς πράσσοντε μὴ μείζω κακὰ κτησώμεθ' 1003-1004): 'Where can you possibly have turned your eyes, that you arm yourself with such rashness and call upon me for aid?' (ποῖ γάρ ποτ' ἐμβλέψασα τοιοῦτον θράσος / αὐτή θ' ὁπλίζει κἄμ'

[171] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 241 n. 80: "There is nothing in Chrysothemis to compare with Ismene's tormented affection for her sister."
[172] Coo 2021: 102.
[173] Blundell 1989: 160.
[174] See, for example: Finglass 2007: 411 n. 922-1014: "the tone of Chrysothemis' speech is colder than that of Ismene's. Chrysothemis does not attempt to understand her sister's motivations or sympathise with her predicament"; and Mossman 2012: 499: "Chrysothemis… is much less tactful with [Electra] than Ismene is with Antigone".
[175] Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.: "φρονεῖν = εὖ φρονεῖν… which is to Chrysothemis' mind 'be prudent'.

ὑπηρετεῖν καλεῖς; 995-996) Kamerbeek and Finglass have argued that the indignant ποῖ γάρ ποτ' ἐμβλέψασα echoes Electra's earlier question in 958-959 (ἐς τίν' ἐλπίδων βλέψασ' ἔτ' ὀρθήν;), which Chrysothemis now "turns back [on her sister] in contempt".[176] But it also recalls Electra's call to aid in 954 (εἰς σὲ δὴ βλέπω), thereby expressing her own indignation that Electra can have drifted so far from reality and common sense that she could ever expect her to participate in such a mad enterprise. Like Ismene, Chrysothemis reminds her sister that, as women, they lack the strength to contend against men. However, whereas Ismene uses the associative first-person plural to convey the idea that the two sisters are united in their common weakness (ἀλλ' ἐννοεῖν χρὴ τοῦτο μὲν γυναῖχ' ὅτι / ἔφυμεν, ὡς πρὸς ἄνδρας οὐ μαχουμένα *Ant.* 61-62), Chrysothemis' accusatory use of the second-person singular serves instead to reproach Electra for her foolish delusions of heroic grandeur: οὐκ εἰσορᾷς; γυνὴ μὲν οὐδ' ἀνὴρ ἔφυς, / σθένεις δ' ἔλασσον τῶν ἐναντίων χερί (*El.* 997-998).[177] Like Ismene again, Chrysothemis offers to keep her sister's plan a secret. Accepting that Antigone is not to be dissuaded, Ismene suggests a compromise which both increases the likelihood of Antigone's success and places herself at considerable risk (ἀλλ' οὖν προμηνύσῃς γε τοῦτο μηδενὶ / τοὔργον, κρυφῇ δὲ κεῦθε, σὺν δ' αὕτως ἐγώ *Ant.* 84-85). Chrysothemis' pledge 'to guard what has been said', however, expresses not her willingness to offer what support she can when her sister makes the attempt on her own, but rather her decision to have nothing more to do with it: καὶ τὰ μὲν λελεγμένα / ἄρρητ' ἐγώ σοι κἀτελῆ φυλάξομαι (*El.* 1011-1012).[178] In the same way that Electra's feelings for Chrysothemis are contingent upon Chrysothemis' willingness to submit to her will, so too is Chrysothemis' loyalty to Electra contingent

[176] Finglass 2007 ad loc; Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc. Kells (1973 ad loc.) argues that it echoes Electra's own indignation in 887-888: ἐς τί μοι βλέψασα θάλπῃ τῷδ' ἀνηκέστῳ πυρί;

[177] Mossman (2012: 499) also argues that Chrysothemis' version is considerably "brusquer" than Ismene's.

[178] Campbell & Abbott: 1886: "'I will keep them no less secret than unperformed'"; Jebb 1984 ad loc.: "she will not divulge them, nor act upon them; they will be ἀτελῆ, as finding no accomplishment"; and Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.: "for her part Electra's words will not be followed up, so that they will remain without effect and harmless. *She* will 'keep them secret', as if not said at all, and 'not fulfilled'".

upon Electra's willingness to embrace Chrysothemis' own views on prudence and good sense. Coo has argued that Chrysothemis' speech exemplifies "her continued efforts to safeguard Electra".[179] While it is true that Chrysothemis attempts to dissuade her sister from pursuing a dangerous course of action, there is equally no denying that Chrysothemis' primary concern, as ever, is for her own well-being. Moreover, as with her earlier effort to 'safeguard' Electra from danger in their first encounter (πρὸς ταῦτα φράζου, καί με μή ποθ' ὕστερον παθοῦσα μέμψῃ 383-384), Chrysothemis' emphasis on the fact that Electra's proposed course of action meets neither of the requirements upon which her earlier promise of cooperation was predicated – that it neither lies within their 'strength' (σθένεις δ' ἔλασσον τῶν ἐναντίων χερί 998, cf. 946) nor confers any 'benefit' (λύει γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν οὐδ' ἐπωφελεῖ 1005, cf. 944) – reads less like an expression of selfless concern for Electra's safety than a justification that clears her of any blame in failing to 'join with her sister' (ξὺν τῇδ' ἀδελφῇ 956).

The chorus intervenes again. In the first episode, the chorus urges Chrysothemis to comply with Electra's 'pious' request to replace Clytemnestra's funeral offerings with their own (πρὸς εὐσέβειαν ἡ κόρη λέγει 464); here they bid Electra to give way to Chrysothemis' 'good sense' (νοῦ σοφοῦ 1016). Whereas the chorus' earlier effort helps to secure the sisters' collaboration, here it fails to prevent the complete breakdown of their relationship.[180] There are several parallels between this final passage of angry stichomythia and the rancorous aftermath of Ismene's refusal in the *Antigone*: the heroine's resolve to act alone (1019-1020, cf. *Ant*. 71-72, 80-81); accusations of cowardice, dishonour and betrayal (1027, 1031, 1035, cf. *Ant*. 77, 80, 996-97); threats of hatred and rejection (1047, 1052-1053, cf. *Ant*. 69-70, 86-87, 93-94); cruel insults (1033, cf. *Ant*. 549); and appeals to prudence and good sense[181] (1024, 1026, 1038, 1055-1056,

[179] Coo 2021: 103.
[180] Gardiner 1987: 153: "Before, the chorus were used to unite the two sisters; now their failure serves to emphasise the rift between the characters."
[181] On the 'proliferation' of words referring to 'sense' and 'rationality' in this scene (seventeen terms between 1013 and 1057), see Winnington-Ingram 1980: 240-241.

cf. *Ant*. 88, 90, 92, 98-99). Once again, however, the differences are crucial to a proper understanding of how distinctly Sophocles has characterised each relationship. Like Antigone, Electra maliciously accuses her sister of siding with their *echthroi* over their *philoi*: ἐλθοῦσα μητρὶ ταῦτα πάντ' ἔξειπε σῇ[182] (1033, cf. *Ant*. Κρέοντ' ἐρώτα· τοῦδε γὰρ σὺ κηδεμών 549). But whereas Ismene never once retaliates to any of Antigone's insults, Chrysothemis does not hesitate to match her sister's cruelty. When Electra asserts her resolve to act alone, Chrysothemis sarcastically retorts (1021-1022):

> φεῦ·
> εἴθ' ὤφελες τοιάδε τὴν γνώμην πατρὸς
> θνήσκοντος εἶναι· πᾶν γὰρ ἂν κατειργάσω
>
> Oh!
> Then would that you had been of such a mind when our father
> died, for there is nothing you could not have achieved!

Chrysothemis is expressing her contempt for Electra's wildly inflated belief in her own abilities;[183] but she is also being exceptionally cruel, throwing in Electra's face the very thing that has been the source of her torment for all these years.

Several scholars have noted that Electra reverts to her earlier contempt for Chrysothemis as soon as Chrysothemis refuses her request (cf. 344, 365-367, 391);[184] but Chrysothemis has also reverted to her own disdain for Electra. When Electra states that she 'loathes Chrysothemis' cowardice' (τῆς δὲ δειλίας στυγῶ 1027), Chrysothemis replies: ἀνέξομαι κλύουσα χὤταν εὖ λέγῃς (1028). Coo has argued

[182] Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.: "provocative maliciousness… σῇ: emphatic, at the end of the line and sentence, renders the words particularly invidious."
[183] Jebb 1894 ad loc.: "The ironical wish is a way of expressing how insane she thinks Electra's present design: 'It is a pity that thy courage was not shown in preventing, rather than avenging, our father's murder.' – **πᾶν γὰρ ἂν κατειργάσω**, lit., 'thou wouldst have achieved anything'; nothing would have been too hard for thee, – even to defeat the murderous conspiracy"; and Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc.: "φεῦ: the following words lend a sarcastic ring to the commiserative exclamation."
[184] Knox 1964: 20, Segal 1966: 504, Blundell 1989: 161, and Coo 2021: 103.

that "Chrysothemis anticipates Electra changing her tone when the murder proves unfeasible, looking forward to a time in the future when the sisters will agree".[185]

Firstly, as in the earlier encounter (383-384, 430), it is not so much 'being in agreement' with her sister that Chrysothemis is 'looking forward to' as Electra being forced to acknowledge that she was right (cf. ἐπαινέσεις ἐμέ 1044, τἄμ' ἐπαινέσεις ἔπη 1057). Secondly, ἀνέξομαι does not convey a sense of eager anticipation, but rather the exact opposite: "i.e. 'As I am indifferent to your censure, so I will be to your commendation, when you have learned the truth'. As Kaibel says, there is no noble-mindedness in these words; on the contrary they are the scornful utterance of one who congratulates herself that events will put her in the right".[186] Moreover, when Electra suggests that Chrysothemis go and inform Clytemnestra of her plan, Chrysothemis replies: οὐδ' αὖ τοσοῦτον ἔχθος ἐχθαίρω σ' ἐγώ (1034). Campbell & Abbott, Jebb and Kells all interpret this along the lines of: 'While I disapprove of your intentions, on the other hand (αὖ) I do not hate you so much that I would reveal your secret and put you in danger'.[187] As Finglass points out, however, "rather than deny her hatred, [Chrysothemis] merely qualifies its extent".[188]

Coo has also claimed that "whereas Electra only wants a sister who will act with her and on her terms… Chrysothemis offers a baseline of… unchanging, collaborative… sisterhood".[189] Chrysothemis may be a lot more subtle than Electra, but her own sense of sibling loyalty is no less conditional. Chrysothemis claims that she is merely 'showing consideration' (προμηθίας δὲ σοῦ 1036) for Electra's well-being (1037-1038):

[185] Coo 2021: 103.
[186] Kamerbeek 1974 ad loc; Kaibel 1911 ad loc. See also: Campbell & Abbott 1886 ad loc.: "Chrysothemis means that the bad opinion of Electra is a matter of no moment to her, and that her praises (which will certainly come) will be an annoyance".
[187] Campbell & Abbott 1886; Jebb 1894; and Kells 1973 ad loc. Blundell (1989: 161) claims that Chrysothemis "refuses to adopt the role of enemy which Electra thrusts upon her" and Coo (2021: 203) that "[t]his accusation of enmity is denied by Chrysothemis".
[188] Finglass 2007 ad loc.
[189] Coo 2021: 104.

{ΗΛ.} τῷ σῷ δικαίῳ δῆτ' ἐπισπέσθαι με δεῖ;
{ΧΡ.} ὅταν γὰρ εὖ φρονῇς, τόθ' ἡγήσει σὺ νῷν.[190]

EL. So I, then, must be governed by your view of what is right?
CHR. Yes, when you are sensible, then you may guide us both.

This is Chrysothemis' final dual (νῷν). Coo has argued that Chrysothemis is once again trying to promote a sense of unity between Electra and herself, despite their current disagreement;[191] but this offer of 'unity' is clearly attached to a condition. In the same way that Electra's hypothetical use of the dual in 977-985 implies that her unity with Chrysothemis is dependent on whether Chrysothemis collaborates in the assassination, Chrysothemis' dual implies that it is only 'when' Electra adopts her own sensible position that she and Electra can come together as a 'pair' (νῷν). And indeed, when it becomes clear that Electra will not 'agree' to this condition (φρονεῖν ἔοικας οὐδὲν ὧν ἐγὼ λέγω 1048), any further 'concern' for her sister is immediately withdrawn, as it was in their first meeting: ἄπειμι τοίνυν (1050, cf. σὺ δ' οὐχὶ πείσῃ καὶ συναινέσεις ἐμοί;… χωρήσομαι 402, 404).

Antigone and Ismene never manage to regain their initial sense of 'oneness', but nor do they part in anger. Despite their opposing views and moral imperatives, the two sisters do eventually come to reach a certain level of mutual understanding regarding the decisions and motivations that led them on such divergent paths. Even Antigone, who cannot quite bring herself to forgive Ismene for her initial refusal, comes to recognise that her own position was not necessarily the only right one, and that while 'some' may have approved Ismene's choice, and 'others' hers, they were nevertheless each of them *kalos* in their own way: καλῶς σὺ μὲν τοῖς, τοῖς δ' ἐγὼ 'δόκουν φρονεῖν (*Ant.* 557). Not so for Electra and Chrysothemis, neither of whom ever comes to recognise or accept the validity of any position other than her own: φρονεῖν ἔοικας

[190] Kamerbeek (1974 ad loc.) points out that the *caesura media* in 1036, 1037 and 1038 is suggestive "of the dead-lock between the standpoints of the two sisters."
[191] Coo 2021: 103.

οὐδὲν ὧν ἐγὼ λέγω (*El.* 1048). In the *Antigone*, the bitter hostility that follows Ismene's refusal is ultimately replaced by the painful recognition that, for all their 'noble' intentions, neither sister has managed to achieve what she sought: καὶ μὴν ἴση νῷν ἐστιν ἡ 'ξαμαρτία (*Ant.* 558). In the *Electra*, these feelings of blame and reproach persist right until the very end (*El.* 1039-1040):

> {ΗΛ.} ἦ δεινὸν εὖ λέγουσαν ἐξαμαρτάνειν.
> {ΧΡ.} εἴρηκας ὀρθῶς ᾧ σὺ πρόσκεισαι κακῷ.
>
> EL. How terrible it is, that one who speaks so well should be so wrong.
> CHR. You have rightly described the failing to which you yourself cling.

As Finglass has argued, the "block of angry stichomythia which closes the episode marks the final degeneration of the sisters' relationship";[192] but it also marks a return to the mutual contempt which characterised their opening exchanges in the first episode. By the end of their second encounter, we have essentially come full circle: Electra is still reproaching Chrysothemis for her refusal to 'help' (σοὶ γὰρ ὠφέλησις οὐκ ἔνι 1031, cf. οὔτε ξυνέρδεις 350), and Chrysothemis is still reproaching Electra for her refusal to 'learn' (ἀλλὰ σοὶ μάθησις οὐ πάρα 1032, cf. κοὐδ' ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ διδαχθῆναι θέλεις…; 330). Finglass has also argued that in terms of plot development, the sisters' second encounter "turns out to be a dead end", since both Chrysothemis' account of Orestes' return and Electra's plan to assassinate Aegisthus are all but forgotten in the rest of the play;[193] but nor does this scene 'lead anywhere' in terms of the sisters' relationship. Whereas Antigone and Ismene move from unity, to separation, to a new level of acceptance and recognition, Electra and Chrysothemis' relationship lacks the same level of growth and development, moving simply from separation, to meaningless conciliation, then back to separation. We are no further along at the end of their second quarrel than we were at the end of their first: Electra is still determined to avenge Agamemnon 'alone' (μόνῃ 1019, cf. μούνη 118), and

[192] Finglass 2007: 416 n. 1015-57.
[193] Finglass 2007: 373 n. 871-1057.

Chrysothemis is still unwilling to risk any additional 'trouble' (πράσσειν κακῶς 1026, cf. νῦν δ' ἐν κακοῖς μοι πλεῖν ὑφειμένῃ δοκεῖ 335).

