The Classical Review

<http://journals.cambridge.org/CAR>

Additional services for *The Classical Review*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)

The Problem of the *Antigone*: What did Sophocles Write?

J. J. Murphy

The Classical Review / Volume 32 / Issue 7-8 / November 1918, pp 141 - 143

DOI: 10.1017/S0009840X00011872, Published online: 27 October 2009

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009840X00011872

How to cite this article:

J. J. Murphy (1918). The Problem of the *Antigone*: What did Sophocles Write?. The Classical Review, 32, pp 141-143 doi:10.1017/S0009840X00011872

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

fatal act (967-8). He sees plainly at that moment that Apollo has spoken *ἀμαθίαν* (971). But Electra stifles his scruples by her question, 'If Apollo be evil-minded, who are the wise?' Look at lines 294-6, and you will admit that Euripides uses his moral reflection with an eye to dramatic effect. Orestes, in his own sound mind, knows

ἐνεστὶν οἶκος ἀμαθία μὲν οὐδαμοῦ,
σοφοῖσι δ' ἀνδρῶν. . . .

In the final scene, which is externally conventional, the Dioskuri blame Apollo for lack of wisdom. And when Orestes, in a poignant cry, which recalls the most tragic moment of the *Choephorae* (923), bids his sister (1325)

πρόσπυζον σῶμα· θανόντος δ'
ὥς ἐπὶ τύμβῳ καταθρήνησον,

the Dioskuri touch again the theme of pity for human trouble.

J. T. SHEPPARD.

THE PROBLEM OF THE *ANTIGONE*: WHAT DID SOPHOCLES WRITE?

WHEN Jebb in his famous edition decided against the genuineness of the suspected lines in the last speech of Antigone, he supported his decision by arguments which are still unanswered, and, with the present interpretation of the text, are likely to continue so. Yet there are several difficulties in his treatment of the problem. He cuts out line 904 to 920, a matter of nearly one-third of the whole speech, so that it runs:

. . . νῦν δὲ Πολυνείκης τὸ σὸν
δέμας περιστέλλουσα τοιάδ' ἄρνυμαι
ποῖαν παρεξέλθουσα δαιμόνων δίκην;

To account for such an interpolation he merely repeats the suggestion that Iophon, in a revision of his father's plays, inserted the suspected lines in the text. Why Iophon, or any other poetical editor, should be guilty of such a literary atrocity he does not say. Moreover, though in Jebb's version the lines run smoothly enough, the principle *παρεξέλθουσα* coming naturally after the indicative *ἄρνυμαι*, from an aesthetic view-point it is extremely forced. The great appeal against inexplicable fate contained in the single line *ποῖαν παρεξέλθουσα δαιμόνων δίκην*, comes as a splendid finish to the lines

καὶ νῦν ἄγει με διὰ χειρῶν οὕτω λαβὼν
ἄλεκτρον ἀνυμέναιον οὔτε τοῦ γάμου
μέρος λαχοῦσαν οὔτε παιδείου τροφῆς
ἀλλ' ὅδ' ἔρημος πρὸς φίλων ἡ δύσμορος
ζῶσ' εἰς θανόντων ἔρχομαι κατασκαφάς,

which express so vividly the sadness and horror of her early death, and almost make her believe that the gods have forsaken her, who thus reward her obedience to their divine laws.

Coming after the prosaic *τοιάδε* it would be much less effective, in fact almost bombastic.

The received interpretation of the passage left Jebb no alternative but to reject it entirely. Antigone seems to say, 'Never would I have taken up this task if it had been my husband or children that lay mouldering in death.' Such a startling statement needs justification, which is supplied by a 'primitive sophism' taken almost bodily out of Herodotus. But does Antigone really say this? Let us forget for a moment the received interpretation, and, taking the Greek as it stands, try if it is capable of some other more satisfactory interpretation. The first thing that strikes us is that Antigone never actually refers to the death of her children as a case in which she would not have deemed the divine law binding, in fact she never mentions it at all. Her words are: 'Never, if I had been the mother of children . . .'

