

1 | Introduction

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The study of women in ancient Greek tragedy has become a scholarly mainstay. The subject has launched a thousand undergraduate dissertations and PhD theses, has attracted some of the most eloquent scholars of recent generations, and, particularly through its intersection with gender studies, structural anthropology and feminist criticism, has been instrumental in keeping tragedy firmly in the vanguard of new critical approaches to ancient literature. Yet unsurprisingly this attention has focussed on those plays that happen to have come down to us in full, with certain characters – such as Aeschylus’ Clytemnestra, Sophocles’ Antigone and Euripides’ Medea – coming to dominate our understanding of the representation of women in tragedy. There have been few systematic attempts to approach the study of female characters from the perspective of fragmentary tragedy. That is what this book attempts to provide.

The prevalent focus on extant tragedy, though hardly difficult to understand or explain, is increasingly difficult to justify. There has never been a better time to be working on fragmentary tragedy, with the last few decades having seen enormous advances in this field.¹ The monumental series *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, whose first volume appeared in 1971, was completed in 2004; its five volumes, expertly edited by three of the greatest philologists of the modern era (Richard Kannicht, Bruno Snell and Stefan Radt), collect together the fragments and testimonia of the ‘big three’ tragedians Aeschylus (1985), Sophocles (1977¹, 1999²) and Euripides (2004, in two parts), as well as those belonging to other tragic poets (1971¹, 1986², addenda 2004) and the anonymous fragments (1981, addenda 2004). The previous complete text, by August Nauck (1856¹, 1889²), was in only one volume; the massively increased bulk of the modern edition reflects the huge growth in material thanks to the publication of papyri from the late nineteenth century onwards. It has also never been easier to incorporate the fragmentary tragedies into university curricula: we now have Loeb’s of the fragments of the ‘big three’ (Lloyd-Jones

¹ For the history of the collection of dramatic fragments see Kassel 1991a = 1991b: 88–98, ≈ McHardy *et al.* 2005: 7–20.

2003, Collard and Cropp 2008, Sommerstein 2008), Budé editions of the fragments of Euripides (Jouan and Van Looy 1998, 2000), and commentaries in the Aris and Phillips series on selected fragmentary plays of Euripides (Collard, Cropp, and Lee 1995, Collard, Cropp, and Gibert 2004), Sophocles (Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick, and Talboy 2006, Sommerstein and Talboy 2012), and the ‘minor’ tragedians (Cropp 2019). Introductory chapters on fragments are included in companion volumes to the main tragedians (Hahnemann 2012, Collard 2017). As Pat Easterling has reiterated, ‘there is even less reason now to stick to interpretations of tragedy based on the notion that the thirty-three plays that survive are all that are worth taking into account’.²

Yet despite the increased availability and accessibility of these texts, work on the tragic fragments has tended to remain somewhat isolated. Much excellent scholarship has been accomplished in terms of commentary on individual fragmentary plays, and occasional edited volumes have taken the fragments as their focus.³ But in general, these texts are seldom fully integrated into more wide-ranging interpretative enquiries, and works that purport to examine a particular theme ‘in Greek tragedy’ regularly omit the fragments entirely or only include them as a kind of afterthought or extra.⁴ The reasons for this are not hard to find. The fragments are, simply put, difficult to work with: they are often lacunose or textually obscure, necessitating philological elucidation; the plots of the plays from which they derive are less familiar to a general audience and require laborious exposition (sometimes involving a fair amount of hypothesis); more often than not, their context is unknown, and sometimes wholly unguessable. In some cases, we simply do not have the basic information – such as speaker, addressee and immediate or wider context – that is fundamental in using these texts in any manner beyond plot reconstruction. At a more practical level, fragmentary plays tend to appear in different series and volumes, sometimes located in different sections of libraries and by different editors and publishers, compared to dramas that have survived complete. For all the achievements of recent scholarship on tragic fragments, there remains a powerful sense that ‘the plays of Sophocles’ (for

² Easterling 2013: 185.

³ Hofmann 1991, Sommerstein 2003, McHardy *et al.* 2005, Cousland and Hume 2009.

⁴ Notable exceptions include Alan Sommerstein’s *Aeschylean Tragedy* (2010a), which fully integrates the fragments into its discussion, partly as a result of using the trilogy as its structuring principle, and Jacques Jouanna’s *Sophocle* (2007 ≈ 2018), which includes a detailed appendix with summaries of the fragmentary plays.

instance) comprise *Trachiniae*, *Ajax*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, *Electra*, *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus* – and nothing else.