Ismene never once abandons her sister. Chrysothemis resolves to do so twice: χωρήσομαι (404), ἄπειμι τοίνυν (1050). Ismene's parting words to Antigone at the end of their first encounter are an assurance of her undiminished affection and support, despite their opposing views: ἀλλ', εἰ δοκεῖ σοι, στεῖχε· τοῦτο δ' ἴσθ' ὅτι / ἄνους μὲν ἔρχῃ, τοῖς φίλοις δ' ὀρθῶς φίλη (*Ant.* 98-99). As at the conclusion of their first argument (εἰ γάρ μ' ἀπώσει, σὺν κακῷ μέτει πάλιν *El.* 430), Chrysothemis' parting words to Electra at the end of this scene, rather than displaying any genuine concern for her sister, merely serve to express her conviction in the superiority of her own position (1055-1057):[194]

> ἀλλ' εἰ σεαυτῇ τυγχάνεις δοκοῦσά τι
> φρονεῖν, φρόνει τοιαῦθ'. ὅταν γὰρ ἐν κακοῖς
> ἤδη βεβήκῃς, τἄμ' ἐπαινέσεις ἔπη.
>
> Well, if you happen to think that you are in the right,
> then go ahead and think that. Soon enough, when you have
> come to trouble, you will praise my words.

The only thing that prevented Chrysothemis from walking out on Electra in the first episode was Electra's interest in Clytemnestra's dream. As Finglass notes, there is no such 'remedy' now.[195] Even though Antigone and Ismene's paths are forever sundered by the distinction between 'she who chose life' and 'she who chose death' (σὺ μὲν γὰρ εἵλου ζῆν, ἐγὼ δὲ κατθανεῖν *Ant.* 555), Antigone's final lines to Ismene nevertheless reveal not only that she has finally come to recognise just how much she means to Ismene, but also that she herself still cares enough to try and console Ismene in her distress: θάρσει· σὺ μὲν ζῇς, ἡ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχὴ πάλαι / τέθνηκεν, ὥστε τοῖς θανοῦσιν

[194] Cf. March 2001 ad loc.: "Chrysothemis is sure that she is in the right and that future events will bear her out. Cf. her earlier words at 430."
[195] Finglass 2007: 372 n. 871-1057.

ὠφελεῖν (*Ant.* 559-560). Electra's parting words, by contrast, reflect only the same sense of discord that has plagued the sisters' relationship from the start (*El.* 1052-1053):

> ἀλλ' εἴσιθ'. οὔ σοι μὴ μεθέψομαί ποτε,
> οὐδ' ἢν σφόδρ' ἱμείρουσα τυγχάνῃς·
>
> So go! I shall never follow you, never –
> no matter how much you should want me to![196]

These lines resemble the acrimonious threat Antigone makes to Ismene at the height of her anger in 69-70: οὔτ' ἂν κελεύσαιμ' οὔτ' ἄν, εἰ θέλοις ἔτι / πράσσειν, ἐμοῦ γ' ἂν ἡδέως δρῴης μέτα. In the *Antigone*, this turns out to be a pivotal moment in the sisters' relationship when Antigone later carries out this threat and refuses to allow Ismene to share her death. Unlike Ismene, who desires nothing more than to share her sister's 'fate' (οἴμοι τάλαινα, κἀμπλάκω τοῦ σοῦ μόρου; *Ant.* 554), Chrysothemis simply departs back into the palace, abandoning her sister to whatever fate awaits her.

Conclusion

As soon as Chrysothemis exits back into the palace, Sophocles reaffirms Electra's bond with the chorus. Electra might not have been successful with Chrysothemis, but she has evidently done enough to persuade the chorus, whose initial uncertainty (990-991) now gives way to the highest praise: Electra has 'taken up arms against dishonour' (τὸ μὴ καλὸν καθοπλίσασα 1087-1088) and thereby proven herself not only the 'best daughter' (ἀρίστα παῖς 1089) but also worthy of the 'noblest' (ἄριστα 1097) renown for her 'wisdom' (σοφά 1089) and 'reverence' (εὐσεβείᾳ 1097). Chrysothemis, on the other hand, the chorus tacitly condemns both for neglecting the duties owed to one's parents (1058-1062) and for 'abandoning' her sister to 'weather the storm on her own'

[196] March 2001 ad loc.: "Electra speaks as Chrysothemis turns to go into the palace, meaning that she will neither follow her sister indoors, not give in to her viewpoint." Kamerbeek (1974 ad loc.) points out that "there are no other instances of μεθέπεσθαι in Tragedy".

(πρόδοτος δὲ μόνα σαλεύει Ἠλέκτρα 1074-1075).[197] This identification between Electra and the chorus only continues to intensify as the play progresses.[198] When Orestes finally reveals his true identity to Electra, it is the chorus to whom Electra turns to share in her joy, just as she had earlier turned to them to share in her sorrow: ὦ φίλταται γυναῖκες, ὦ πολίτιδες, ὁρᾶτ' Ὀρέστην τόνδε… (122-1228, cf. 846- 870). There, the chorus became so actively involved in Electra's misery that they cried out in pain (866); here, they weep with joy (ὁρῶμεν, ὦ παῖ, κἀπὶ συμφοραῖσί μοι / γεγηθὸς ἕρπει δάκρυον ὀμμάτων ἄπο 1230-1231). Gardiner has argued that when Chrysothemis retreats into the palace, she is "replaced by Orestes, who does join his sister in the desperate task she proposed";[199] but this is not quite right. Electra may no longer be excluded from Orestes' confidence (cf. 77-85), but nor is she accorded the position of joint avenger. As in the prologue, that role is given to Pylades: it is Orestes and Pylades who become the avenging 'pair' (1297, 1367, 1376, 1401, cf. 21, 75), actively performing the murders inside the palace. In Euripides' version Electra physically helps Orestes 'drive' his sword into Clytemnestra.[200] Here Sophocles opts to deny Electra a physical part in the murders, instead assigning her the position of supporter and decoy outside the palace. While the 'men' set about 'performing the deed' (ἄνδρες αὐτίκα τελοῦσι τοὔργον 1398-1399), it is the chorus who once again unite with Electra in common purpose, urging the murderers on (1433-1434) and even suggesting the ruse that results in Aegisthus' capture (1437-1441).[201] Aegisthus is led off into the

[197] Gardiner 1987: 154: "the chorus seem to have made a decision, for they confirm the moral validity of Electra's values as against those of Chrysothemis, and indeed they actually condemn, albeit mildly and briefly, Chrysothemis' desertion… The women may agree with [Chrysothemis'] prudence, but not with her withdrawal; they come down firmly on Electra's side and praise her devotion unreservedly for the rest of the song." See also: Gellie 1972: 120, Winnington-Ingram 1980: 240-24, and Blundell 1989: 155-156.

[198] Foley 2002: 157: "The play reconstitutes for the isolated Electra a chorus that… becomes fully identified with the heroine."

[199] Gardiner 1987: 165.

[200] Eur. *El*. 1224-1225: ἐγὼ δέ γ' ἐπεκέλευσά σοι / ξίφους τ' ἐφηψάμαν ἅμα.

[201] Gardiner 1987: 158: "[the chorus] step beyond simple passive approval and actively throw themselves into the deception. If lines 1428-1429, 1433-1434, and 1437-1441 are, as most editors agree, correctly attributed to the chorus, then these women warn of Aegisthus' approach, order the men to rush inside, and then advise Electra to deceive Aegisthus with soothing words."

palace to face his execution, and we end as we began in the parodos, with Electra and the chorus alone on stage together.[202] It is not Orestes, therefore, who takes up what ought to have been Chrysothemis' role to 'weather the storm' by Electra's side (cf. 1074-1075), but rather the chorus – as indeed they have done throughout the play.

In her very last words to her sister, Electra says that her attempt to secure Chrysothemis' aid was nothing but an 'idle quest': ἐπεὶ πολλῆς ἀνοίας καὶ τὸ θηρᾶσθαι κενά (1053-1054). In the same way in which Antigone's final words to Ismene capture the changing progression of their relationship over the course of the play (θάρσει· σὺ μὲν ζῇς, ἡ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχὴ πάλαι / τέθνηκεν, ὥστε τοῖς θανοῦσιν ὠφελεῖν. *Ant.* 559-560), so too does this parting jibe of Electra's sum up Electra and Chrysothemis' entire relationship. Jebb comments that the force of κενά is to be understood as: "vain dreams that her sister could ever feel and act with her"; and Campbell & Abbott that θηρᾶσθαι κενά "may mean not only 'to pursue an idle quest'… but 'to pursue what is useless when found'".[203] As several scholars have noted, whereas Electra and Chrysothemis' first encounter begins "with insults" and ends "with affection", their second "begins with affection" and "ends with insults."[204] This idea that the sisters' second meeting reverses the events of their first is mirrored in the stage movement: in the first episode, Chrysothemis enters from the palace and leaves through the side entrance; in the third episode, she enters from the side entrance and exits into the palace.[205] By the end of their second encounter we feel as if we have watched the sisters' relationship play out in reverse – back to the moment

[202] Gardiner 1987: 159: "It is widely and probably correctly believed that Electra is alone in front of the house with the chorus at the very end" (cf. Segal 1966: 529); 161: "Thus by the end of the play these sensible, admirable women are with Electra in every aspect – in emotions, in principles, and in action – so that her behaviour is not that of one aberrant person but of sixteen persons." Cf. Budelmann 2000: 252.

[203] Jebb 1894 ad loc.; Campbell & Abbott 1886 ad loc.

[204] Segal 1966: 502-503. Finglass 2007: 371 n. 871-1057: "In broad outline the earlier episode moved from a hostile to a conciliatory atmosphere, from recrimination to cooperation. The present scene reverses the pattern… The progress made earlier in the sisters' relationship is thus literally turned back on itself."

[205] Finglass 2007: 371. n. 871-1057.

before Chrysothemis first entered from the palace. In a sense then, we reach the end of their second encounter only to feel that we are somehow back at the beginning of their first; as if none of it had ever happened and their entire interaction has been nothing but an 'idle dream'. And indeed, for all the difference their interactions have made either to their own position or their relations with one another, Chrysothemis might as well have never come on stage in the first place. We end precisely as we began, with one absent and unacknowledged sister enjoying the comforts of her privileged position within the palace, and one excessively devoted sister united in common purpose with the chorus outside.

Although Electra and Chrysothemis manage to achieve some form of togetherness at the end of their first meeting, this soon turns out to be little more than a 'useless' interlude that has no lasting effect on their relationship. Because of the overly reductive either/or binaries that typically govern Sophoclean scholarship, scholars have often fallen victim to the assumption that, like the sisters themselves – who are "so consumed with being right"[206] – we are obligated to pick sides; that the sisters' failure to maintain a lasting connection must necessarily rest *either* with Electra, *or* with Chrysothemis.[207] Cairns has argued that "[t]he *Antigone* is not a study in black and white";[208] but the same holds true for the *Electra*. Electra might regard the sibling bond as a tool with which to manipulate her sister for the advancement of her own aims, but Chrysothemis is no less calculating in her own way; nor is her loyalty towards Electra any less conditional.

Similarly, since the theoretical framework of Sophoclean scholarship is focused so heavily on the primary distinction between 'hero' and 'foil', the reception of Electra

[206] Pounds-Williams 2017: 138.
[207] For the former view, see: Shillington 1968, Apfel 2011, Pounds-Williams 2017, Roisman 2020, and Coo 2021; for the latter, see: Campbell & Abbott 1886, Jebb 1894, Waldock 1951, Kamerbeek 1974, Powell, B J 1990, Sicking 1998, March 2001, and van Nortwick 2015.
[208] Cairns 2016: 53.

and Chrysothemis' relationship has largely been predicated on the assumption that Sophocles has simply recreated the same dynamic from his earlier play, once again setting his eminently more remarkable heroine against her timid, conventional sister.[209] As Kirkwood has argued, however: "Electra is no second Antigone, nor is Chrysothemis another Ismene."[210] While there is little doubt that Sophocles has deliberately drawn upon a number of elements from the *Antigone*, thereby inviting his audience to make comparisons between the two pairs of sisters, he does so not to draw our attention to how similar they are, but how different. Both relationships conclude in the same way – the 'heroic' sister on stage, the 'ordinary' sister inside[211] – and yet the differences could not be more striking. By the time Antigone and Ismene part ways, Ismene has twice shown herself willing to 'throw herself into danger'[212] out of affection for Antigone; Chrysothemis, by contrast, has twice shown herself willing to abandon Electra out of concern for her own well-being. Antigone and Ismene are finally separated only when Creon's guards come to lead Antigone to her death; Electra and Chrysothemis' final parting is not only voluntary, but mutually gratifying: {ΧΡ.} ἄπειμι τοίνυν… {ΗΛ.} ἀλλ' εἴσιθ' (1050, 1052).

If Antigone and Ismene's relationship is characterised by the breakdown of *to koinon*, then Electra and Chrysothemis' is characterised by the complete lack of it from the start. Reinhardt and Kirkwood have both recognised that the "antitheses" between Electra and Chrysothemis "go so much deeper" than those between Antigone and Ismene; and yet it is not simply the sisters' profoundly opposing values and ethical perspectives that drive them apart.[213] As the *Antigone* shows, such differences can be overcome; but whereas Antigone and Ismene have the type of relationship where at

[209] Cf. Iriarte 2000.
[210] Kirkwood 1958: 139. Cf. Reinhardt 1979: 145: "Electra is not Antigone, Ismene is not Chrysothemis."
[211] Finglass 2007:424 n. 1057; Mossman 2012: 501.
[212] Σ *Ant*. 561.1-561.3: τὴν Ἰσμήνην ὅτι εἰ καὶ μὴ συνειργάσατο ῥίπτει ἑαυτὴν εἰς κίνδυνον.
[213] Reinhardt 1979: 143. Kirkwood 1958: 137: "The thing that most strikingly distinguishes this pair of sisters is the complete severance between their whole way of thinking and even between their use of words. Both speak of καλόν, κακόν, νοῦς, and the like, but they do not mean the same things at all."

least one sister's love for the other supersedes all else, Electra and Chrysothemis, quite simply, do not. This is not to say that neither sister demonstrates any affection for the other whatsoever – after all, Chrysothemis does twice try to dissuade Electra from a dangerous course of action, and even Electra looks forward to uniting with Chrysothemis against their enemies – but rather that neither sister values the sibling bond above her own priorities. Picklesimer has suggested that, should Electra have been captured while trying to enact her revenge plan, Chrysothemis would probably have reacted precisely as Ismene does;[214] but there can be little question of this. Chrysothemis might not 'hate Electra enough' (οὐδ' αὖ τοσοῦτον ἔχθος ἐχθαίρω σ' ἐγώ 1034) to actively bear her any ill-will, but nor does she love her enough to 'sail beside her in times of trouble' (*Ant*. 540-541; *El*. 335):

> {ΙΣ.} ἀλλ' ἐν κακοῖς τοῖς σοῖσιν οὐκ αἰσχύνομαι
> ξύμπλουν ἐμαυτὴν τοῦ πάθους ποιουμένη.
>
> {ΧΡ.} νῦν δ' ἐν κακοῖς μοι πλεῖν ὑφειμένη δοκεῖ…

By the end of the *Antigone*, Antigone has lost her life and Ismene has lost her reason for living: καὶ τίς βίος μοι σοῦ λελειμμένη φίλος; (548); τί γὰρ μόνῃ μοι τῆσδ' ἄτερ βιώσιμον; (566). Neither Electra nor Chrysothemis are any worse off after their second meeting than they were before their first.

[214] Picklesimer 2000: 225: "No sabemos lo que hubiera hecho Crisótemis de haber sido Electra apresada, pero quizá no se hubiera comportado de forma muy diferente a Ismene. Cuando Creonte la inculpa como cómplice del crimen de Antígona, Ismene se reconoce culpable y dispuesta a compartir la muerte con su hermana."