This has been taken as a poetic way of saying 'if my children were dead'; but surely in a solemn statement of such great importance to the whole aspect of the play, and one which the poet admits to be in need of explanation, it would be absurd to increase the difficulty by involving it in a poetic disguise, which is certainly liable to another interpretation. Evidently there is something wrong somewhere, and where such perplexity arises it is extremely probable that the clear brain of Sophocles is not alone responsible for the text.

Jebb objects rightly to the line *τίνος*

νόμου δὴ ταῦτα πρὸς χάριν λέγω, as 'strongly suggestive of the interpolator who bespeaks attention for his coming point.' It certainly has not the spirit of Sophocles, so we may reasonably arrest it on suspicion, on Jebb's informations, till we secure its accomplices. We shall still follow Jebb in making a clear sweep of the four lines containing the 'primitive sophism'; but as the principal objection to the following three depends on the sense of the preceding eight, and as there is nothing in the technique to show that they are not Sophoclean, we must let them stand till we see how the others are to be treated.

Let us now suppose the remaining verses written in the Athenian script of the fifth century B.C., with no accentuation, punctuation, or division of words. What is more likely than that an editor or revisor reading over the *Antigone*, forty years after its first production, and coming to the words

οὐγαρ ποτὺντανεῖτε κνῶν μήτηρ ἔφυν
οὐτεῖ ποσις μοι κατθαναν ἑτήκετο
βιαι πολιτῶν τανδανήρομητρον

should have been misled by the *οὐτεῖ* catching his eye at the beginning of the second line and taken *οὐταν* in the first to be the corresponding negative followed by the particle *ἄν*. To him, then, the text presents the strange problem of an extraordinary statement, qualifying the whole aspect of the play and absolutely unsupported by any stated reasons.

In accordance with the well-known rule of rhetoric, soon afterwards to be formulated by Aristotle, he proceeds to supply the deficiency, aided by the remembrance of a supposed parallel instance in Herodotus which the unusual word *ἐκπροτιμήσασα* may have helped him to recall. This happy thought he expresses in four jogging senarii, and goes on his way rejoicing.

Now this very word *ἐκπροτιμήσασα* does not give the required sense to the present form of the text. Antigone did not honour her brother beyond her husband or children, for the simple reason that such a comparison would be unmeaning. She was dying *ἄλεκτρος ἀνυμέναιος*, and knew it too well to for-

get it even in the depth of fraternal love. She might have said that she *would have* honoured her brother more than them, but the interpolator, content with a loose connexion of thought, preferred to keep the poet's actual words as far as possible, than to secure his own position by any further changes which might involve more tampering with the text than his conscience would allow, or his own limited powers could undertake.

Let us now consider the alternative interpretation. If we divide the first line so as to give

οὐ γάρ ποτ', οὐ τὰν, εἰ τέκνων μήτηρ ἔφυν,

the next line falls naturally into a parenthesis since *οὐτ' εἰ* must mean 'not if,' not 'nor if,' since there is now no corresponding 'neither.' Then the third line takes up the first and completes the conditional sentence, and thus we obtain an entirely new meaning with practically no change in the text. The passage will then run:

καίτοι σ' ἐγὼ τίμησα τοῖς φρονούσιν, εἰ.
οὐ γάρ ποτ', οὐ τὰν, εἰ τέκνων μήτηρ ἔφυν
—οὐτ' εἰ πόσις μοι κατθανὼν ἐτήκετο—
βία πολιτῶν τόνδ' ἂν ἥρόμην πόνον.
τοιῷδε μέντοι σ' ἐκπροτιμήσας' ἐγὼ
νόμῳ Κρέοντι ταῦτ' ἔδοξ' ἀμαρτάνειν
καὶ δεινὰ τολμᾶν, ὧ κασίγνητον κάρα.
καὶ νῦν ἄγει με κ.τ.λ.

'And yet I honoured thee in the eyes of those that are wise, well. For never, no never, had I been the mother of children—not if it were my husband that lay mouldering in death—would I have taken on myself this labour in defiance of the citizens. Yet though I held thee first in honour by such a law I seemed to Creon to be wrong and dare unlawfully, brother mine. And now he leads me to my death, etc.'

