

Before the End: Intertextuality in Sophocles' *Antigone* and Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*

In this paper, I explore the complex and rich network of intertextuality between Sophocles' *Antigone* and Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, a network often gestured towards yet rarely enumerated. The mythological and narrative connection of the two plays has drawn the eye of many scholars, prompting numerous examinations of the end of the *Seven*. After the discovery that the *Seven* was the final play in its trilogy, scholars questioned the legitimacy of its ending, and Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff argued in 1914 that many lines were the interpolation of another Athenian author, namely lines 861–874 and the end at 1005–1078. This interpolation was supposed to help transition Aeschylus' narrative into the beginning of Sophocles' *Antigone*. In 1959, Hugh Lloyd-Jones launched a defense of the final lines of the *Seven*, prompting renewed, prolific debate on the two plays (Lloyd-Jones, 1959; Dawe 1967). In light of this, it is all the more striking that there are no treatments on their specific intertexts beyond the suggestions in the backs of commentaries. In order to move beyond the scholastic roadblock of the supposed interpolation of the *Seven*, I compile commentary work and adduce original intertextual evidence between the *Antigone* and *Seven* to foster progress in understanding the poetics of Sophoclean drama.

Due to Sophocles' extensive employment of Aeschylean material, the present study focuses on specific phrases and lexemes that demonstrate the importance and pervasion of this intertextuality; three illustrative examples will follow, one for intertextuality on the level of phrases and the others on the level of lexemes. For phrases, Kreon repeats nearly the entire line of *Seven* 582 from the reported speech of Amphiaraus. Aeschylus' Amphiaraus describes the heinous acts of Polynices, asking if it is truly honorable to ravage "one's fatherly city and native

gods (πόλιν πατρώαν καὶ θεοὺς τοὺς ἐγγενεῖς)” (*Seven* 582). Sophocles’ Kreon describes Polynices as one who has come to raze “his own fatherly land and native gods (ὄς γῆν πατρώαν καὶ θεοὺς τοὺς ἐγγενεῖς)” (*Ant.* 199). Commentators like Mark Griffith have noted this connection, suggesting that Sophocles may echo Aeschylus to strengthen the charges against Polynices (1999, 160–161), but, due to necessary constraints of the medium, these commentary notes are doubly insufficient. First, the notes of commentary lack sufficient room to explore the depth of the intertextual connection. Second, the required brevity means that other intertextual connections throughout the text are treated in separate notes, with no effort to combine them for a synthetic understanding of Sophocles’ poetic aims deploying such intertexts.

For intertextuality in lexemes, Sophocles utilizes unique terminology to signal his interaction with Aeschylus. When Eteocles scolds the chorus of Theban women, warning them not to give the city over to fear, he moralizes that “obedience is the mother of good conduct and the wife of the savior (πειθαρχία γάρ ἐστι τῆς εὐπραξίας | μήτηρ ἄγνη ἰσότητος)” (*Seven* 224–225). As Kreon instructs Haemon to cast off Antigone for her disobedience, centering his lecture on what it means to be loyal to one’s family and to one’s ruler, in *Antigone* 675–676 he states that “what saves the most bodies of those acting rightly is obedience “τῶν δ’ ὀρθομένων | σώζει τὰ πολλὰ σώμαθ’ ἢ πειθαρχία.” The word πειθαρχία is exceptionally rare within extant Attic tragedy, appearing only in these two locations, strengthening the intertextual bond of the passages.

One final example of Sophocles’ Aeschylean intertext is the language used to describe the proscriptive punishment of death by stoning in the plays. Antigone notes that Kreon has ordered that “a death of public-stoning before the city is prescribed φόνον προκειῖσθαι δημόλευστον ἐν πόλει” (*Antigone* 36) for the lawbreaker. While R.C. Jebb mentioned in his

commentary a similarity to the language of Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1616 (1971, 56), I argue for connection with *Seven* 199, wherein Eteocles warns that “there is no flight by which to escape the stoning-lot of the people (λευστῆρα δήμου δ’ οὐ τι μὴ φύγη μόρον)” (*Seven* 199). This uncommon compound appears only once in Sophocles, and thus bears fuller exploration towards its Aeschylean models. In summation, I synthesize and explore these and other *exempla*, concluding with analysis on how these intertexts can enhance our readings of both the *Antigone* and the *Seven*.

Bibliography

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