Conclusion

The prevailing assumption that the term 'hero' necessarily translates to 'worthy of attention' and 'foil' to 'lack of dramatic interest' has led Chrysothemis to suffer the same reductive tendencies as Ismene. While I might ultimately differ from Coo on the precise nature of Chrysothemis' characterisation, we are nevertheless agreed on the same crucial premise: that a thorough consideration of the so-called 'weaker' sisters, who are no less individuated than their 'stronger' counterparts, is crucial to a comprehensive engagement with the plays.[1] As Pounds-Williams has pointed out, between them Ismene, Chrysothemis and Tecmessa feature in a staggering 57% of extant Sophoclean tragedy,[2] and the assumption that Sophocles attached no greater significance to these characters than their capacity to 'illuminate' the heroes through their "sympathetic ordinariness"[3] not only perpetuates what has heretofore been a largely prejudiced critical tradition that privileges certain aspects of the plays over others, but also fails to take advantage of the new insights and dimensions in the nature of both Sophoclean and Attic tragedy that these minor characters reveal. Although Ismene and Chrysothemis have typically been brushed off as copies of one another, Chrysothemis is in many respects a great deal more differentiated from Ismene than Electra is from Antigone. To reduce either Ismene or Chrysothemis to such crude generalisations as 'weak', 'timid' and 'ordinary' is not only to disregard the manifest care Sophocles has taken to delineate each character, but also to close ourselves off to the complexities and ambiguities that Ismene and Chrysothemis' alternative perspectives bring to each play, thereby limiting ourselves to one interpretation at the expense of all others.

[1] Coo 2021.
[2] Pounds-Williams 2017: 209. She also points out (217) that there is as yet no scholarly work devoted entirely to a comprehensive analysis of minor characters in tragedy.
[3] Easterling 1977: 124.

Antigone's instinctive reaction to Creon's edict is an overwhelming imperative to act, to do the only thing that she knows to be 'right':

> In her there is no conflict between love and duty, between what she wishes to do and what she knows to be right… She does the last services to Polyneices because she loves him and because the gods demand it. In this there is no contradiction, no dual purpose, no ambiguity. She does what she must because she is that sort of woman.[4]

When Antigone summons Ismene forth from the palace and offers her the opportunity to prove that she is also 'that sort of woman' (καὶ δείξεις τάχα εἴτ' εὐγενὴς πέφυκας εἴτ' ἐσθλῶν κακή 37-38), Ismene baulks. Like Antigone herself, most scholars never quite manage to look beyond this initial 'failure'; and, also like Antigone, they swiftly condemn Ismene as a traitorous coward: τὸν γοῦν ἐμὸν, καὶ τὸν σόν, ἢν σὺ μὴ θέλῃς, / ἀδελφόν· οὐ γὰρ δὴ προδοῦσ' ἁλώσομαι (45-46). Because these Ismene-dismissive judgements are based on the assumption that we are meant to share Antigone's own sense of heroic superiority on the polarising distinction between *eugenês* and *kakos*, between she who does 'her duty… to a brother' and she who does not, they have failed to recognise the broader significance of Ismene's refusal. By failing to prove herself a 'true' Labdacid, Ismene not only opts out of the inherited pattern of self-destructive inwardness that has plagued their family for generations, she also opts out of the spirit of dogmatic narcissism that characterises the Sophoclean heroes.

Like the Homeric poems, Sophoclean drama relates the deeds of a long-ago nobility. Unlike the aristocratic warrior culture of epic poetry however, Sophocles sets his protagonists against the backdrop of the fifth-century *polis*. The rise of Athenian democracy had ostensibly occasioned a dramatic shift in Greek society, in which the competitive struggle for power and precedence amongst the leading aristocratic families of pre-democratic Athens had given way to "a new spirit of collective

[4] Bowra 1944: 96.

urbanisation"[5] and the growing recognition for a more collaborative system of values – less 'heroic', more 'human', and better suited to the new modes of social and political activity in the democratic *polis*.[6] In practice, however, the underlying tension between individual autonomy and social obligation, between independent self-interest and the 'common good', continued to plague Greece for centuries, ultimately to the point of its own destruction.[7] Holt remarks that "Ismene, notoriously, is no tragic heroine".[8] In a scholarly tradition which has persistently overvalued the heroic at the expense of those 'ordinary' characters like Ismene and Chrysothemis, this crude distinction has, for the most part, been enough to damn Ismene to the margins of Sophoclean scholarship; and yet the fact that Ismene is *not* a 'hero', and yet nevertheless proves herself worthy of our interest and admiration, is precisely the point. The heroes represent an exalted version of human nature: admirably honourable, idealistic and self-sacrificing. But they are also rigidly uncompromising, self-sufficient and life-denying. Alienated from their communities, they are quick to anger, dismissive of authority and resentful of any appeals to reason – all of which makes them a threat to well-being of the wider social group. Achilles, the prototype of the Sophoclean hero and the figure to whom Antigone is most often likened, intentionally sacrifices his fellow countrymen for the sake of his own honour and *kleos*.

[5] Scully 1990: 83.

[6] Adkins 1960 and 1972.

[7] Slater (1968: 36) has shown how, rather than "diminish[ing] as the Greeks became more civilized", the competitive drive to assert one's own pre-eminence extended to all areas of Greek life: "'Nothing defines the quality of Greek culture more neatly than the way in which the idea of competition was extended from physical prowess to the realm of the intellect, to feats of poetry and dramatic composition' [Finley 1959, pp. 128-29]. Indeed, as Huizinga remarks, 'The Greeks used to stage contests in anything that offered the bare possibility of a fight' – beauty… singing, riddle-solving, staying awake, [Huizinga, 1955, pp. 73]. Nothing seemed to have meaning to the Greek unless it included the defeat of another". On the detrimental effect of the competitive values on Greek civilisation see, for example: Gouldner 1965: 41-74, Slater 1968: 36-41, Adkins 1960 and 1972; Finley 1959, 1963, 1973, and 1983, and Detienne 1999 and 2007.

[8] Holt 1999: 647.

Antigone and Creon may take up opposing positions on the issue of Polyneices' burial, but they are equally blinkered by their limited perspectives. In a somewhat blunt simplification, Antigone values loyalty to the family at the expense of the *polis*; Creon values loyalty to the *polis* at the expense of the family. When Creon changes Antigone's sentence from public execution to life-long imprisonment in a rocky cavern, he condemns her to the same anomalous fate as he does Polyneices: she is to have 'no home among the living nor the dead' (οὔτ' ἐν βροτοῖς οὔτε νεκροῖσιν / μέτοικος, οὐ ζῶσιν, οὐ θανοῦσιν 851-852). Even before she suffers this fate, however, Antigone defines herself to Ismene as one whose 'life has long since been surrendered to death' (ἡ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχὴ πάλαι τέθνηκεν 559-560). Before she is led off to her rocky prison, Antigone – no longer quite so sure that she has done the right thing – beseeches the gods: if it happens to be Creon who is wrong, then let him 'suffer no greater evil' than that which he has unjustly inflicted upon her (εἰ δ' οἵδ' ἁμαρτάνουσι, μὴ πλείω κακὰ / πάθοιεν ἢ καὶ δρῶσιν ἐκδίκως ἐμέ 927-928). And so it happens. Stripped of his wife and son, Creon is also ultimately subjected to a living death: ἄγετέ μ' ἐκποδών, / τὸν οὐκ ὄντα μᾶλλον ἢ μηδένα (1321-1325).

Creon turns out to be wrong. Does this mean Antigone is right?[9] Sophoclean drama is rarely that straightforward. It is not merely that Antigone is not *of* this world, she is also not *for* this world. Antigone's view on the need for Polyneices to be buried might be vindicated, but – like Creon and her other dead male relations – she nevertheless remains a threat to civic order of the *polis*.[10] It is only when men honour *both* 'the justice of the gods' (θεῶν δίκαν) and 'the laws of the land' (νόμους χθονὸς), says the chorus in 367-370, that their 'city stands proud' (ὑψίπολις). Both Antigone and Creon are so convinced that their own monistic position represents the only correct interpretation

[9] Cairns 2016: 46: "For most interpreters, the fact that Creon is wrong is enough to suggest that Antigone is right."

[10] Cf. Cartledge 1997: 30: "the eponymous heroine is clearly on the side of the gods, but she is equally clearly a menace (in a different way from her uncle Creon) to the smooth running of the male-ordered city." See also: Sorum 1982: 206, Sourvinou-Inwood 1989: 140, 148, Apfel 2011: 281, and Cairns 2016: 49.

that they stubbornly blind themselves to any considerations that prove contrary to the one thing which they deem to be all important. Apfel has argued that one of the defining features which distinguishes tragedy from heroic poetry is that while "epic gives the sense that the hero is, in the final analysis, doing the 'right' thing or making the 'best' decision… tragedy provides no such comfort."[11] Antigone might claim that she *knows* that she is fulfilling the will of the gods (ἀλλ' οἶδ' ἀρέσκουσ' οἷς μάλισθ' ἁδεῖν με χρή 89), but it is not for mortals to assume such certainty in the workings of the divine:

> ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ ἂν τὰ θεῖα κρυπτόντων θεῶν
> μάθοις ἄν, οὐδ' εἰ πάντ' ἐπεξέλθοις σκοπῶν.[12]
>
> Since the gods conceal all things divine, you will never understand them,
> not even should you go searching to the ends of the earth.

Antigone gives her life to honour the ἄγραπτα κἀσφαλῆ θεῶν νόμιμα (454-455); for this the gods neither praise her, nor save her. Antigone's death reveals "nothing about the gods, only about life as it really is in which actions have their consequences and the consequences have to be faced."[13]

It is Ismene who sees more, who recognises and accepts, as the heroes will not, the complex nexus of interrelating familial, social, religious, and political obligations that govern mankind's existence in the *polis*.[14] Whereas Antigone and Creon champion one cause at the exclusion of all others, it is Ismene who so desperately attempts to navigate her way through these competing claims (61-67):

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[11] Apfel 2011: 238.

[12] A fragment from a lost Sophoclean play: Sophocles *Fr.* 919 Radt (833 Nauck).

[13] Easterling 1985: 308.

[14] Cf. Saxonhouse 1992: 70: "Ismene… acknowledges the tensions and the multiple dimensions of human life. Thus, unlike Antigone, Ismene is torn between the love of her sister and the force of the city". Goldhill 1986: 92: "Ismene… challenges Antigone's attitudes and plan precisely from such a different social perspective which includes a recognition of the obligations of civic life and the dependent status of women."

ἀλλ' ἐννοεῖν χρὴ τοῦτο μὲν γυναῖχ' ὅτι
ἔφυμεν, ὡς πρὸς ἄνδρας οὐ μαχουμένα·
ἔπειτα δ' οὕνεκ' ἀρχόμεσθ' ἐκ κρεισσόνων,
καὶ ταῦτ' ἀκούειν κἄτι τῶνδ' ἀλγίονα.
ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν αἰτοῦσα τοὺς ὑπὸ χθονὸς
ξύγγνοιαν ἴσχειν, ὡς βιάζομαι τάδε,
τοῖς ἐν τέλει βεβῶσι πείσομαι…

We must, first, remember this – we are women.
And so we should not contend against men.
Next, that we are ruled by the stronger, and so
we must submit in this, yes and in things far more painful still.
So I shall beg the forgiveness of those below the Earth,
since in this matter I am forced,
and I shall obey those who have come to power.

Haemon also understands that the stability of the social group cannot rest upon one person's conviction: πόλις γὰρ οὐκ ἔσθ' ἥτις ἀνδρός ἐσθ' ἑνός (737). He tries to caution his father against the dangers of excessive self-reliance (705-711):

μή νυν ἓν ἦθος μοῦνον ἐν σαυτῷ φόρει,
ὡς φὴς σύ, κοὐδὲν ἄλλο, τοῦτ' ὀρθῶς ἔχειν.
ὅστις γὰρ αὐτὸς ἢ φρονεῖν μόνος δοκεῖ,
ἢ γλῶσσαν ἣν οὐκ ἄλλος ἢ ψυχὴν ἔχειν,
οὗτοι διαπτυχθέντες ὤφθησαν κενοί.
ἀλλ' ἄνδρα, κεἴ τις ἦ σοφός, τὸ μανθάνειν
πόλλ' αἰσχρὸν οὐδὲν καὶ τὸ μὴ τείνειν ἄγαν.

So do not bear within yourself one mentality only;
that it is only what you think, and nothing else, that is right.
For whoever thinks that he alone is wise
– that his speech and mind is such as no one else's –
these men, when laid open, are always found wanting.
It is no shame for a man, even though he be wise,
to learn many things, and not to be so rigid.

Both Antigone and Creon are criticised for their refusal to acknowledge the range of interdependent relationships that constitute a community:[15] 'It is your own self-willed temper that has destroyed you', says the chorus to Antigone (σὲ δ' αὐτόγνωτος ὤλεσ' ὀργά 875); 'You would rule well over a desert', says Haemon to Creon (καλῶς ἐρήμης γ' ἂν σὺ γῆς ἄρχοις μόνος 739). Aristotle claims that there is simply no place for such dogged autonomy in the social order of the *polis*:

> ὁ δὲ μὴ δυνάμενος κοινωνεῖν ἢ μηδὲν δεόμενος δι' αὐτάρκειαν οὐθὲν μέρος πόλεως, ὥστε ἢ θηρίον ἢ θεός.[16]
>
> That man who is not capable of working in common, or who in his self-sufficiency has no need of anyone, is no part of the city, like an animal, or a god.

To the ethic of absolute values – the 'all or nothing' morality upon which the heroes stake their lives – Ismene and Haemon oppose the ethic of relative values which moves from the unequivocal plane of independent self-assertion to the broader and infinitely more complex one of social commitment in a community context:

> Sophocles sought in his tragedies to challenge not only the ability of the hero to exist in the current landscape of the *polis*, but the threat inherent in him doing so. For Sophocles, the hero was at once problem and paragon; monism was at once devastating and romantic. In the tragic world he created, heroism had its merits. It had its allure. But it was the real world in which the pluralist perspective was more fitting, or perhaps we could say, of which it was more reflective.[17]

Had either Creon or Antigone heeded Ismene and Haemon's advice on the necessity for moderation, compromise and accommodation, the disaster would have been

[15] Cf. Frank 2006: 339.

[16] Aristotle *Politics* 1253a27-1253a29 Ross.

[17] Apfel 2011: 272. Saxonhouse 1992: 73: "Ismene and Haemon vainly offer to each character the opportunity to see the world as complex. Antigone may alert the audience to unchanging laws that exist independently of the city… but Ismene alerts us to a world far more intriguing and ultimately far more demanding. Ismene speaks of both love for her sister and submission to male authority in the city. She accepts the tension between them, while Antigone… chooses one to the exclusion of the other."

averted. As it is, between them they are responsible not only for three deaths but for endangering the entire city. To protect Thebes from any such threats in the future, Creon is destroyed and Antigone is confined to what would seem to be the only suitable place for one who is so rigidly 'self-governed' (αὐτόνομος 821): with the dead below.[18] And yet, as McGrew Eifrig points out, no critical response ever names Ismene and Haemon "as the morally superior forces in the play."[19]

As well as posing a threat to the social order, the quasi-divine 'otherworldliness' of the great Sophoclean heroes also renders them unsuited to the conditions of mortal life:

> The heroes refuse to accept the limitations imposed on human beings by their mortality, resist the strong imperatives of time and circumstance – all things change, but they will not – and this is an assumption of divinity.[20]

The fixed, polarising principles to which the heroes adhere with such fervour – the uncompromising distinctions between *philos* and *echthros*, *kalon* and *kakon*, honour and dishonour, profit and loss – are admirable enough in theory, but in practice are simply too rigid to accommodate the complexities of the hero's own tragic world in which these seemingly opposing categories invariably fail to remain distinct: a world in which *philoi* are also *echthroi* – where wives murder husbands, fathers curse sons, and brothers declare war on one another. A world in which 'justice brings harm' (δίκη βλάβην φέρει *El*. 1042) and honouring what is *kalon* only leads to further *kaka*. The chorus says that Antigone has not learned to 'yield before adversity' (εἴκειν δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται κακοῖς 472); and she never does. As she is led off to her fate, the chorus

[18] Griffith (1999: 63) reaches a similar conclusion regarding Antigone, but he attributes her fate to her gender: "… in her solitary death, she seems after all to confirm that the only acceptable place for such female subjectivity is – in Hades, where she can 'lie with' her family for ever". For a fuller discussion on the city's need to be purged "from the consequences of generations of Labdacid dysfunction", see Cairns 2016: 92, 96-113.