In the field of ancient Greek drama, patterns of transmission have made this problem particularly pressing in the case of tragedy. With Old Comedy, the survival of complete plays by only one writer, Aristophanes, means perforce that anyone wanting to advance a generalisation about the genre can hardly avoid taking fragmentary evidence into consideration. And in the case of satyr play only one example, Euripides' *Cyclops*, has survived in full, again meaning that any study of that dramatic form must adopt a perspective that includes the fragments; it helps that the largest fragment of satyr drama, the papyrus of Sophocles' *Ichneutae* (*Trackers*), is substantial, containing roughly half the play. Tragedy, on the other hand, offers us thirty dramas from the three most prominent authors in that field (plus two more whose attributions are unknown, *Prometheus Bound* and *Rhesus*), whose production dates stretch from 472 into the fourth century; these plays provide ample material for scholars to approach all kinds of issues across different axes without the need to take fragmentary evidence into account. But the failure to do this can lead to the impoverishment of those debates, based as they are on less than the totality of the material that has come down to us; it has resulted in the establishment of scholarly modes of enquiry that rarely depart from the grooves laid down by the fully extant plays alone.

It remains true that the analysis of fragmentary drama, as of fragmentary evidence of any kind, needs to proceed with caution. However, while the texts that we call tragic fragments do present particular problems to interpreters, we must remember that *all* of the evidence that we have for Greek tragedy is fragmentary to one degree or another, as can be seen in several ways. First, the thirty-two 'complete' plays that we have today are known to us not by autograph copies written by their authors, but from manuscripts written more than thirteen centuries after their original composition. During the long process of transmission many, perhaps all, of those dramas have lost lines; so the opening of Aeschylus' *Choephoroe* (*Libation Bearers*) is missing its opening lines (some of which can be restored from other sources which quoted them before the passage was lost), the endings of Euripides' *Bacchae*, *Children of Heracles* and probably Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* are mutilated, and occasional lines are missing from within dramas as well. The scripts that we possess are therefore themselves 'fragmentary' – admittedly, far larger fragments than we are used to dealing with, but nevertheless incomplete, and sometimes in ways significant for their overall interpretation. Many will also have been

afflicted by textual additions made by actors and other sources during the period of their transmission that can be difficult to detect.⁵ Second, most, probably all, of the ‘complete’ plays were intended to be performed as part of a larger unit, which in most cases was a *didascalia* made up of three tragedies followed by a satyr play. Whether or not a given sequence of plays had a connected storyline (as with Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*), dealt with distinct episodes of a broader mythical history (as with Euripides’ ‘Trojan trilogy’ of 415), or had no particular mythical coherence (as with Euripides’ plays of 431, where *Medea* was performed with *Dictys* and *Philoctetes*, the name of the satyr play being unknown), each play was designed to be experienced in that context, a context which for most dramas has totally disappeared. A third way in which even our ‘complete’ plays show fragmentary characteristics arises from our ignorance of so many of the basic conditions of their performance. The actors’ gestures and tones of voice, the dancing, the staging, the music, the weather conditions, the hubbub of the audience, the ceremonies before the performances, the sights, sounds and smells of the theatre – all this is lost to us.

The fully extant plays may, then, convey a comforting impression of completeness, but this too is illusory. There is therefore a certain contradiction if we confidently put forward interpretations of the extant plays while simultaneously professing our inability to include any analysis of the fragments on the grounds that so much is unknown. Indeed, even those wary of overly positivist approaches to the interpretation of extant tragedy are often reluctant to engage with fragments precisely on account of the constant need to acknowledge the precariousness of any conclusions reached and the slenderness of the evidence that one can accumulate. This is a wariness that must be overcome if we are to begin to use these texts in more sustained and meaningful ways in our readings of the genre. It may well be that we have to adjust our notion of the roles that ‘certainty’ and ‘provisionality’ should (or could) play in the formulation of a literary interpretation. For example, Matthew Wright, in a recent discussion of the methodology of working with tragic fragments, has highlighted the ‘fragmentariness’ of all our evidence more widely, and has outlined a mode of reading fragmentary texts that is not afraid to engage (albeit with due caution) with creativity, imagination and multiple, exploratory and simultaneously held interpretations – approaches that would usually be

⁵ Finglass 2015a, 2015b, Lamari 2015, 2017.

considered undesirable when working with a ‘complete’ text.⁶ Engaging with fragments is thus not only worth doing in its own right, but also has the potential to sharpen our methodologies for interpreting ancient literature more generally. As Douglas Olson has put it, with reference to the study of dramatic fragments, ‘the recognition of what we do not know or cannot know about our texts, and an explicit acknowledgment of the degree to which our readings merely represent an agreement to work in a consensus environment forged by previous scholarship going back to the Hellenistic world, is a significant contribution this tiny subfield, with its difficult and puzzling material, can make to the modern discipline of classical studies’.⁷

We believe that the benefits of incorporating fragments into our regular discussions of tragedy in this way considerably outweigh any drawbacks. We look forward to a world where there are no ‘fragments scholars’ at all because everyone with an interest in this field, or any field for which the evidence is partially ‘complete’, partially fragmentary, discusses fragmentary evidence alongside less-fragmentary evidence as a matter of course.

