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### The Treatment of Women in Greek Tragedies (*Antigone*)

Sophocles was a very well-known Greek tragedy writer in his time and ours. He had written works, such as *Antigone*, *Electra*, and most famously, *Oedipus Rex*. Within these plays, we see the portrayal of a variety of characters. Especially, the way he portrays his female characters, as two opposite sides of the spectrum. There seem to be a lot of similarities between *Antigone* and *Electra* because these characters are strong, female leads protesting against a higher power. In *Oedipus Rex*, the opposite is seen, the women become background characters to support the main male lead, and they do not hold such a voice that is seen in *Antigone*'s play and *Electra*'s play. Despite living in a time when women were looked down upon, Sophocles portrays two incredible female characters against what was considered the norm about female behavior and personality.

Willner, Dorothy. "The Oedipus Complex, Antigone, and Electra: the Woman as Hero and Victim." *American Anthropologist* 84.1 (1982): 58-78.

Within this article, Wilner argues that women portrayed in these plays are both heroes and victims. This is seen in this quote, "Antigone meets death as a hero, not a victim. The hero of tragedy... However, it is not the change in fortunes that distinguishes a hero. A victim also

suffers, but his suffering is not the outcome of his acts or choice. A victim suffers rather than acts.”(Willner, 62). This has relevance to my essay because it discusses how Antigone meets death, and it is shown in a heroic light. In comparison to other plays, we see that these women do not die by their hands, but rather the consequences of someone else’s actions. This was a choice made by Antigone. This author also argues that in *Oedipus Rex* the women are meek compared to the other plays.

Kirkpatrick, Jennet. "The Prudent Dissident: Unheroic Resistance in Sophocles' Antigone." *The Review of Politics* 73.3 (2011): 401-424.

In this article, Kirkpatrick talks about Antigone’s resistance against Creon. The author talks about the role of gender in this play and uses it as evidence for feminist activism. The author also talks about her sister, and how, in a way, she’s also evidence of a feminist role. “It is important to note that Ismene not only suggests violating Creon’s decree in secret, but she also unhesitatingly offers to assist Antigone in this duplicity. Ismene is willing to offer Antigone what she would not give her before her assistance.”(Kirkpatrick,407). Her sister is quieter but still is going against the higher power but in a more subtle way. This source is relevant because it discusses how each character can be viewed within Antigone.

Fox, Mary-Jane. "The idea of women in peacekeeping: Lysistrata and Antigone." *Women and international peacekeeping*. Routledge, 2019. 9-22.

Fox argues that women in Greek tragedies are a good example of being peacekeepers and that they could lead future generations in promoting peace. Two significant plays are brought up, *Lysistrata*, and *Antigone*. *Lysistrata* is a comedy written by Aristophanes, showing this character

stopping a war by holding a sex strike. This is relevant to my essay because, while this play seems not relevant, it shows in more than a couple of ways that Greek tragedy writers depict women as powerful. It proves that Sophocles was not the only one with this type of thought.

Ierulli, Molly. "A community of women?[The Protagonist and the Chorus in Sophocles' *Electra*]." *Mètis. Anthropologie des mondes grecs anciens* 8.1 (1993): 217-229.

Here is discussed the chorus's importance in the communication with Electra. The chorus in Greek tragedies is usually a gathering of the people of the town. In the play of *Electra*, it was a chorus of women. We see this in the quote, "Electra's success in persuading the chorus subverts their function. A chorus of women may not have political import, but a chorus which radically questions its choral function shivers the foundations of drama in the polis." (Ierulli, 229). This has relevance because we see how powerful she is. She's able to change the minds of this large gathering. Sophocles intentionally wrote this to show that Electra may not have political power, but she had other influences that helped her throughout her dilemma.

By using these texts, the reader can understand that despite the time these plays came from, they show a lot of progress in ideas. This helps the readers to think and discuss the roles that women had and continue to have. Due to some of the similarities between Sophocles's plays, we see a repeating theme of strong, female leads. Each text offers a different way that can interpret feminist ideas. In the case of Antigone's sister, while she may not be seen as the most progressive character, one text did argue how in a subtle way she is. Whether in death or life, these characters are considered outside the norm of normal female behavior at this time.