[19] McGrew Eifrig 1998: 189.

[20] Knox 1964: 43.

comments that 'still the same rough winds, the wild passion raging through the girl'[21] (ἔτι τῶν αὐτῶν ἀνέμων αὐταὶ / ψυχῆς ῥιπαὶ τήνδε γ' ἔχουσιν. 929-930). It is precisely because Ismene is not a 'hero' that she is not locked into the rigid dynamic of an either/or binary. For the heroes there is only honour or dishonour, loyalty or betrayal, love or hatred; for Ismene there are shades of grey: she is "neither-nor", occupying "the terrain between [the] binary poles, rather than at the extremities of the poles themselves"[22] – where loyalty is not directly opposed to individuation, a difference of opinion does not automatically necessitate hatred, and honourable success or honourable death are not the only options. Antigone and Electra are frozen in the old ethic of the true-born *eugenês* whose obsessive awareness of their own nobility – an identity to which they will sacrifice everything else – demands that they never 'yield' on a matter of principle. 'What else could an εὐγενὴς γυνή do?', says Electra to the chorus (257).[23] It is Ismene and Chrysothemis who represent the newer sophistic ethic of 5th century Greece, not only acknowledging and confronting the various pressures of necessity and circumstance, but also retaining enough flexibility to question, adapt, admit their own failings, and even change their minds.[24]

Because Ismene has so often been dismissed as an extension of Antigone rather than a fully individuated character in her own right,[25] the critical tradition has largely overlooked the fact that, in many respects, her characterisation – as she grapples with the tragic forces of her circumstances, torn between 'what she wishes to do and what she knows to be right' – is in many respects more complex than Antigone's largely static devotion to the dead. Ismene may only be a 'minor' character, and Sophocles is indeed the dramatist of striking contrasts, but this in itself is not enough to justify the

[21] Fagles' (1984) translation.
[22] Honig 2011: 44; Kirkpatrick 2011: 418-419.
[23] Cf. *El*. 1320-1321: ἢ γὰρ ἂν καλῶς ἔσωσ' ἐμαυτήν, ἢ καλῶς ἀπωλόμην; *Ai*. 479-480: ἀλλ' ἢ καλῶς ζῆν ἢ καλῶς τεθνηκέναι τὸν εὐγενῆ χρή.
[24] Cf. Kells 1973: 105 n. 341f.
[25] Neeser Hever 2024: 4: "Ismene is only definable as *that which is not Antigone*."

prevailing assumption that it is merely the contrast between the 'extraordinary' Antigone and the 'average' Ismene that is of critical significance. Griffith has argued that Ismene's only role is "to articulate 'normal,' conventional female attitudes and expectations". But we hardly need Ismene to illustrate that Antigone's behaviour is "extreme and unconventional";[26] this is made clear throughout the play.[27] Nor can Ismene be categorised as simply performing the dramatic function of 'tragic adviser' whose primary role is to reveal the protagonist's stubbornness by "unsuccessfully [attempting] to dissuade the hero from a tragic course of action".[28] Ismene is not simply a detached third-party figure, like Teiresias, who has no personal stake in the hero's decision.[29] She begins the play by being fully identified with Antigone, and by the end of her second appearance it has been revealed that her own life has been no less destroyed by her sister's actions than Antigone's own. Moreover, while Ismene does not manage to sway Antigone, she does contribute to the dramatic force of the play. It is her initial refusal, for example, that fixes Antigone's heroic resolve, and it is her later effort to share Antigone's death that initiates the heroine's growing realisation that her death is not as unreservedly *kalos* and glorious as she initially imagined it would be (72, 97, 502-504).[30] Ismene also happens to display many of the characteristics of a tragic hero. Like Creon, Ismene learns through suffering that the 'worst' fate is not death, but to be deprived of that which makes life worth living;[31]

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[26] Griffith 2001: 129.

[27] See, for example 484-485 and 578-579, where Creon accuses Antigone of usurping a man's role.

[28] Carter 2005: 174. For the adviser figure in Sophoclean tragedy, see: Easterling 1977, Lardinois 2003, and Carter 2005.

[29] Cf. Pounds-Williams 2017: 24.

[30] Cairns 2016: 91: "while she does not regret what she has done, she does lament the consequences to which it has led, not only for their injustice, but also because the death that awaits her anomalous, inglorious, and unlamented as it appears, is not at all what she had in mind when she imagined that her death would be… *kerdos*". Private letter from Peter Euben (dated September 15, 1991) to Arlene Saxonhouse; quoted in Saxonhouse 1992: 69 n. 43: "she recognises the costs of her stand; she develops a more complex sense of herself and her world, of what she has excluded… confronting death she recognises the limits of her conception of life".

[31] Lefkowitz (1981: 4) argues that the heroes and heroines of tragedy are characterised by their "acquisition of knowledge through suffering".

like Antigone, she confronts and even goes beyond her own limits[32] to take "deliberate action for which she is willing to be held accountable";[33] like Antigone, too, Ismene also performs a courageous act of self-sacrifice;[34] and, like both Creon and Antigone, Ismene's decision to go on living after the 'worst' has happened enables the audience to reflect on "the limits of human endurance".[35]

However, rather than embracing the ambiguity of Ismene's role in the play;[36] the scholarly tradition has persistently sought to efface it by employing the same reductive tendency towards binary opposition to which the heroes themselves fall victim. Antigone is daring and brave, while Ismene is "timid and weak";[37] and yet the sisters' second encounter proves that Ismene is no less willing to 'throw herself into danger' (ῥίπτει ἑαυτὴν εἰς κίνδυνον) than Antigone herself.[38] Antigone is active and defiant, while Ismene is "as passive and obedient as a world of men could wish her to be";[39] and yet Ismene also ultimately shows herself capable of 'contending against men' (γυναῖχ'… ἔφυμεν, ὡς πρὸς ἄνδρας οὐ μαχουμένα 61-62). Antigone is a selfless idealist, while Ismene is a self-serving sycophant who fails to "act on her beliefs";[40] and yet Ismene is also prepared to risk her life for a principle, that 'one irreplaceable thing without which life would no longer be worth living'.[41] It is Antigone's "complex and contradictory" nature, Griffith argues, that makes her "one of the most discussed and most admired figures of Greek literature";[42] and yet when

[32] Mogyoródi (1996: 364) argues that it is Ismene's failure to undertake "a crucial existential challenge for herself" that prevents her from achieving tragic status.
[33] Foley (2002: 17), who argues that it is precisely the 'autonomy' of the grand tragic heroines that distinguishes them from the 'ordinary' female characters like Ismene.
[34] Markantonatos (2012: 7): "the hero fulfills himself in self-sacrifice".
[35] Easterling (1985: 311), who argues that this is one of the primary functions of the Sophoclean heroes.
[36] Frank (2006: 339 n.9) argues that we should not only follow Nonet's view of Ismene as "a model of ambiguity", but that we should also "take her ambiguity as a sign of her importance for Sophocles."
[37] D'Ooge 1890: 72 n. 536.
[38] Σ *Ant*. 561.2-561.3.
[39] Whitman 1951: 86.
[40] Elshtain 1989: 228.
[41] Honig 2011: 53.
[42] Griffith 2001: 129-130.

Ismene dares to show a little 'complexity' she incurs only further derision. 'Damned if you do, damned if you don't' – when she initially refuses to risk her life, she is accused of being a spineless coward; when she later tries to die with Antigone, she is accused of being 'hysterical'.[43] Sophocles has been heralded as 'the prophet' of *sophrosyne*, the "cardinal virtue [of] Greek morality",[44] but somehow the version Ismene displays amounts to no more than a 'little' person's "wish to be safe" or "a timid acquiescence in the conventions of feminine behaviour."[45]

Even those critics like Kirkpatrick and Honig who have more recently come to Ismene's defense by arguing that she is an "intriguing, layered character" and an "archetype of undaring defiance" only do so on the condition that Ismene performed the first burial.[46] Feminist and political theorists like Irigaray, Butler, Johnson, Söderbäck and Diprose, for whom Antigone has become an icon of rebellious opposition to male authority, have also dismissed Ismene as little more than a 'caricature' of conventional, submissive womanhood.[47] One notable exception is Rawlinson, who not only argues that Ismene's concern to "promote life" makes her a better model for feminist philosophy than Antigone's own determination to "sacrific[e] the future to the dead", but also criticises those readers, particularly feminist readers, who valorise Antigone's abandonment of a living sister for a dead brother.[48] It is not merely this widespread admiration of Antigone's preference for a male sibling that further reinforces the patriarchal ideologies which feminist theory seeks to dismantle, however, but also the complete disregard for Ismene's own loyalty

[43] See, for example, Jebb 1888: xxix.
[44] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 9; Adams 1955: 48. Cf. Rohdich 1980: 31.
[45] Whitman 1951: 8-9, cf. Adams 1957: 18-19; North 1966: 54.
[46] Kirkpatrick 2011: 414, 403; Honig 2011. Moro (2021) also thinks it likely that Ismene was responsible for the first burial.
[47] Irigaray 1985 and 2010a; Butler 2000; Johnson 1997; Söderbäck 2010; and Diprose 2005. To these can be added: Hirsch 1989, Benhabib 2002, Bovard 2003, Sjöholm 2004, Pollock 2006 and Paul 2007.
[48] Rawlinson 2016: 94-95. Cf. Goldhill (2006: 159), who argues that the appeal of "Antigone's resistance" amongst feminist writers has led "to a re-enactment of Antigone's dismissive attitude towards her sister".

towards Antigone, which privileges devotion to a brother over devotion to a sister: if you risk your life for a dead brother, you are a hero; if you risk your life for a living sister, you are a nobody.

Whitman expresses his surprise that a character like Ismene could ever win any amount of approval.[49] The real mystery, however, is why she has not won a great deal more. Even though it is Antigone who claims that she was 'not born to share in hatred, but in love' (οὔτοι συνέχθειν, ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν 523) – and many scholars have shared her assessment[50] – one cannot help but feel that what is perhaps the most famous line in this famous play has been given to the wrong sister: it is not Antigone whom Sophocles characterises as 'all-loving', but Ismene.[51] Similarly, the prevailing consensus is that it is Antigone who is the "admirable anomaly";[52] but in a family where discord and dysfunction have been the norm for generations, Antigone merely maintains the status quo. It is Ismene who is the real 'anomaly'.[53] As Žižek points out, Ismene is also the sister with whom we can most readily "identify… – kind, considerate, sensitive, prepared to give way and compromise, pathetic, 'human' in contrast to Antigone".[54] But I think that it goes further than this. Sophocles creates morally ambivalent situations and then retreats behind the safety of his plays. Where then, asks Winnington-Ingram, are we meant to turn for comfort?[55] The reason Sophocles fails to provide any answers is because there are none to give. When Antigone acknowledges that Ismene and herself have each behaved 'nobly' (καλῶς)

[49] Whitman 1951: 89.
[50] Campbell 1871: 393, Jebb 1888: xxvii-xxviii, Kitto 1956: 149, Knox 1964: 116, Segal 1964: 70, Lesky 1967: 107, Blundell 1989: 109, and Foley 2002: 173.
[51] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 135: "Antigone follows the old traditional code, with its polarity of friendship and enmity, an opposition which cannot be bridged, for where there is friendship there will be enmity also, and the stronger the *philia* the stronger the *echthra*. Antigone may believe that it is her nature to share in love, but she is caught up in a code which equally demands hatred… It is Ismene who is all affection."
[52] Foley 2002: 180.
[53] Else 1976: 29: "In a crazed family, Ismene has made sanity her business."
[54] Žižek 1989: 117.
[55] Winnington-Ingram 1980: 10.

in their own way, Ismene counters that they have nevertheless both been proven 'wrong' (καὶ μὴν ἴση νῷν ἐστιν ἡ ξαμαρτία 558). The same holds true for the opposing stances adopted by Electra and Chrysothemis: "Chrysothemis counsels safe acquiescence, Electra reckless defiance. The play shows neither course to be entirely satisfactory."[56] In the tragic circumstances Sophocles creates for his characters, as in real life, there is no one 'true' course that is entirely 'noble' or blameless.[57] Given the "utter vulnerability to circumstance"[58] that characterises the human condition, the best we can do is precisely as Ismene does: accept and endure as well as we may. And the best 'comfort' we can hope for is an Ismene who freely offers herself to 'sail beside us in our times of trouble': ἀλλ' ἐν κακοῖς τοῖς σοῖσιν οὐκ αἰσχύνομαι / ξύμπλουν ἐμαυτὴν τοῦ πάθους ποιουμένη (540-541).

In the end the ancient Greeks proved no more successful at uniting in common purpose, *to koinon*, than the two pairs of sisters.[59] Sophocles is famously said to have claimed that whereas Euripides represented men 'as they are' (οἷοι εἰσίν), he himself portrayed them as they 'ought to be' (οἵους δεῖ).[60] It seems to have been taken for granted that it was the 'heroes' to whom he was referring, but in a culture that always overvalued extremism and individual assertions of power at the expense of the larger social group, ultimately to the point of its own destruction, is it really the death-oriented fanaticism of an Antigone or the hate-fueled obsessiveness of an Electra that Sophocles meant his fellow Athenians to aspire to? Tyrell & Bennett also believe that Ismene "undoubtedly" represented something more than a mere "foil for her sister's heroism [to] Sophocles' original audience", but whereas they claim that Sophocles

[56] Roisman 2020: 11.
[57] Cf. Winnington-Ingram 1980: 246.
[58] Easterling 1985: 299.
[59] Kirkpatrick 2011: 419 n. 48: "For Aristotle, inquiring into the *koinon* of the city means exploring what draws citizens together, what unites them in common purpose". For the failure of the ancient Greeks to ever truly realise their 'fundamental unity as a people', see esp.: Adkins 1960, Finley 1963, Green 1973, Luce 1975 and Detienne 2007.
[60] Aristotle *Poetics* 1460b33-1460b35 Kassel.

intended Ismene to serve as "a model for the compliance and submission expected of women",[61] my own view is that we are meant to regard Ismene as a type of Sophoclean anti-hero, who shares none of her sister's worst qualities and yet all of her best ones. Whether this was Sophocles' intention or not, is it not time that we look beyond the self-destructive heroism of an Antigone or an Electra towards the less impressive and yet ultimately more demanding (and perhaps even more admirable) heroism of an Ismene, who not only asserts her own individuality, but also her unconditional love; who not only recognises what is truly valuable in human existence, but also that the blind pursuit of 'justice' can sometimes do more harm than good; and who not only possesses the courage to risk her life, but also the courage to survive? Campbell concludes his 1879 treatise on Sophocles with the reflection that the "subject" of Sophoclean tragedy "is always new and always old".[62] In a world where the common good is still too often hampered by the drive for individual self-assertion, the crucial difference – now as it was then – is not that Ismene is *not* a 'hero', but that she never sought to be one.

[61] Tyrrell & Bennett 1998: 76-77. Cf. Picklesimer (2000), who also believes that Sophocles intended that Ismene serve an important 'instructive purpose' (215, 218, 220). Like Tyrrell & Bennett, she argues that Ismene is meant to act as a model for how women ought to behave: "Si en la *Antígona* se nos presenta como más modesta y débil, es precisamente porque así ha de ser una doncella mítica, y los consejos de prudencia que, como Crisótemis, da a su hermana sólo tratan de llevarla a comportarse como una doncella mítica normal" (222).

[62] Campbell 1879: 157.