In this volume, we bring some of the least-studied texts in the tragic genre into dialogue with one of its most-studied areas of modern scholarly enquiry: the representation of female characters. Our aim in doing so is twofold. From the perspective of the fragments themselves, we wish to re-examine them in the light of modern critical approaches, showing how they can open up insightful new ways of reading and interpreting these texts. And conversely, from the perspective of current trends in approaches to Greek tragedy, we ask how these neglected plays and characters might offer fresh perspectives on familiar questions, since turning to the fragments exposes the extent to which our ways of studying tragedy have been directed by a near-exclusive focus on the extant dramas. In other words, if tragedies such as *Agamemnon*, *Antigone*, *Hippolytus*, the *Electra* plays and *Medea* had not survived in full – but Aeschylus’ *Nereids*, Sophocles’ *Eurypylus* and *Tereus* and Euripides’ *Antigone*, *Cretans*, *Hypsipyle*, *Ino* and *Protesilaus* had, what kind of traditions of thinking about tragedy would we have inherited, and what would it now mean to study ‘women in tragedy’?

⁶ Wright 2016: xi–xii, xxiii–xxvi. See also the dialogue of Baltussen and Olson 2017 for two contrasting approaches to the study of literary fragments, particularly in relation to the possibility and implications of the activity of recovering a lost ‘whole’.

⁷ Olson 2017: 138.

In both respects, we hope to show how the underused resources of the fragmentary tragedies have the potential to reshape the field, not only with regard to subjects that may appear more immediately connected to the theme of female characters (such as gender, sexuality, marriage and the family), but also by contributing to a better understanding of many issues central to the interpretation of ancient drama, including characterisation, ethical agency, politics, space and staging and *mousikê*.

In addressing the tragic representation of women, this volume intervenes in a field that has witnessed some of the most exciting and provocative scholarship of recent decades. The study of women and female experience in Greek tragedy was particularly reinvigorated from the 1970s onwards by the application of feminist interpretative frameworks to the texts; and the topic has been further enriched by readings and approaches that draw on, *inter alia*, psychoanalysis, structural anthropology and sociolinguistics.⁸ Individual female characters from Greek tragedy have loomed large in debates in political and ethical philosophy: in particular, Sophocles' *Antigone* has been, and remains, a central figure in the discussion of kinship, ethics and, more recently, feminist politics.⁹

But in general, the engagement of this capacious and particularly fertile field of scholarship with the fragmentary plays has been restrained. This is partly down to the difficulties of dealing with fragments, as outlined above. But it is also due to the fact that the extant plays offer such a varied and complex range of characters that even restricting ourselves to these means that we already seemingly have 'enough' to be getting on with. One contribution in this area is illustrative: in his paper 'Sophocles and women', delivered in 1982 at the Fondation Hardt Entretiens on Sophocles, R. P. Winnington-Ingram begins his analysis of that tragedian's female roles with a fragment: *Tereus* fr. 583, Procne's lament on the miseries of marriage. After summarising its content in one sentence and hypothesising that the play might be dated to a relatively late period of Sophocles' career, his sole and concluding comment on the text itself reads: 'There is no lack of appropriateness to the dramatic situation, but we do not have the

⁸ Zeitlin 1978 ≈ 1996: 87–119, 1985 ≈ 1996: 341–74 = Winkler and Zeitlin 1990: 63–96, Foley 1981b, 2001, Loraux 1985 ≈ 1987, des Bouvrie 1990, Rabinowitz 1993, Segal 1993, Seidensticker 1995, Wohl 1998, Ormand 1999, Mendelsohn 2002. For women's speech, song and communication in tragedy see McClure 1999, Griffith 2001, Mossman 2001, 2005, 2012, Dué 2006, Chong-Gossard 2008.

