

Sibling Address and Cooperative Verbal Strategies in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*

In his extant tragedies, Sophocles take a particular interest in depicting sibling relationships and the complex family dynamics that surround them. In recent years, scholars have explored the relationships between the sister pairs, Antigone and Ismene, and Electra and Chrysothemis, to acknowledge and elevate the cooperative strategies of the “weaker” sister in the pair (Kim 2024, Coo 2021, Moro 2021, Hahnemann 2019, Honig 2013). This paper builds on these recent arguments to consider how readers of Sophocles might understand sibling dynamics between Sophoclean brothers and sisters in a similar light. In particular, this paper examines the sibling bond between Antigone and Polyneices in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* to argue that the kinship and friendship addresses that Antigone and Polyneices employ to address one another in their dialogue scenes correspond to and intensify the predicament Antigone finds herself in, as she is trapped between her love for her brother and her loyalty to their father in this play (and beyond).

The argument is divided into two main sections that analyze the speech of Polyneices and Antigone, respectively. The first part identifies some of the cooperative linguistic strategies like affectionate addresses, the use of personal pronouns, and polite commands in Polyneices' lines of dialogue that are also used by the minor sisters Ismene in *Antigone* and Chrysothemis in *Electra*. After analyzing the range of ways in which Polyneices addresses his sisters Ismene and Antigone in his plea for them to act as mediators between himself and their father, the paper then argues that the lexical choices he makes in his addresses to his sisters emphasize the blood relationships (σπέρματα, ὁμαίμονες) he shares with them more strongly than they express his affection (e.g. φίλοι) and thus prefigure the failure of his entreaty.

By contrast, after Polyneices' plea to Oedipus to support his return to Thebes has failed, Polyneices speaks to his sisters using affectionate addresses to reinforce his belief that his sisters will have a duty in the future to care for his deceased body and offer him funeral rites. This section then establishes that his descriptions of his sisters underscore their difficult position between their obligations to their father and their brother, and his verbal patterns, moreover, structurally mirror the polluted origins of the children of Oedipus.

The second section of the paper next turns to the speech of Antigone. Like Polyneices, Antigone expresses less affection through in her first address to him when he enters the stage. Rather than emphasizing blood ties, Antigone employs an address that highlights her brother's suffering (e.g. *ταλαίπωρε*, *OC* 1280) and links him to their father and to the familial curse under which they all suffer. Antigone's verbal choice creates a bond between herself and her brother without openly or explicitly showing affection to Polyneices when she still hopes that Oedipus might change his mind and grant Polyneices' request.

Like Polyneices, Antigone switches to a more affectionate mode of speech once their father has resolutely rejected his entreaty. At this moment in the play when she speaks to Polyneices at greater length, her addresses emphasize their sibling connection and the warmth she feels for her brother. For instance, the noun *κόσις* appears in the vocative only here in Greek literature (*OC* 1440), and its brevity may convey heightened intimacy and affection as Antigone realizes she is speaking to her brother for the last time. It also echoes her plea to Oedipus before Polyneices' entrance, in which she advocated for Polyneices as her brother, which expresses affection (*κασίγνητος*, *OC* 1184; Kamerbeek 1984). Antigone's address nods to the strength of her bond with Polyneices, which the audience of the play knows will lead to her own doomed fate in the play's future.

Ultimately, the paper concludes that the language used between brother and sister reinforces the model of the sister who supports the actions of her male relatives. By incorporating some of the cooperative linguistic strategies that minor sisters also employ in the *Antigone* and *Electra*, Polyneices heightens the emotional appeal of his requests. Antigone modulates her language as she attempts to broker a peace, but as her persuasive power reaches its limits, she defaults to affectionate language that affirms Polyneices' role as her brother despite his doomed fate.

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