Text and Translation: Antigone & Ismene
The First Meeting, lines 1-99

{ΑΝΤΙΓΟΝΗ}
ὦ κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἰσμήνης κάρα,
ἆρ' οἶσθ' ὅ τι Ζεὺς τῶν ἀπ' Οἰδίπου κακῶν
ὁποῖον οὐχὶ νῷν ἔτι ζώσαιν τελεῖ;
οὐδὲν γὰρ οὔτ' ἀλγεινὸν οὔτ' ἄτης ἄτερ
οὔτ' αἰσχρὸν οὔτ' ἄτιμόν ἐσθ', ὁποῖον οὐ
τῶν σῶν τε κἀμῶν οὐκ ὄπωπ' ἐγὼ κακῶν.
καὶ νῦν τί τοῦτ' αὖ φασι πανδήμῳ πόλει
κήρυγμα θεῖναι τὸν στρατηγὸν ἀρτίως;
ἔχεις τι κεἰσήκουσας; ἢ σε λανθάνει
πρὸς τοὺς φίλους στείχοντα τῶν ἐχθρῶν κακά;
{ΙΣΜΗΝΗ}
ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐδεὶς μῦθος, Ἀντιγόνη, φίλων
οὔθ' ἡδὺς οὔτ' ἀλγεινὸς ἵκετ', ἐξ ὅτου
δυοῖν ἀδελφοῖν ἐστερήθημεν δύο,
μιᾷ θανόντοιν ἡμέρᾳ διπλῇ χερί·
ἐπεὶ δὲ φροῦδός ἐστιν Ἀργείων στρατὸς
ἐν νυκτὶ τῇ νῦν, οὐδὲν οἶδ' ὑπέρτερον,
οὔτ' εὐτυχοῦσα μᾶλλον οὔτ' ἀτωμένη.
{ΑΝ.} ἤδη καλῶς, καί σ' ἐκτὸς αὐλείων πυλῶν
τοῦδ' οὕνεκ' ἐξέπεμπον, ὡς μόνη κλύοις.
{ΙΣ.} τί δ' ἔστι; δηλοῖς γάρ τι καλχαίνουσ' ἔπος.
{ΑΝ.} οὐ γὰρ τάφου νῷν τὼ κασιγνήτω Κρέων
τὸν μὲν προτίσας τὸν δ' ἀτιμάσας ἔχει;
Ἐτεοκλέα μέν, ὡς λέγουσι, σὺν δίκης
χρήσει δικαίᾳ καὶ νόμου, κατὰ χθονὸς
ἔκρυψε, τοῖς ἔνερθεν ἔντιμον νεκροῖς·
τὸν δ' ἀθλίως θανόντα Πολυνείκους νέκυν
ἀστοῖσί φασιν ἐκκεκηρῦχθαι τὸ μὴ
τάφῳ καλύψαι μηδὲ κωκῦσαί τινα,
ἐᾶν δ' ἄκλαυτον, ἄταφον, οἰωνοῖς γλυκὺν
θησαυρὸν εἰσορῶσι πρὸς χάριν βορᾶς.
τοιαῦτά φασι τὸν ἀγαθὸν Κρέοντα σοὶ
κἀμοί, λέγω γὰρ κἀμέ, κηρύξαντ' ἔχειν,
καὶ δεῦρο νεῖσθαι ταῦτα τοῖσι μὴ εἰδόσιν
σαφῆ προκηρύξοντα, καὶ τὸ πρᾶγμ' ἄγειν
οὐχ ὡς παρ' οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ὃς ἂν τούτων τι δρᾷ,
φόνον προκεῖσθαι δημόλευστον ἐν πόλει.
οὕτως ἔχει σοι ταῦτα, καὶ δείξεις τάχα
εἴτ' εὐγενὴς πέφυκας εἴτ' ἐσθλῶν κακή.

ANTIGONE
My own sister, Ismene, born of the same womb and closest of kin,
do you know of any kind of misery, of all those stemming from Oedipus,
that Zeus does not accomplish for us two while we still live?
For there is nothing painful, nothing without ruin,
no shame, no dishonour,
that I have not seen in your sorrows and mine.
And what now of this new edict which they say
the General has just proclaimed to the entire city?
Have you heard anything? Or have you not yet realised
that the evils owed to our enemies are now marching upon our loved ones?
ISMENE
No word of those we love, Antigone, has reached me –
neither pleasing nor painful. Not since when,
on a single day, we two were robbed of our two brothers,
each dying at the hands of the other.
And since the Argive army has departed
this last night, I know nothing more,
neither of good fortune nor of sorrow.
AN. I knew it well! And so I brought you outside the courtyard gates
for this very reason, so that you might hear it alone.
IS. What is it? For it is clear that some news has displeased you.
AN. What? Our two brothers – their burial – has Creon
not gone and honoured the one and dishonoured the other?
Eteocles, as they say, with righteous observance
of justice and custom, he has buried below the earth
to be honoured among the dead below.
But the other, the corpse of Polyneices, who died miserably,
they say that he has proclaimed to the citizens that no-one
is to bury him in a grave or mourn for him,
but that he is to be left unwept, unburied, a delightful treasure
for the vultures to behold and feed on at their pleasure.
Such, they say, the good Creon has decreed
for you and for me – yes, even for *me*! He is coming here
to proclaim it plainly to those who do not know it,
and he does not regard the matter lightly, for whoever
dares any of these things is to be put to death
by public stoning before all the people.
So there you have it, and soon you will show whether you are indeed worthy
of your noble birth, or just the worthless daughter of a noble house.

{ΙΣ.} τί δ', ὦ ταλαῖφρον, εἰ τάδ' ἐν τούτοις, ἐγὼ
λύουσ' ἂν ἢ 'φάπτουσα προσθείμην πλέον;
{ΑΝ.} εἰ ξυμπονήσεις καὶ ξυνεργάσει σκόπει.
{ΙΣ.} ποῖόν τι κινδύνευμα; ποῦ γνώμης ποτ' εἶ;
{ΑΝ.} εἰ τὸν νεκρὸν ξὺν τῇδε κουφιεῖς χερί.
{ΙΣ.} ἦ γὰρ νοεῖς θάπτειν σφ', ἀπόρρητον πόλει;
{ΑΝ.} τὸν γοῦν ἐμὸν καὶ τὸν σόν, ἢν σὺ μὴ θέλῃς,
ἀδελφόν· οὐ γὰρ δὴ προδοῦσ' ἁλώσομαι.
{ΙΣ.} ὦ σχετλία, Κρέοντος ἀντειρηκότος;
{ΑΝ.} ἀλλ' οὐδὲν αὐτῷ τῶν ἐμῶν μ' εἴργειν μέτα.
{ΙΣ.} οἴμοι· φρόνησον, ὦ κασιγνήτη, πατὴρ
ὡς νῷν ἀπεχθὴς δυσκλεής τ' ἀπώλετο,
πρὸς αὐτοφώρων ἀμπλακημάτων διπλᾶς
ὄψεις ἀράξας αὐτὸς αὐτουργῷ χερί·
ἔπειτα μήτηρ καὶ γυνή, διπλοῦν ἔπος,
πλεκταῖσιν ἀρτάναισι λωβᾶται βίον·
τρίτον δ' ἀδελφὼ δύο μίαν καθ' ἡμέραν
αὐτοκτονοῦντε τὼ ταλαιπώρω μόρον
κοινὸν κατειργάσαντ' ἐπαλλήλοιν χεροῖν.
νῦν δ' αὖ μόνα δὴ νὼ λελειμμένα σκόπει
ὅσῳ κάκιστ' ὀλούμεθ', εἰ νόμου βίᾳ
ψῆφον τυράννων ἢ κράτη παρέξιμεν.
ἀλλ' ἐννοεῖν χρὴ τοῦτο μὲν γυναῖχ' ὅτι
ἔφυμεν, ὡς πρὸς ἄνδρας οὐ μαχουμένα·
ἔπειτα δ' οὕνεκ' ἀρχόμεσθ' ἐκ κρεισσόνων,
καὶ ταῦτ' ἀκούειν κἄτι τῶνδ' ἀλγίονα.
ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν αἰτοῦσα τοὺς ὑπὸ χθονὸς
ξύγγνοιαν ἴσχειν, ὡς βιάζομαι τάδε,
τοῖς ἐν τέλει βεβῶσι πείσομαι· τὸ γὰρ
περισσὰ πράσσειν οὐκ ἔχει νοῦν οὐδένα.
{ΑΝ.} οὔτ' ἂν κελεύσαιμ', οὔτ' ἄν, εἰ θέλοις ἔτι
πράσσειν, ἐμοῦ γ' ἂν ἡδέως δρῴης μέτα.
ἀλλ' ἴσθ' ὁποία σοι δοκεῖ· κεῖνον δ' ἐγὼ
θάψω· καλόν μοι τοῦτο ποιούσῃ θανεῖν.
φίλη μετ' αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα,
ὅσια πανουργήσασ'· ἐπεὶ πλείων χρόνος
ὃν δεῖ μ' ἀρέσκειν τοῖς κάτω τῶν ἐνθάδε.
ἐκεῖ γὰρ αεὶ κείσομαι· σοὶ δ' εἰ δοκεῖ,
τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἔντιμ' ἀτιμάσασ' ἔχε.
{ΙΣ.} ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἄτιμα ποιοῦμαι, τὸ δὲ
βίᾳ πολιτῶν δρᾶν ἔφυν ἀμήχανος.

IS. But, my poor sister, if this is how things stand, what could I possibly do
to improve the situation by trying to loosen or tighten the knot?
AN. Consider if you will share in the labour and the deed.
IS. In what sort of venture? What are you proposing?
AN. Whether, together with this hand, you will help lift the corpse.
IS. What? You actually mean to bury him, when it is forbidden to the city?
AN. Most certainly I do! – for my brother, and yours too, even if you
are not willing. I will never be convicted of betraying him.
IS. So bold! When Creon has forbidden it?
AN. But it is not for him to keep me from my own.
IS. Oh no! Just think, my sister,
how our father died, despised and infamous,
when through his own investigation he discovered his crimes
and blinded both his eyes with his very own hand.
And then his mother, and his wife – a twofold name, for she was both –
who destroyed her own life in the twisted coils of the noose.
And thirdly, our two brothers, who on a single day
killed one another, unfortunate souls, and so came to their shared
fate, each slain by the hand of the other.
Now consider how we in turn – we two who have been left all alone –
will perish, most wretchedly of all, if we transgress
against this ruling or the might of those in power.
We must, first, remember this – we are women.
And so we should not contend against men.
Next, that we are ruled by the stronger, and so
we must submit in this, yes and in things far more painful still.
So I shall beg the forgiveness of those below the Earth,
since in this matter I am forced,
and I shall obey those who have come to power.
To act in vain – there just is not any sense in that.
AN. Then I would not urge you. No, not even if you were to later
be inclined, I would still not welcome you in this task with me!
You be whatever seems best to you. But I will bury him.
And if I die trying, well then to me it will be a glorious death.
I shall lie there beside him, a loved one with him whom I love,
once I have dared my righteous crime. Since I must oblige
those below far longer than I must those here.
For I shall dwell there forever. But if this seems best to you,
then go ahead and dishonour those things held in honour by the gods.
IS. I do not mean them any dishonour… but
to act against my own nature and defy the state!

{ΑΝ.} σὺ μὲν τάδ' ἂν προὔχοι'· ἐγὼ δὲ δὴ τάφον
χώσουσ' ἀδελφῷ φιλτάτῳ πορεύσομαι.
{ΙΣ.} οἴμοι ταλαίνης, ὡς ὑπερδέδοικά σου.
{ΑΝ.} μὴ 'μοῦ προτάρβει· τὸν σὸν ἐξόρθου πότμον.
{ΙΣ.} ἀλλ' οὖν προμηνύσῃς γε τοῦτο μηδενὶ
τοὔργον, κρυφῇ δὲ κεῦθε, σὺν δ' αὔτως ἐγώ.
{ΑΝ.} οἴμοι, καταύδα· πολλὸν ἐχθίων ἔσῃ
σιγῶσ', ἐὰν μὴ πᾶσι κηρύξῃς τάδε.
{ΙΣ.} θερμὴν ἐπὶ ψυχροῖσι καρδίαν ἔχεις.
{ΑΝ.} ἀλλ' οἶδ' ἀρέσκουσ' οἷς μάλισθ' ἁδεῖν με χρή.
{ΙΣ.} εἰ καὶ δυνήσει γ'· ἀλλ' ἀμηχάνων ἐρᾷς.
{ΑΝ.} οὐκοῦν, ὅταν δὴ μὴ σθένω, πεπαύσομαι.
{ΙΣ.} ἀρχὴν δὲ θηρᾶν οὐ πρέπει τἀμήχανα.
{ΑΝ.} εἰ ταῦτα λέξεις, ἐχθαρεῖ μὲν ἐξ ἐμοῦ,
ἐχθρὰ δὲ τῷ θανόντι προσκείσει δίκῃ.
ἀλλ' ἔα με καὶ τὴν ἐξ ἐμοῦ δυσβουλίαν
παθεῖν τὸ δεινὸν τοῦτο· πείσομαι γὰρ οὐ
τοσοῦτον οὐδὲν ὥστε μὴ οὐ καλῶς θανεῖν.
{ΙΣ.} ἀλλ' εἰ δοκεῖ σοι, στεῖχε· τοῦτο δ' ἴσθ', ὅτι
ἄνους μὲν ἔρχει, τοῖς φίλοις δ' ὀρθῶς φίλη.

The Second Meeting, lines 526-578

{ΧΟΡΟΣ}
καὶ μὴν πρὸ πυλῶν ἥδ' Ἰσμήνη,
φιλάδελφα κάτω δάκρυ' εἰβομένη·
νεφέλη δ' ὀφρύων ὕπερ αἱματόεν
ῥέθος αἰσχύνει,
τέγγουσ' εὐῶπα παρειάν.
{ΚΡΕΩΝ}
σὺ δ', ἣ κατ' οἴκους ὡς ἔχιδν' ὑφειμένη
λήθουσά μ' ἐξέπινες, οὐδ' ἐμάνθανον
τρέφων δύ' ἄτα κἀπαναστάσεις θρόνων,
φέρ', εἰπὲ δή μοι, καὶ σὺ τοῦδε τοῦ τάφου
φήσεις μετασχεῖν, ἢ 'ξομεῖ τὸ μὴ εἰδέναι;
{ΙΣ.} δέδρακα τοὔργον, εἴπερ ἥδ' ὁμορροθεῖ,
καὶ ξυμμετίσχω καὶ φέρω τῆς αἰτίας.
{ΑΝ.} ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐάσει τοῦτό γ' ἡ δίκη σ', ἐπεὶ
οὔτ' ἠθέλησας οὔτ' ἐγὼ 'κοινωσάμην.

AN. Well let this be your excuse. But now I shall go
to raise the burial mound for my most beloved brother.
IS. Oh my poor sister, how I fear for you!
AN. Do not be afraid on *my* account. Rather put right your own fate.
IS. Well then at least give no indication of this deed beforehand.
Keep it a secret, and I will keep it hidden with you.
AN. No, shout it out! You shall be far more hateful to me
by keeping quiet, if you do not proclaim it to all.
IS. You have a hot heart for cold deeds!
AN. I know that I am obliging those whom I am most bound to oblige.
IS. If you succeed. But you are in love with the impossible.
AN. Well, when I have no more strength, then I shall have done.
IS. But to chase after the impossible! – it should not be done in the first place.
AN. If this is what you say, you will have hatred from me,
and you will justly bring down upon yourself the hatred of the dead.
But let me be – me and my foolishness! Leave me alone
to suffer this dread deed. For I shall suffer nothing
so terrible as not to die gloriously.
IS. Go, then, if this seems best to you. But know this –
that though you go foolishly, to your loved ones you are rightly loving.

CHORUS
Look, here comes Ismene from the gates,
shedding the tears of a loving sister.
A cloud upon her brow
mars her flushed face
and moistens her fair cheek.
CREON
And you! – who have been lurking in my house like a viper,
draining my blood behind my back, and all the while I did not know
that I was rearing two banes to rise up against my throne.
Come, tell me now, will you also admit that you had a share
in this burial, or will you deny any knowledge of it?
IS. I have done the deed – if she consents –
and I claim my share of the guilt.
AN. No, justice will not allow you this, since
you were not willing, and I gave you no part in it.