⁹ Lacan 1986: 283–333 (lectures delivered 1960), translated in Lacan 1992, Irigaray 1974 ≈ 1985, J. Butler 2000, Honig 2013.

context and cannot say whether this speech bore on the total picture of the heroine. We had better turn to extant plays.¹⁰

This reluctance to even attempt to engage with the fragments – to try to read them as literature, rather than a puzzle waiting to be reconstructed – is by no means untypical, even in a critic as insightful as Winnington-Ingram.¹¹ Strikingly, his structure and phrasing are echoed some thirty years later in Judith Mossman’s chapter on women’s voices in Sophocles for the Brill Companion: she also begins by looking at Procne’s speech, but offers only a brief paragraph of discussion before concluding: ‘Tantalizing though the fragments may be, it seems best to concentrate on the extant plays for the remainder of this chapter.’¹² In a pattern replicated in many other works, we find a tension here between the evident enticement and appeal of the fragment (which both scholars have, after all, elected to place first in their discussions) and its ready dismissal in favour of concentrating on the extant plays, where the chosen themes can be traced more fully, and with less need for uncertainty and speculation.

On the other end of the spectrum, the overconfident use of the fragments could be equally damaging to their acceptance into the scholarly mainstream. In his 1967 monograph on Euripides, T. B. L. Webster attempted to incorporate all the known plays, including the fragmentary ones, into his analysis, and his approach (typical of the period) relied on over-interpretation of the evidence in order to piece together detailed outlines and reconstructions of the lost works. In relation to the study of women in Euripides he at least attempted to draw together the totality of the evidence, but his main hypothesis to emerge from this endeavour – that in his early trilogies, Euripides followed the pattern of producing one play about a ‘bad woman’ (by which Webster generally means a woman who acts out of sexual desire), one play about an ‘unhappy woman’ and one play ‘of a different kind’ – has not aged well.¹³

There are other instances of the inclusion of fragmentary plays in discussions of gender and women in tragedy. For example, Froma Zeitlin’s ‘The politics of Eros in the Danaid trilogy of Aeschylus’ takes the whole

¹⁰ Winnington-Ingram 1983: 237.

¹¹ Similarly, Winnington-Ingram’s great monograph on Sophocles (1980) is largely a fragment-free zone, with his reflections on humanity’s relationship with the gods unaffected by the remarkable papyrus of Sophocles’ *Niobe*, in which Apollo and Artemis slaughter the title character’s terrified daughters, published only a few years before: Finglass 2019a: 29–34.

¹² Mossman 2012: 492.

¹³ Webster 1967: 116. For the unfortunate afterlife of Webster’s coinage of the phrase ‘bad woman’ in studies of tragedy see Mueller 2017: 502; for further criticism of his book see Burnett 1968.

trilogy into account, although given the exiguous remains of both *Egyptians* and *Danaids*, its focus is mainly on the single extant play, *Suppliants*.¹⁴ The fact that the fragmentary tragedies preserve certain plot patterns that are not as well represented in the extant dramas has also led to their use in elucidation of those themes. In relation to the study of female characters, one notable example is the mythical pattern termed the ‘girl’s tragedy’ by Burkert,¹⁵ in which an unmarried girl is raped by a god and subsequently threatened or punished by her family when it is discovered that she is either pregnant or has given birth. Scholars have analysed this theme in fragmentary works such as Sophocles’ *Tyro* and Euripides’ *Antiope* and *Melanippe the Wise* alongside the extant *Ion*.¹⁶ One fragmentary tragedy that has enjoyed more substantial critical attention is Euripides’ *Erechtheus*, and the centrality of female characters to its plot – which includes a long and memorable speech by the Athenian queen Praxithea, in which she volunteers her daughter for sacrifice on behalf of the city – has helped the play find its way into scholarship on the representation of women’s roles in Athenian civic and ritual identity.¹⁷ But in the majority of those works that have been broadly influential in the study of gender and female characters in tragedy, it is fair to say that more often than not any mention of the fragmentary plays is brief, fleeting or simply absent.

In this volume, our contributors have approached the fragments under the directives outlined above: both to reveal new ways of reading and interpreting them, and to show how these plays might prompt a reevaluation of the kinds of questions and approaches that are current in tragic scholarship. We here offer a brief outline of the major findings of each chapter and their contribution to the broader landscape of the study of women in Greek tragedy.

One productive line of scholarly enquiry has been the attention given to the dynamics and symbolism of marriage. Viewed as a social transaction between men that transfers women from one household (the natal *oikos*) to another (the marital *oikos*), in tragedy the institution of marriage is particularly adept at exposing rifts and moments of tension in its surrounding

¹⁴ Zeitlin 1992 = 1996: 123–71.

¹⁵ Burkert 1979: 6–7.

¹⁶ Scafuro 1990, Sommerstein 2006a.