This is the *νόμος* which Antigone quotes as the authority for 'honouring her brother above all.' Not above husband or children, for they are not for her, but above the commands and threats of Creon, the persuasions of Ismene and the example of blind obedience given by public opinion as expressed by the chorus. The force of this law, the reason why she mentions it, and the light which it throws on the play, must next be considered.

Antigone is dying before she has got what is due to her out of life. The

perfection of the natural life being in the Greek ideal, the joy of marriage and offspring, she is scarcely to be considered as having lived at all. She is but as a child—a pure spirit clothed in a garment of flesh, touching this world for an instant and shrinking from the cold blasts of misfortune which have been her portion during her brief existence. Yet she does not want to lie down and sleep away in death the memory of her sorrows. She has found love, and her young heart is full of unspeakable longings after happiness, sweeter because only half-guessed. And now all this is torn from her by the most cruel stroke of all. On the edge of her living tomb she pauses and thinks of what might have been, of wedded love, and the sweet duty of *παιδείος τροφή*, the nurture of children.

'Ah then,' she says, 'I could have lived; even if it were my husband that lay unburied. I need not have faced the violence of men, for my duty to my children would have first claim. But now my dead brother holds the first place and I could not do otherwise. Yet Creon thinks me wrong, though he knows that I acted under this law and from no choice of mine, and now he leads me desolate to death. I do not

know; I cannot understand why the gods permit such things. But why disquiet myself in vain? I shall soon know all, and I trust to the justice of Heaven to justify me on earth by punishing my judges if they have done wrong.'

Thus the virgin-martyr goes to her doom, not lifted above the earth in an ecstasy of devotion and already enjoying a foretaste of Heaven, but with one long sad glance at the fair joys she can never share she faces an unknown world full of doubt and darkness, with her brave heart alone sustaining her in the firm belief that she has done her duty and that it will not be in vain.

Surely this new interpretation reveals a trait in the character of Antigone hitherto almost unsuspected—her deep tenderness and immense capacity for love. Nowhere else in the play do we get such striking proof of the words the poet puts into her mouth at the beginning of the action, thus giving a hint at the truest and most beautiful aspect of her character.

οὐ τοι συνέχθειν ἀλλὰ συμφιλῆν ἔφυν.

J. J. MURPHY.

University College,
Dublin.

THE HOMERIC HYMNS.

XI.

Εἰς Ἀπόλλωνα.

IT is a small matter to read *ἀνέρας εἰσορόων* for *ἀνδρας τ' εἰσορόων* in 154, and it is perhaps not extravagant to regard 155 as the ambitious, albeit rather wooden, interpolation of a meddlesome rhapsodist; but it may be a shock to the thick-and-thin supporters of *hiatus licitus* to be told that

156 πρὸς δὲ τότε μέγα θαῦμα, δού κλέος οὐκ ὅτ' ὀλεῖται

should be corrected by introducing *τόο*, the uncontracted form of *τοῦ*, instead of the barbaric diectasis *δου* (= *δο*).

The couplet 159-60,

αὖτις δ' αὖ Λητώ τε καὶ Ἀρτεμιν ἰοχέαιραν,
μνησάμεναι ἀνδρῶν τε παλαιῶν ἢ δὲ γυναικῶν

presents greater difficulty. *Λητώ* for *Λητόα* and the hiatus *μνησάμεναι ἀνδρῶν*

are a sufficient indication that something is amiss. A deliberate attempt has been made, unless I am mistaken, by a little omission and the transposition of seemingly unimportant words to exalt Apollo and to dissociate his praises from the laudation of his mother and sister, as if the singers sang two or even three separate hymns, one for each person. The present hymn itself shows that the assumption is improbable. So far Leto and her troubles have been dwelt upon in nearly a hundred lines out of 160, and in 165 we read

Ἰηκοὶ μὲν Ἀπόλλων Ἀρτέμδι ξύν.

Moreover, if we adopt the theory of a separate Delian Hymn ending at 178, Leto is the last word. I suggest then that the true reading of 158-61 may be approximately—