{ΙΣ.} ἀλλ' ἐν κακοῖς τοῖς σοῖσιν οὐκ αἰσχύνομαι
ξύμπλουν ἐμαυτὴν τοῦ πάθους ποιουμένη.
{ΑΝ.} ὦν τοὔργον, Ἅιδης χοὶ κάτω ξυνίστορες·
λόγοις δ' ἐγὼ φιλοῦσαν οὐ στέργω φίλην.
{ΙΣ.} μήτοι, κασιγνήτη, μ' ἀτιμάσῃς τὸ μὴ οὐ
θανεῖν τε σὺν σοὶ τὸν θανόντα θ' ἁγνίσαι.
{ΑΝ.} μή μοι θάνῃς σὺ κοινά, μηδ' ἃ μὴ 'θιγες
ποιοῦ σεαυτῆς· ἀρκέσω θνήσκουσ' ἐγώ.
{ΙΣ.} καὶ τίς βίος μοι σοῦ λελειμμένῃ φίλος;
{ΑΝ.} Κρέοντ' ἐρώτα· τοῦδε γὰρ σὺ κηδεμών.
{ΙΣ.} τί ταῦτ' ἀνιᾷς μ', οὐδὲν ὠφελουμένη;
{ΑΝ.} ἀλγοῦσα μὲν δῆτ', εἰ γελῶ γ᾽, ἐν σοὶ γελῶ.
{ΙΣ.} τί δῆτ' ἂν ἀλλὰ νῦν σ' ἔτ' ὠφελοῖμ' ἐγώ;
{ΑΝ.} σῶσον σεαυτήν· οὐ φθονῶ σ' ὑπεκφυγεῖν.
{ΙΣ.} οἴμοι τάλαινα, κἀμπλάκω τοῦ σοῦ μόρου;
{ΑΝ.} σὺ μὲν γὰρ εἵλου ζῆν, ἐγὼ δὲ κατθανεῖν.
{ΙΣ.} ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἀρρήτοις γε τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις.
{ΑΝ.} καλῶς σὺ μὲν τοῖς, τοῖς δ' ἐγὼ 'δόκουν φρονεῖν.
{ΙΣ.} καὶ μὴν ἴση νῷν ἐστιν ἡ 'ξαμαρτία.
{ΑΝ.} θάρσει· σὺ μὲν ζῇς, ἡ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχὴ πάλαι
τέθνηκεν, ὥστε τοῖς θανοῦσιν ὠφελεῖν.
{ΚΡ.} τὼ παῖδε φημὶ τώδε τὴν μὲν ἀρτίως
ἄνουν πεφάνθαι, τὴν δ' ἀφ' οὗ τὰ πρῶτ' ἔφυ.
{ΙΣ.} οὐ γάρ ποτ', ὦναξ, οὐδ' ὃς ἂν βλάστῃ μένει
νοῦς τοῖς κακῶς πράσσουσιν, ἀλλ' ἐξίσταται.
{ΚΡ.} σοὶ γοῦν, ὅθ' εἵλου σὺν κακοῖς πράσσειν κακά.
{ΙΣ.} τί γὰρ μόνῃ μοι τῆσδ' ἄτερ βιώσιμον;
{ΚΡ.} ἀλλ' ἥδε μέντοι μὴ λέγ'· οὐ γὰρ ἔστ' ἔτι.
{ΙΣ.} ἀλλὰ κτενεῖς νυμφεῖα τοῦ σαυτοῦ τέκνου;
{ΚΡ.} ἀρώσιμοι γὰρ χἀτέρων εἰσὶν γύαι.
{ΙΣ.} οὐχ ὥς γ' ἐκείνῳ τῇδέ τ' ἦν ἡρμοσμένα.
{ΚΡ.} κακὰς ἐγὼ γυναῖκας υἱέσι στυγῶ.
{ * } ὦ φίλταθ' Αἷμον, ὥς σ' ἀτιμάζει πατήρ.
{ΚΡ.} ἄγαν γε λυπεῖς καὶ σὺ καὶ τὸ σὸν λέχος.
{ * } ἦ γὰρ στερήσεις τῆσδε τὸν σαυτοῦ γόνον;
{ΚΡ.} Ἅιδης ὁ παύσων τούσδε τοὺς γάμους ἐμοί.
{ * } δεδογμέν', ὡς ἔοικε, τήνδε κατθανεῖν.
{ΚΡ.} καὶ σοί γε κἀμοί. μὴ τριβὰς ἔτ', ἀλλά νιν
κομίζετ' εἴσω, δμῶες…

IS. But in your troubles I do not shrink from
making myself a fellow-voyager in your suffering.
AN. Whose deed it was, Hades and those below are witnesses.
I have no love for a loved one who loves in words alone.
IS. No, my sister! Do not deem me unworthy
to die with you and consecrate the dead.
AN. Share not my death, no, nor claim for yourself those things in which
you did not have a hand! My death is pleasing enough.
IS. And what life is dear to me, left behind here without you?
AN. Ask Creon! Since he is the one you are so concerned about.
IS. Why treat me so cruelly, when it is of no use to you?
AN. Truly, if I do mock you, it is with pain that I do so.
IS. Please, what might I do, even now, to be of help to you?
AN. Save yourself. I do not resent you for your escape.
IS. Oh what misery! Am I really to be deprived of your fate?
AN. You chose life. I, to die.
IS. At least there was nothing I left unsaid.
AN. Your judgement seemed noble to some. Mine, to others.
IS. And yet both of us has been equally mistaken.
AN. Take courage – you live. My life has long since been
surrendered to death, so that I might serve the dead.
CR. These two girls! I say that one has just now shown herself foolish,
while the other has been so from the very moment she was born.
IS. How could it not be so, my lord, when even innate sense does not remain
with those who suffer misfortunes, but is thrust aside.
CR. Yours certainly was, when you chose wickedness with the wicked.
IS. Alone, without her, what sort of life could I endure?
CR. No, do not even speak of a life with *her*. For she is no more.
IS. Do you really intend to kill the bride of your own son?
CR. No matter. There are other fields for him to plough.
IS. No, none that can rival the bond between him and her.
CR. I would loathe a worthless wife for my son.
* Oh my beloved Haemon! How your father dishonours you!
CR. No, you are too vexing – you and your marriage both!
* Will you really rob your own son of this girl?
CR. It is Hades who will put an end to this wedding for me.
* Then it is decided, it seems, that she is to die.
CR. Yes, by you as well as by me. Do not delay anymore, but lead them
inside, servants…

{ΧΟΡΟΣ}
μὴ νῦν ἔτ' εἴπῃς μηδέν· ὡς δόμων ὁρῶ
τὴν σὴν ὅμαιμον, ἐκ πατρὸς ταὐτοῦ φύσιν,
Χρυσόθεμιν, ἔκ τε μητρός, ἐντάφια χεροῖν
φέρουσαν, οἷα τοῖς κάτω νομίζεται.
{ΧΡΥΣΟΘΕΜΙΣ}
τίν' αὖ σὺ τήνδε πρὸς θυρῶνος ἐξόδοις
ἐλθοῦσα φωνεῖς, ὦ κασιγνήτη, φάτιν,
κοὐδ' ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ διδαχθῆναι θέλεις
θυμῷ ματαίῳ μὴ χαρίζεσθαι κενά;
καίτοι τοσοῦτόν γ' οἶδα κἀμαυτὴν, ὅτι
ἀλγῶ 'πὶ τοῖς παροῦσιν· ὥστ' ἄν, εἰ σθένος
λάβοιμι, δηλώσαιμ' ἂν οἷ' αὐτοῖς φρονῶ.
νῦν δ' ἐν κακοῖς μοι πλεῖν ὑφειμένῃ δοκεῖ,
καὶ μὴ δοκεῖν μὲν δρᾶν τι, πημαίνειν δὲ μη.
τοιαῦτα δ' ἄλλα καὶ σὲ βούλομαι ποεῖν.
καίτοι τὸ μὲν δίκαιον οὐχ ᾗ 'γὼ λέγω,
ἀλλ' ᾗ σὺ κρίνεις· εἰ δ' ἐλευθέραν με δεῖ
ζῆν, τῶν κρατούντων ἐστὶ πάντ' ἀκουστέα.
{ΗΛΕΚΤΡΑ}
δεινόν γέ σ' οὖσαν πατρὸς οὗ σὺ παῖς ἔφυς
κείνου λελῆσθαι, τῆς δὲ τικτούσης μέλειν.
ἅπαντα γάρ σοι τἀμὰ νουθετήματα
κείνης διδακτὰ, κοὐδὲν ἐκ σαυτῆς λέγεις.
ἔπειθ' ἑλοῦ γε θάτερ', ἢ φρονεῖν κακῶς,
ἢ τῶν φίλων φρονοῦσα μὴ μνήμην ἔχειν·
ἥτις λέγεις μὲν ἀρτίως ὡς, εἰ λάβοις
σθένος, τὸ τούτων μῖσος ἐκδείξειας ἄν·
ἐμοῦ δὲ πατρὶ πάντα τιμωρουμένης
οὔτε ξυνέρδεις τήν τε δρῶσαν ἐκτρέπεις.
οὐ ταῦτα πρὸς κακοῖσι δειλίαν ἔχει;
ἐπεὶ δίδαξον, ἢ μάθ' ἐξ ἐμοῦ, τί μοι
κέρδος γένοιτ' ἂν τῶνδε ληξάσῃ γόων;
οὐ ζῶ; κακῶς μέν, οἶδ', ἐπαρκούντως δ' ἐμοί.
λυπῶ δὲ τούτους, ὥστε τῷ τεθνηκότι
τιμὰς προσάπτειν, εἴ τις ἔστ' ἐκεῖ χάρις.
σὺ δ' ἡμὶν ἡ μισοῦσα μισεῖς μὲν λόγῳ,
ἔργῳ δὲ τοῖς φονεῦσι τοῦ πατρὸς ξύνει.

CHORUS
Do not say anymore now. For I see your sister coming
from the house, born from the same father –
Chrysothemis – and from the same mother, carrying offerings in her
two hands such as those commonly given to them below.
CHRYSOTHEMIS
What is this talk that you have once again
come forth to publicly declaim, sister –
will you not learn through any length of time
not to indulge in vain your pointless anger?
And yet I know this much myself, that I too
am pained by our current circumstances. So that – if only I could
find the strength – I would show them what I think of them.
But now in these times of trouble, what seems best to me is to lower my sails,
and not to give the impression of doing something, and yet inflict no harm –
and I wish that you would also do the same!
However, justice is not with what I advise,
but with the course you have chosen. But if I am to live in freedom
our rulers must be obeyed in all things.
ELECTRA
How strange that you, having sprung from such a father as yours,
should forget him, caring only for your mother!
All of your reproaches to me have been
learnt from her, and nothing you say comes from yourself.
So then, make your choice: either to be imprudent
or, being prudent, to be neglectful of those who are dear to you.
You – who have just said that, if you could but find the
strength, you would show them the hatred you bear them –
but while I am doing everything in my power to avenge our father, you do
nothing to help, but instead try to prevent her who *is* doing something.
Does this type of behaviour not add cowardice to our sufferings?
For tell me then – or rather let me tell you – what profit
would there be for me in ceasing from these lamentations?
Do I not live? – wretchedly, I know, but well enough for me.
And I grieve *them*, and so bestow honour
upon the dead, if there is any pleasure to felt in that place.
But you, who tell us that you hate, hate only in word;
in *deed*, you consort with the murderers of your own father.

ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν οὐκ ἄν ποτ', οὐδ' εἴ μοι τὰ σὰ
μέλλοι τις οἴσειν δῶρ', ἐφ' οἷσι νῦν χλιδᾷς,
τούτοις ὑπεικάθοιμι· σοὶ δὲ πλουσία
τράπεζα κείσθω καὶ περιρρείτω βίος.
ἐμοὶ γὰρ ἔστω τοὐμὲ μὴ λυπεῖν μόνον
βόσκημα· τῆς σῆς δ' οὐκ ἐρῶ τιμῆς τυχεῖν.
οὐδ' ἂν σύ, σώφρων γ' οὖσα. νῦν δ' ἐξὸν πατρὸς
πάντων ἀρίστου παῖδα κεκλῆσθαι, καλοῦ
τῆς μητρός· οὕτω γὰρ φανεῖ πλείστοις κακή,
θανόντα πατέρα καὶ φίλους προδοῦσα σούς.
{ΧΟ.} μηδὲν πρὸς ὀργήν, πρὸς θεῶν· ὡς τοῖς λόγοις
ἔνεστιν ἀμφοῖν κέρδος, εἰ σὺ μὲν μάθοις
τοῖς τῆσδε χρῆσθαι, τοῖς δὲ σοῖς αὖτη πάλιν.
{ΧΡ.} ἐγὼ μέν, ὦ γυναῖκες, ἠθάς εἰμί πως
τῶν τῆσδε μύθων· οὐδ' ἂν ἐμνήσθην ποτέ,
εἰ μὴ κακὸν μέγιστον εἰς αὐτὴν ἰὸν
ἤκουσ', ὃ ταύτην τῶν μακρῶν σχήσει γόων.
{ΗΛ.} φέρ' εἰπὲ δὴ τὸ δεινόν· εἰ γὰρ τῶνδέ μοι
μεῖζόν τι λέξεις, οὐκ ἂν ἀντείποιμ' ἔτι.
{ΧΡ.} ἀλλ' ἐξερῶ σοι πᾶν ὅσον κάτοιδ' ἐγώ.
μέλλουσι γάρ σ', εἰ τῶνδε μὴ λήξεις γόων,
ἐνταῦθα πέμψειν ἔνθα μή ποθ' ἡλίου
φέγγος προσόψει, ζῶσα δ' ἐν κατηρεφεῖ
στέγῃ χθονὸς τῆσδ' ἐκτὸς ὑμνήσεις κακά.
πρὸς ταῦτα φράζου, καί με μή ποθ' ὕστερον
παθοῦσα μέμψῃ· νῦν γὰρ ἐν καλῷ φρονεῖν.
{ΗΛ.} ἦ ταῦτα δή με καὶ βεβούλευνται ποεῖν;
{ΧΡ.} μάλισθ'· ὅταν περ οἴκαδ' Αἴγισθος μόλῃ.
{ΗΛ.} ἀλλ' ἐξίκοιτο τοῦδέ γ' οὕνεκ' ἐν τάχει.
{ΧΡ.} τίν', ὦ τάλαινα, τόνδ' ἐπηράσω λόγον;
{ΗΛ.} ἐλθεῖν ἐκεῖνον, εἴ τι τῶνδε δρᾶν νοεῖ.
{ΧΡ.} ὅπως πάθῃς τί χρῆμα; ποῦ ποτ' εἶ φρενῶν;
{ΗΛ.} ὅπως ἀφ' ὑμῶν ὡς προσώτατ' ἐκφύγω.
{ΧΡ.} βίου δὲ τοῦ παρόντος οὐ μνείαν ἔχεις;
{ΗΛ.} καλὸς γὰρ οὑμὸς βίοτος ὥστε θαυμάσαι.
{ΧΡ.} ἀλλ' ἦν ἄν, εἰ σύ γ' εὖ φρονεῖν ἠπίστασο.
{ΗΛ.} μή μ' ἐκδίδασκε τοῖς φίλοις εἶναι κακήν.
{ΧΡ.} ἀλλ' οὐ διδάσκω· τοῖς κρατοῦσι δ' εἰκαθεῖν.
{ΗΛ.} σὺ ταῦτα θώπευ'· οὐκ ἐμοὺς τρόπους λέγεις.
{ΧΡ.} καλόν γε μέντοι μὴ 'ξ ἀβουλίας πεσεῖν.
{ΗΛ.} πεσούμεθ', εἰ χρή, πατρὶ τιμωρούμενοι.
{ΧΡ.} πατὴρ δὲ τούτων, οἶδα, συγγνώμην ἔχει.