¹⁷ See Calame 2011 on the role of the male and female in the play’s construction of Athenian autochthony, Goff 2004: 322–3 on ritual identity.

social structure, and at providing opportunities for female characters to voice their own subjective experiences and assert themselves as agents within their marital relationships.¹⁸ In the extant plays, marriage rarely (if ever) manifests itself as a positive and straightforward transaction or state of affairs, and notably it is the women whose interventions generally help to bring things to a catastrophic end: so we find characters who cause death and destruction after their husbands introduce a mistress into the household (Clytemnestra, Deianira) or abandon them for another woman (Medea), wives who take or desire to take an adulterous lover (Clytemnestra, Phaedra) and women who commit suicide because of some aspect of their marriage (Deianira, Evadne, Jocasta, Phaedra). In addition, the overlapping imagery and symbolism of marriage and death means that we also find strong nuptial associations even in the cases of unmarried girls who die by suicide, sacrifice or murder (Antigone, Cassandra, Iphigenia, Polyxena, the daughter of Heracles).

The extant plays thus offer a rich variety of female roles in relation to their experience of marriage and sexual desire, but without taking the fragmentary plays into account, the picture is incomplete. Several contributions to this volume demonstrate how the fragments reveal variations and refinements of these well-known tragic models. In her chapter, Helene P. Foley ('Heterosexual Bonding in the Fragments of Euripides') provides a thorough survey of the theme of heterosexual love in the fragments of Euripides, demonstrating how many of these plays – particularly *Andromeda*, *Oedipus*, *Protesilaus* and *Antigone* – offer glimpses of a different permutation of tragic marriage. These plays dramatise marital or premarital relationships in which the female partner could play an active and sometimes assertive role, and which, even when placed within dramatic contexts that render the union itself problematic, may be termed reciprocal and even romantic. Foley's widening of the scope of enquiry demonstrates that the more positive portrayal of spousal bonds that we find in Euripides' *Helen* is not an anomaly within the genre: tragic marriage did not always have to be portrayed a site of friction and disaster, and in fact it was some of Euripides' most overtly erotic and romantic plays that left a distinctive mark on their original and later audiences.

Euripides did not, of course, restrict his portrayal of female sexual desire to that between husband and wife, or suitor and unmarried virgin; as is well known, he was lampooned in Aristophanes' comedies for creating

¹⁸ For tragic marriage see Seaford 1987 = 2018: 257–99, Rehm 1994, Ormand 1999.

characters such as Phaedra and Stheneboea, married women driven by desire for a man who is not their husband. By contrast, the picture of Sophocles that we glean from the extant tragedies seems to characterise him as a playwright comparatively less interested in depicting female erotic expression and its consequences. Alan H. Sommerstein ('Women in Love in the Fragmentary Plays of Sophocles') shows that this picture is flawed: in at least three plays – *Phaedra*, *Oenomaus* and *Women of Colchis* – Sophocles did portray 'women in love' who experienced sexual desire for a male character and whose actions in pursuit of that desire resulted in the deaths of others. Sommerstein's chapter not only draws attention to this overlooked aspect of Sophoclean characterisation, but also deftly exposes the main differences between the typical Sophoclean and Euripidean models of such women: in Sophocles, none is deliberately betraying a husband, and this may be one reason as to why the playwright appears to have escaped the accusations of immorality and misogyny that comedy heaped upon Euripides.

As noted, in the extant plays we find examples of wives who react intensely and/or with violence to the introduction of a sexual rival into the *oikos* or to their abandonment by their partner for that rival. In her contribution, Fiona McHardy ('Female Violence towards Women and Girls in Greek Tragedy') fills in the gaps in our understanding of this pattern by taking into account the fragmentary plays in which women enact violence upon other women and girls. As she demonstrates, this most often occurs in the case of married women who perceive the introduction of a (younger) rival into their household as a threat to their own position and status, and it frequently takes the form of an attack upon this rival's physical beauty. McHardy shows that we should place less recognised figures such as Sidero, Dirce and the wife of Creon alongside the widely cited examples of Clytemnestra and Medea as tragic wives whose desire to maintain or restore their status leads them to violently target other women.

P. J. Finglass ('Suffering in Silence: Victims of Rape on the Tragic Stage') focuses on women who have themselves been the object of violence and who are linked by the theme of silence. The episode in *Trachiniae* in which Deianira is struck by the appearance of Iole has long been compared to the scene between Clytemnestra and Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*: in both cases, a silent woman, a target of male sexual lust, arrives at the home of her new master and is met by his wife. Finglass highlights the relevance of a third play for this pattern: Sophocles' *Tereus*, in which the mutilated Philomela, her tongue cut out, will have arrived at the palace of Tereus and his wife, her sister Procne. Finglass draws out the structural and thematic