For *my* part, never – no, not even if someone were
to offer me those same gifts in which you now take such pride –
never would I yield to them! Yours be the richly-
laden table and the life of luxurious ease.
Let it be sustenance enough for me not to lose
my integrity. I have no desire to partake in privileges –
and nor would you, were you truly prudent. But now, when you might be
called the daughter of the noblest of all fathers, go ahead and be called
the daughter of your mother! For thus will your treachery be most clearly
revealed, betraying both your dead father and your friends.
CH. No more in anger, by the gods! There is profit for you both
in these words, if you, Electra, would learn
to take her counsel, and she take yours in turn.
CHR. I at least, women, am well enough accustomed to
this kind of talk from her. Nor would I have even mentioned anything,
had I not heard that the greatest misfortune was coming her way,
which will keep this one from her interminable wailing.
EL. Come on then, out with this dreadful thing! For if you can tell me of
anything worse than what I now suffer, I will no longer argue.
CHR. I will, I will tell you everything I know.
For they intend, if you will not cease from this mourning,
they intend to send you where you will never see the
light of the sun, spending your life in some cavernous dungeon
outside this land, bewailing your misfortunes.
So think about this, and do not ever blame me later
when you are in trouble. Now is the time for wisdom.
EL. Have they really resolved to do this to me?
CHR. Certainly they have – as soon as Aegisthus returns home.
EL. Well if that is all, then would that he arrives in haste!
CHR. Have you gone mad? What is this prayer?
EL. That he may come, if this is what he intends.
CHR. So that you might suffer what fate? Whatever *are* you thinking?
EL. That I might flee as far away as possible from all of you.
CHR. But have you no thought for your present life?
EL. Oh yes, because my life is so wondrously good.
CHR. Well it could be, if you would but learn prudence.
EL. Do not teach me to betray my friends.
CHR. That is not what I teach, but to yield to those in power.
EL. You are the groveler. Those are not *my* ways of which you speak.
CHR. Nevertheless, it is good not to fall through foolishness.
EL. I will fall, if must be, in pursuit of vengeance for my father.
CHR. Our father, I know, forgives me for this.

{ΗΛ.} ταῦτ' ἐστὶ τἄπη πρὸς κακῶν ἐπαινέσαι.
{ΧΡ.} σὺ δ' οὐχὶ πείσῃ καὶ συναινέσεις ἐμοί;
{ΗΛ.} οὐ δῆτα· μή πω νοῦ τοσόνδ' εἴην κενή.
{ΧΡ.} χωρήσομαι τἄρ' οἷπερ ἐστάλην ὁδοῦ.
{ΗΛ.} ποῖ δ' ἐμπορεύῃ; τῷ φέρεις τάδ' ἔμπυρα;
{ΧΡ.} μήτηρ με πέμπει πατρὶ τυμβεῦσαι χοάς.
{ΗΛ.} πῶς εἶπας; ἦ τῷ δυσμενεστάτῳ βροτῶν;
{ΧΡ.} ὅν ἔκταν' αὐτή· τοῦτο γὰρ λέξαι θέλεις.
{ΗΛ.} ἐκ τοῦ φίλων πεισθεῖσα; τῷ τοῦτ' ἤρεσεν;
{ΧΡ.} ἐκ δείματός του νυκτέρου, δοκεῖν ἐμοί.
{ΗΛ.} ὦ θεοὶ πατρῷοι, συγγένεσθέ γ' ἀλλὰ νῦν.
{ΧΡ.} ἔχεις τι θάρσος τοῦδε τοῦ τάρβους πέρι;
{ΗΛ.} εἴ μοι λέγοις τὴν ὄψιν, εἴποιμ' ἂν τότε.
{ΧΡ.} ἀλλ' οὐ κάτοιδα πλὴν ἐπὶ σμικρὸν φράσαι.
{ΗΛ.} λέγ' ἀλλὰ τοῦτο· πολλά τοι σμικροὶ λόγοι
ἔσφηλαν ἤδη καὶ κατώρθωσαν βροτούς.
{ΧΡ.} λόγος τις αὐτήν ἐστιν εἰσιδεῖν πατρὸς…

… πλείω δὲ τούτων οὐ κάτοιδα, πλὴν ὅτι
πέμπει μ' κείνη τοῦδε τοῦ φόβου χάριν.
πρός νυν θεῶν σε λίσσομαι τῶν ἐγγενῶν
ἐμοὶ πιθέσθαι μηδ' ἀβουλίᾳ πεσεῖν·
εἰ γάρ μ' ἀπώσει, σὺν κακῷ μέτει πάλιν.
{ΗΛ.} ἀλλ', ὦ φίλη, τούτων μὲν ὧν ἔχεις χεροῖν
τύμβῳ προσάψῃς μηδέν…

… αἰτοῦ δὲ προσπίτνουσα γῆθεν εὐμενῆ
ἡμῖν ἀρωγὸν αὐτὸν εἰς ἐχθροὺς μολεῖν,
καὶ παῖδ' Ὀρέστην ἐξ ὑπερτέρας χερὸς
ἐχθροῖσιν αὐτοῦ ζῶντ' ἐπεμβῆναι ποδί,
ὅπως τὸ λοιπὸν αὐτὸν ἀφνεωτέραις
χερσὶ στέφωμεν ἢ τανῦν δωρούμεθα.
οἶμαι μὲν οὖν, οἶμαί τι κἀκείνῳ μέλον
πέμψαι τάδ' αὐτῇ δυσπρόσοπτ' ὀνείρατα.
ὅμως δ', ἀδελφή, σοί θ' ὑπούργησον τάδε
ἐμοί τ' ἀρωγὰ, τῷ τε φιλτάτῳ βροτῶν
πάντων ἐν Ἅιδου κειμένῳ κοινῷ πατρί.
{ΧΟ.} πρὸς εὐσέβειαν ἡ κόρη λέγει· σὺ δέ,
εἰ σωφρονήσεις, ὦ φίλη, δράσεις τάδε.
{ΧΡ.} δράσω· τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οὐκ ἔχει λόγον
δυοῖν ἐρίζειν, ἀλλ' ἐπισπεύδειν τὸ δρᾶν.

EL. It is for cowards to commend the use of such words.
CHR. You will not be persuaded and give way to my advice?
EL. I will not – may I never be so bereft of sense!
CHR. Well so be it. Then I shall go on the errand to which I was sent.
EL. And where are you going? To whom do you bear these offerings?
CHR. Our mother sends me to pour libations on our father's grave.
EL. What you do mean? For the man who is her most hateful enemy?
CHR. For the one whom she herself murdered – as you would put it.
EL. Persuaded by which friend? To please whom?
CHR. Because of some terrible vision of the night, I think.
EL. Oh gods of my father, be with me now at last!
CHR. You take some encouragement from this terror?
EL. If you would tell me the vision, then I could answer you.
CHR. I do not know everything. I could only tell a little.
EL. Then tell me as much as you know. Even a little information has before now often brought ruin, or success, to men.
CHR. It is said that she beheld our father…

… More than this I do not know, except that
she is sending me on account of this fear.
So by our ancestral gods, I beg you,
be persuaded by me, and do not fall through foolishness. For if you repel me now, you will come in search of me again when you are in trouble.
EL. No, dear sister, let none of these things that you have in your hands touch the tomb…

… Falling down, pray that he himself may come from below,
well-disposed to aid us against our enemies,
and that his son Orestes may live to triumph over
his enemies, trampling them under his foot,
so that in the future we might crown our father's tomb with
gifts more splendid than those we now offer.
For I think that this dream – so terrifying for her to behold – I do think that he himself played some part in sending it.
Be that as it may, sister, render this service; help yourself,
and me, and that dearest of all mortals
who now lies in Hades, our common father.
CH. The girl speaks piously. And you, friend,
if you too would show sense, you will do as she asks.
CHR. I will do it. For when a deed is just, there is no grounds on which to argue, but only to hasten in the doing of it.

πειρωμένη δὲ τῶνδε τῶν ἔργων ἐμοὶ
σιγὴ παρ' ὑμῶν πρὸς θεῶν ἔστω, φίλαι·
ὡς εἰ τάδ' ἡ τεκοῦσα πεύσεται, πικρὰν
δοκῶ με πεῖραν τήνδε τολμήσειν ἔτι.

The Second Meeting, lines 871-1057

{ΧΡ.} ὑφ' ἡδονῆς τοι, φιλτάτη, διώκομαι
τὸ κόσμιον μεθεῖσα σὺν τάχει μολεῖν.
φέρω γὰρ ἡδονάς τε κἀνάπαυλαν ὧν
πάροιθεν εἶχες καὶ κατέστενες κακῶν.
{ΗΛ.} πόθεν δ' ἂν εὕροις τῶν ἐμῶν σὺ πημάτων
ἄρηξιν, οἷς ἴασιν οὐκ ἔνεστ' ἰδεῖν;
{ΧΡ.} πάρεστ' Ὀρέστης ἡμίν, ἴσθι τοῦτ' ἐμοῦ
κλύουσ', ἐναργῶς, ὥσπερ εἰσορᾷς ἐμέ.
{ΗΛ.} ἀλλ' ἦ μέμηνας, ὦ τάλαινα, κἀπὶ τοῖς
σαυτῆς κακοῖσι κἀπὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς γελᾷς;
{ΧΡ.} μὰ τὴν πατρῴαν ἑστίαν, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὕβρει
λέγω τάδ', ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνον ὡς παρόντα νῷν.
{ΗΛ.} οἴμοι τάλαινα· καὶ τίνος βροτῶν λόγον
τόνδ' εἰσακούσασ' ὧδε πιστεύεις ἄγαν;
{ΧΡ.} ἐγὼ μὲν ἐξ ἐμοῦ τε κοὐκ ἄλλης σαφῆ
σημεῖ' ἰδοῦσα τῷδε πιστεύω λόγῳ.
{ΗΛ.} τίν', ὦ τάλαιν', ἰδοῦσα πίστιν; εἰς τί μοι
βλέψασα θάλπει τῷδ' ἀνηκέστῳ πυρί;
{ΧΡ.} πρός νυν θεῶν ἄκουσον, ὡς μαθοῦσά μου
τὸ λοιπὸν ἢ φρονοῦσαν ἢ μώραν λέγῃς.
{ΗΛ.} σὺ δ' οὖν λέγ', εἴ σοι τῷ λόγῳ τις ἡδονή.
{ΧΡ.} καὶ δὴ λέγω σοι πᾶν ὅσον κατειδόμην…

… ἀλλ' ἔστ' Ὀρέστου ταῦτα τἀπιτύμβια.
ἀλλ', ὦ φίλη, θάρσυνε. τοῖς αὐτοῖσί τοι
οὐχ αὐτὸς αἰεὶ δαιμόνων παραστατεῖ.
νῷν ἦν τὰ πρόσθε στυγνός· ἡ δὲ νῦν ἴσως
πολλῶν ὑπάρξει κῦρος ἡμέρα καλῶν.
{ΗΛ.} φεῦ τῆς ἀνοίας, ὥς σ' ἐποικτίρω πάλαι.
{ΧΡ.} τί δ' ἔστιν; οὐ πρὸς ἡδονὴν λέγω τάδε;
{ΗΛ.} οὐκ οἶσθ' ὅποι γῆς οὐδ' ὅποι γνώμης φέρει.
{ΧΡ.} πῶς δ' οὐκ ἐγὼ κάτοιδ' ἃ γ' εἶδον ἐμφανῶς;
{ΗΛ.} τέθνηκεν, ὦ τάλαινα· τἀκείνου δέ σοι
σωτήρι' ἔρρει· μηδὲν ἐς κεῖνόν γ' ὅρα.

But as I attempt this task,
by the gods, my friends, keep it quiet,
because if my mother finds out, I think
I shall yet pay dearly for this enterprise.

CHR. It is joy that has made me hurry here, dearest sister,
forsaking any concern for decorum to come with all speed.
For I bring joyful news to relieve you
of the miseries you have suffered and wept over for so long.
EL. And where could *you* have possibly found help for my
suffering, for which there is no remedy to be found?
CHR. Orestes is here with us – hear what I am telling you –
in bodily presence, as surely as you see me before you!
EL. Have you gone mad, you fool? Are you
laughing at my sufferings, and your own too?
CHR. By our father's hearth, I say this not in mockery.
I tell you – he is here with us both!
EL. Oh, poor fool. And from whom did you hear
this rumour, which you believe so very easily?
CHR. From my own knowledge, not someone else's.
It is from proof that I have seen with own eyes that I believe this account.
EL. What did you see, poor fool, to make you believe? To what, pray tell,
have you turned your eyes to set you ablaze with this crazed hope?
CHR. By the gods, hear me out! Learn the whole story
before you judge whether I am in my right mind, or a fool.
EL. Oh very well. Get on with it then, if it will give you some pleasure.
CHR. Well then, I will tell you everything I saw…

… No, these offerings are from Orestes.
Come, dear sister, take courage! Know that the same
fortunes do not always attend the same people.
Both of ours, until this point, have been wretched. But perhaps
this day now marks the beginning of much prosperity.
EL. Alas you fool, how I have been pitying you.
CHR. What is it? Does what I say not occasion any joy?
EL. You know not into which world, or what delusions, you lead yourself.
CHR. How can I not know that which I saw so clearly?
EL. He is dead, you fool. That means of deliverance
is lost to you. Look to him no more.

{ΧΡ.} οἴμοι τάλαινα· τοῦ τάδ' ἤκουσας βροτῶν;
{ΗΛ.} τοῦ πλησίον παρόντος ἡνίκ' ὤλλυτο.
{ΧΡ.} καὶ ποῦ 'στιν οὗτος; θαῦμά τοί μ' ὑπέρχεται.
{ΗΛ.} κατ' οἶκον, ἡδὺς οὐδὲ μητρὶ δυσχερής.
{ΧΡ.} οἴμοι τάλαινα· τοῦ γὰρ ἀνθρώπων ποτ' ἦν
τὰ πολλὰ πατρὸς πρὸς τάφον κτερίσματα;
{ΗΛ.} οἶμαι μάλιστ' ἔγωγε τοῦ τεθνηκότος
μνημεῖ' Ὀρέστου ταῦτα προσθεῖναί τινά.
{ΧΡ.} ὦ δυστυχής· ἐγὼ δὲ σὺν χαρᾷ λόγους
τοιούσδ' ἔχουσ' ἔσπευδον, οὐκ εἰδυῖ' ἄρα
ἵν' ἦμεν ἄτης· ἀλλὰ νῦν, ὅθ' ἱκόμην,
τά τ' ὄντα πρόσθεν ἄλλα θ' εὑρίσκω κακά.
{ΗΛ.} οὕτως ἔχει σοι ταῦτ'· ἐὰν δέ μοι πίθῃ,
τῆς νῦν παρούσης πημονῆς λύσεις βάρος.
{ΧΡ.} ἦ τοὺς θανόντας ἐξαναστήσω ποτέ;
{ΗΛ.} οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅ γ' εἶπον· οὐ γὰρ ὧδ' ἄφρων ἔφυν.
{ΧΡ.} τί γὰρ κελεύεις ὧν ἐγὼ φερέγγυος;
{ΗΛ.} τλῆναί σε δρῶσαν ἂν ἐγὼ παραινέσω.
{ΧΡ.} ἀλλ' εἴ τις ὠφέλειά γ', οὐκ ἀπώσομαι.
{ΗΛ.} ὅρα, πόνου τοι χωρὶς οὐδὲν εὐτυχεῖ.
{ΧΡ.} ὁρῶ. ξυνοίσω πᾶν ὅσονπερ ἂν σθένω.
{ΗΛ.} ἄκουε δή νυν ἧ βεβούλευμαι ποεῖν.
παρουσίαν μὲν οἶσθα καὶ σύ που φίλων
ὡς οὔτις ἡμῖν ἐστιν, ἀλλ' Ἅιδης λαβὼν
ἀπεστέρηκε καὶ μόνα λελείμμεθον.
ἐγὼ δ' ἕως μὲν τὸν κασίγνητον βίῳ
θάλλοντ' ἔτ' εἰσήκουον, εἶχον ἐλπίδας
φόνου ποτ' αὐτὸν πράκτορ' ἵξεσθαι πατρός·
νῦν δ' ἡνίκ' οὐκέτ' ἔστιν, εἰς σὲ δὴ βλέπω,
ὅπως τὸν αὐτόχειρα πατρῴου φόνου
ξὺν τῇδ' ἀδελφῇ μὴ κατοκνήσεις κτανεῖν,
Αἴγισθον· οὐδὲν γάρ σε δεῖ κρύπτειν μ' ἔτι.
ποῖ γὰρ μενεῖς ῥᾴθυμος, ἐς τίν' ἐλπίδων
βλέψασ' ἔτ' ὀρθήν; ἦ πάρεστι μὲν στένειν
πλούτου πατρῴου κτῆσιν ἐστερημένῃ,
πάρεστι δ' ἀλγεῖν ἐς τοσόνδε τοῦ χρόνου
ἄλεκτρα γηράσκουσαν ἀνυμέναιά τε.
καὶ τῶνδε μέντοι μηκέτ' ἐλπίσῃς ὅπως
τεύξει ποτ'· οὐ γὰρ ὧδ' ἄβουλός ἐστ' ἀνὴρ
Αἴγισθος ὥστε σόν ποτ' ἢ κἀμὸν γένος
βλαστεῖν ἐᾶσαι, πημονὴν αὑτῷ σαφῆ.

CHR. Oh what misery! From whom did you hear this?
EL. From one who was there. He was with him when he died.
CHR. And where is this man? I am overcome with astonishment.
EL. Inside the house. And welcome, rather than displeasing, to our mother.
CHR. Oh what misery! Whose could they have been, then,
those many offerings upon our father's tomb?
EL. Most likely, I think, someone who has placed
them there as a memorial of Orestes' death.
CHR. How ill-fated I am. I, who hurried here – so overjoyed –
with my news, not knowing then
to what disaster we had come. And now that I have arrived,
I find only that new miseries have been added to those we had before.
EL. So there you have it. And yet… if you will be persuaded by me,
you will ease the burden of our present suffering.
CHR. But how could I ever raise the dead to life again?
EL. That is not what I meant! I am not such a fool.
CHR. Well then, what would you have me do – of which I am capable?
EL. That you should have the courage to do what I am about to propose.
CHR. If it will secure some advantage, I will not refuse.
EL. Remember, nothing prospers without hard work.
CHR. I know. I will share the burden, so far as my strength allows.
EL. Listen, then, to what I have resolved to do.
You know, as well as I do, that as regards the support of friends –
we have none. Hades has deprived us of them,
and we two have been left all alone.
While I heard reports that our brother was still
alive, and thriving well, I held fast to the hope that
he would someday come to exact vengeance for our father's murder.
But now that he is no more, I look to you
that, together with your sister, you will not shrink
from killing the author of our father's murder,
Aegisthus. For I must no longer conceal anything from you.
How long will you remain indifferent? To what hope,
which still remains standing, can you look? You, for whom it is no less
than right to lament that you have been robbed of your rich inheritance,
and to grieve that you have been left unmarried for so long,
growing old without the nuptial song.
No, and do not any longer indulge the hope that you will
ever acquire such things. Aegisthus is not so foolish
a man as to ever allow children to be born to
you or me – children who would assuredly pose a threat to him.

ἀλλ' ἢν ἐπίσπῃ τοῖς ἐμοῖς βουλεύμασιν,
πρῶτον μὲν εὐσέβειαν ἐκ πατρὸς κάτω
θανόντος οἴσει τοῦ κασιγνήτου θ' ἅμα·
ἔπειτα δ', ὥσπερ ἐξέφυς, ἐλευθέρα
καλεῖ τὸ λοιπὸν καὶ γάμων ἐπαξίων
τεύξει· φιλεῖ γὰρ πρὸς τὰ χρηστὰ πᾶς ὁρᾶν.
λόγῳ γε μὴν εὔκλειαν οὐχ ὁρᾷς ὅσην
σαυτῇ τε κἀμοὶ προσβαλεῖς πεισθεῖσ' ἐμοί;
τίς γάρ ποτ' ἀστῶν ἢ ξένων ἡμᾶς ἰδὼν
τοιοῖσδ' ἐπαίνοις οὐχὶ δεξιώσεται,
ἴδεσθε τώδε τὼ κασιγνήτω, φίλοι,
ὦ τὸν πατρῷον οἶκον ἐξεσωσάτην,
ὦ τοῖσιν ἐχθροῖς εὖ βεβηκόσιν ποτὲ
ψυχῆς ἀφειδήσαντε, προὐστήτην φόνου·
τούτω φιλεῖν χρή, τώδε χρὴ πάντας σέβειν·
τώδ' ἔν θ' ἑορταῖς ἔν τε πανδήμῳ πόλει
τιμᾶν ἅπαντας οὕνεκ' ἀνδρείας χρεών.
τοιαῦτά τοι νὼ πᾶς τις ἐξερεῖ βροτῶν,
ζώσαιν θανούσαιν θ' ὥστε μὴ 'κλιπεῖν κλέος.
ἀλλ', ὦ φίλη, πείσθητι, συμπόνει πατρί,
σύγκαμν' ἀδελφῷ, παῦσον ἐκ κακῶν ἐμέ,
παῦσον δὲ σαυτήν, τοῦτο γιγνώσκουσ', ὅτι
ζῆν αἰσχρὸν αἰσχρῶς τοῖς καλῶς πεφυκόσιν.
{ΧΟ.} ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις ἐστὶν ἡ προμηθία
καὶ τῷ λέγοντι καὶ κλύοντι σύμμαχος.
{ΧΡ.} καὶ πρίν γε φωνεῖν, ὦ γυναῖκες, εἰ φρενῶν
ἐτύγχαν' αὕτη μὴ κακῶν, ἐσῴζετ' ἂν
τὴν εὐλάβειαν, ὥσπερ οὐχὶ σῴζεται.
ποῖ γάρ ποτ' ἐμβλέψασα τοιοῦτον θράσος
αὐτή θ' ὁπλίζει κἄμ' ὑπηρετεῖν καλεῖς;
οὐκ εἰσορᾷς; γυνὴ μὲν οὐδ' ἀνὴρ ἔφυς,
σθένεις δ' ἔλασσον τῶν ἐναντίων χερί.
δαίμων δὲ τοῖς μὲν εὐτυχεῖ καθ' ἡμέραν,
ἡμῖν δ' ἀπορρεῖ κἀπὶ μηδὲν ἔρχεται.
τίς οὖν τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα βουλεύων ἑλεῖν
ἄλυπος ἄτης ἐξαπαλλαχθήσεται;
ὅρα κακῶς πράσσοντε μὴ μείζω κακὰ
κτησώμεθ', εἴ τις τούσδ' ἀκούσεται λόγους.
λύει γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν οὐδ' ἐπωφελεῖ
βάξιν καλὴν λαβόντε δυσκλεῶς θανεῖν·
οὐ γὰρ θανεῖν ἔχθιστον, ἀλλ' ὅταν θανεῖν
χρῄζων τις εἶτα μηδὲ τοῦτ' ἔχῃ λαβεῖν.

But if you were to agree to my plans,
first you would win praise for your loyalty from our dead
father below, as well as from our brother.
Next you would be called free from now on,
just as you were born free, and secure a worthy
marriage. For everyone tends to admire what is honourable.
Do you not see how glorious a reputation you will certainly procure
for yourself, and for me, were you to be persuaded by me?
What citizen or foreigner, when he sees us,
will not welcome us with such praise as this:
'Behold these two sisters, my friends,
these two who saved their father's house,
these two who – when their enemies were at the height of their power –
took no thought for their own lives, but stood forward to avenge a murder!
These two should be loved, they should be revered by all.
At festivals and gatherings of the city,
these two girls should be honoured by all for their prowess.'
Thus will everyone speak of us two, so that –
alive or dead – our glory shall never fail.
Come, dear sister, be persuaded! Work together with your father,
work with your brother – bring an end to my sufferings,
and to your own. And remember this: that a shameful life
brings shame upon those who were born noble.
CH. In times such as these, prudence
is a helpful ally to both speaker and listener.
CHR. Yes, and before she even said a word, women,
had she any prudence, she would have given some thought
to caution – as she is clearly not doing now!
Where can you possibly have turned your eyes, that you arm
yourself with such rashness and call upon me for aid?
Do you not see? You are a *woman*, not a man,
and your strength cannot rival that of your enemies.
Their fortune improves by the day;
ours only worsens, deteriorating into nothing.
How could anyone, having resolved to overpower such a man,
ever escape destruction unharmed?
Take care that we do not procure for ourselves greater misfortune
than that which we already suffer, should someone hear these words!
It brings us no relief nor benefit if, having secured for us both
a glorious reputation, we then go and die a shameful death!
And indeed, to die is not the worst thing – but rather when one should
yearn for death and yet not be able to achieve even this.

ἀλλ' ἀντιάζω, πρὶν πανωλέθρους τὸ πᾶν
ἡμᾶς τ' ὀλέσθαι κἀξερημῶσαι γένος,
κατάσχες ὀργήν. καὶ τὰ μὲν λελεγμένα
ἄρρητ' ἐγώ σοι κἀτελῆ φυλάξομαι,
αὐτὴ δὲ νοῦν σχὲς ἀλλὰ τῷ χρόνῳ ποτέ,
σθένουσα μηδὲν τοῖς κρατοῦσιν εἰκαθεῖν.
{ΧΟ.} πείθου· προνοίας οὐδὲν ἀνθρώποις ἔφυ
κέρδος λαβεῖν ἄμεινον οὐδὲ νοῦ σοφοῦ.
{ΗΛ.} ἀπροσδόκητον οὐδὲν εἴρηκας· καλῶς δ'
ἤδη σ' ἀπορρίψουσαν ἁπηγγελλόμην.
ἀλλ' αὐτόχειρί μοι μόνῃ τε δραστέον
τοὔργον τόδ'· οὐ γὰρ δὴ κενόν γ' ἀφήσομεν.
{ΧΡ.} φεῦ·
εἴθ' ὤφελες τοιάδε τὴν γνώμην πατρὸς
θνήσκοντος εἶναι· πᾶν γὰρ ἂν κατειργάσω.
{ΗΛ.} ἀλλ' ἦ φύσιν γε, τὸν δὲ νοῦν ἥσσων τότε.
{ΧΡ.} ἄσκει τοιαύτη νοῦν δι' αἰῶνος μένειν.
{ΗΛ.} ὡς οὐχὶ συνδράσουσα νουθετεῖς τάδε.
{ΧΡ.} εἰκὸς γὰρ ἐγχειροῦντα καὶ πράσσειν κακῶς.
{ΗΛ.} ζηλῶ σε τοῦ νοῦ, τῆς δὲ δειλίας στυγῶ.
{ΧΡ.} ἀνέξομαι κλύουσα χὤταν εὖ λέγῃς.
{ΗΛ.} ἀλλ' οὔ ποτ' ἐξ ἐμοῦ γε μὴ πάθῃς τόδε.
{ΧΡ.} μακρὸς τὸ κρῖναι ταῦτα χὠ λοιπὸς χρόνος.
{ΗΛ.} ἄπελθε· σοὶ γὰρ ὠφέλησις οὐκ ἔνι.
{ΧΡ.} ἔνεστιν· ἀλλὰ σοὶ μάθησις οὐ πάρα.
{ΗΛ.} ἐλθοῦσα μητρὶ ταῦτα πάντ' ἔξειπε σῇ.
{ΧΡ.} οὐδ' αὖ τοσοῦτον ἔχθος ἐχθαίρω σ' ἐγώ.
{ΗΛ.} ἀλλ' οὖν ἐπίστω γ' οἷ μ' ἀτιμίας ἄγεις.
{ΧΡ.} ἀτιμίας μὲν οὔ, προμηθίας δὲ σοῦ.
{ΗΛ.} τῷ σῷ δικαίῳ δῆτ' ἐπισπέσθαι με δεῖ;
{ΧΡ.} ὅταν γὰρ εὖ φρονῇς, τόθ' ἡγήσει σὺ νῷν.
{ΗΛ.} ἦ δεινὸν εὖ λέγουσαν ἐξαμαρτάνειν.
{ΧΡ.} εἴρηκας ὀρθῶς ᾧ σὺ πρόσκεισαι κακῷ.
{ΗΛ.} τί δ'; οὐ δοκῶ σοι ταῦτα σὺν δίκῃ λέγειν;
{ΧΡ.} ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἔνθα χἡ δίκη βλάβην φέρει.
{ΗΛ.} τούτοις ἐγὼ ζῆν τοῖς νόμοις οὐ βούλομαι.
{ΧΡ.} ἀλλ' εἰ ποήσεις ταῦτ', ἐπαινέσεις ἐμέ.
{ΗΛ.} καὶ μὴν ποήσω γ', οὐδὲν ἐκπλαγεῖσά σε.
{ΧΡ.} καὶ τοῦτ' ἀληθές, οὐδὲ βουλεύσει πάλιν;
{ΗΛ.} βουλῆς γὰρ οὐδέν ἐστιν ἔχθιον κακῆς.
{ΧΡ.} φρονεῖν ἔοικας οὐδὲν ὧν ἐγὼ λέγω.
{ΗΛ.} πάλαι δέδοκται ταῦτα κοὐ νεωστί μοι.

No, I beg you – before we are both utterly destroyed
and our family is left destitute of heirs –
restrain your passion. And I shall keep guard over what has been said
here for you, ensuring that it remains both unspoken and unaccomplished.
While you yourself must at long last have the sense to yield,
when you have no strength, to those in power.
CH. Listen to her! There is no better gain for mortals
to win than forethought and good sense.
EL. You have said nothing unexpected. I knew well
that you would spurn what I proposed.
Very well, then this task will have to be accomplished
by my hand alone. For I will not suffer it to remain unfulfilled.
CHR. Oh!
Then would that you had been of such a mind when our father
died, for there is nothing you could not have achieved!
EL. My nature was the same then. It was my mind that was less resolute.
CHR. Then practise to keep such a mind throughout your life.
EL. It is clear from these rebukes that you will not share in the deed.
CHR. Of course not – anyone who makes the attempt is likely to fare badly.
EL. While I admire your sense, I loathe your cowardice.
CHR. I shall bear it equally well hearing you praise me.
EL. Do not fear, you will never suffer this from me.
CHR. It is for time to decide these things in the future.
EL. Just go away! There is no help in you.
CHR. There is. But in you there is no capacity to learn.
EL. Go and tell all of this to your mother.
CHR. I do not hate you which such a hatred as that.
EL. Well know then at least to what dishonour you bring me.
CHR. No dishonour. Only consideration for your well-being.
EL. So I, then, must be governed by your view of what is right?
CHR. Yes. When you are sensible, then you may guide us both.
EL. How terrible it is, that one who speaks so well should be so wrong.
CHR. You have rightly described the failing to which you yourself cling.
EL. What then? Do you not believe that I speak with justice?
CHR. But even justice can sometimes bring harm.
EL. I have no wish to live by such principles.
CHR. And yet, if you do this, you will end up praising me.
EL. All the same, I will do it. You have not discouraged me at all.
CHR. And you are certain that you will not reconsider?
EL. I will not. There is nothing more hateful than bad advice.
CHR. You seem to think nothing of what I say.
EL. These things have long been decided upon by me, not just now.

{ΧΡ.} ἄπειμι τοίνυν· οὔτε γὰρ σὺ τἄμ' ἔπη
τολμᾷς ἐπαινεῖν οὔτ' ἐγὼ τοὺς σοὺς τρόπους.
{ΗΛ.} ἀλλ' εἴσιθ'. οὔ σοι μὴ μεθέψομαί ποτε,
οὐδ' ἢν σφόδρ' ἱμείρουσα τυγχάνῃς· ἐπεὶ
πολλῆς ἀνοίας καὶ τὸ θηρᾶσθαι κενά.
{ΧΡ.} ἀλλ' εἰ σεαυτῇ τυγχάνεις δοκοῦσά τι
φρονεῖν, φρόνει τοιαῦθ'· ὅταν γὰρ ἐν κακοῖς
ἤδη βεβήκῃς, τἄμ' ἐπαινέσεις ἔπη.

CHR. Then I will go. For you cannot endure to approve
my words, nor I your ways.
EL. So go! I shall never follow you, never –
no matter how much you should want me to! It was nothing
but the greatest foolishness to even pursue an idle quest.
CHR. Well, if you happen to think that you are in the right,
then go ahead and think that. Soon enough, when you have
come to trouble, you will praise my words.

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