

Research Article

# The Women of Trachis Jealousy, Hatred and Revenge in Sophocles' Tragedy Intrafamilial Marriage and the Husbands' Widow's Wills the Famous Oracle

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## Abstract

In this tragedy by Sophocles, the real theme is the treatment of "prey women" and their influence on the psychological family situation and society in classical Athens. "The Women of Trachis" as well as "Oedipus Rex" and "Oedipus on Colonus" show what an enormously perceptive, in today's terms, psychologist and sociologist Sophocles was. In the fifth century BC, many wars were waged in Greece and prisoners were turned into slaves. Classical Greece thrived on slavery, which also included so-called prey woman. In The Women of Trachis Sophocles describes the jealousy of a wife, with the resulting actions, when the marriage is overstretched and the jealousy is increased through corresponding insults (over the decades). How hatred and revenge then gain the upper hand, ultimately leading to death. The intra-family marriage policy in Athens, which often leads to emotional and social unhappiness, is also a clear theme in the "Women of Trachis", long before Sophocles' two Oedipus tragedies. In his tragedies, Sophocles dealt with sociological themes and human suffering. The poets changed the mythology according to the requirements of their desired intention of the tragedy. The transformation of the myth consists in its integration into the polis and its new reference systems. The fact that the tragic poet sets the problems of his time in a past contributes to the possibility of the tragedy's reception. In the tragedies Oedipus Rex and Oedipus at Colonus, for example, a reference to the social reality in Athens at the time is assumed. The tragedies that were performed at the Dionysia (festival) are characterized by an interpenetration of present and past. Tragedies were organized as competitions, so that the poets had to take the audience's sensitivities into account. Classical philologists are often prevented from producing realistic text analyses and interpretations by idealizing and glorifying Greek tragedies and thus not taking into account the social customs and laws of the time. If we think, that the Greeks had no interest in such a psychological process as how a decision comes about, we are seriously mistaken and we do not do justice to the great, psychologically astute tragedians. Without a sociological, psychological and medical approach, applied to the tragedies that contain such themes in Sophocles and also Euripides in excellent execution, we will not do justice to these brilliant poets. We are left with interpretations without a sociological and psychological understanding of Greek classicism.

## Keywords

Sophocles Tragedy, Psychology, Prey Women (Beutefrauen, ger.), Marriage Politics, Classic Athen

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In this tragedy by Sophocles, the treatment of "prey women" ("Beutefrauen") and their influence on the family situation and society in classical Athens is the real theme. The prey woman named Briseis is already a central supporting character in *ILIAD*: Achilles is supposed to hand her over to King Agamemnon. Achilles hesitates for a long time and therefore does not take part in the battle for Troy for a while.

"The Women of Trachis" as well as "Oedipus Rex" and "Oedipus at Colonus" show what an enormously perceptive, in today's terms, psychologist and sociologist Sophocles was.

In the fifth century BC, many wars were waged in Greece and prisoners were turned into slaves. Classical Greece thrived on slavery, which also included so-called prey women. In Wikipedia

"[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sklaverei\\_im\\_antiken\\_Griechenland](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sklaverei_im_antiken_Griechenland)"

There is a large article on the subject of slavery in Greece, but only a minimal reference to women slaves<sup>2</sup> ([18] p. 291):

"Any marriage or filial relationship of slaves was not legally recognized, and the owner could divide a slave family at any time. However, slaves belonged to their master's household. Like a newly married woman, newly purchased slaves were welcomed with nuts and fruit" (Wikipedia).

The tragedies in classical Athens also had the task of educating the audience, of being moral lesson plays, of having an educational effect on the state. At the same time, however, the poets were also able to present to the audience what they themselves considered to be very important. For tragedy, mythology was, so to speak, merely the state coach gilded by poetry, the carriage pulled across the stage. The content inside could be perceived or remained concealed by the mythological narrative if the spectator or interpreter preferred.

In "The Women of Trachis" we can see how sensitively Sophocles describes the jealousy of a wife with the resulting actions when the marriage is overstretched and the jealousy is increased enormously by corresponding insults (over the decades). How hatred and revenge then gain the upper hand, ultimately resulting in death.

## 2. Preliminary Notes on Tragedies and Marriage Customs in Athens at the Time

The Athenian Sophocles was a well-known poet, finance minister, politician, strategist (i.e. general) and priest (of Halon, the god of healing, and later of Asclepius<sup>3</sup>). This gave him a deep insight into the social and family structures of Athens. He was the friend and finance minister of the long-standing, famous statesman and general Pericles, who, among other things, initiated the reconstruction of the Acropolis and introduced a form of social welfare for all disabled and incapacitated people in Athens.

In his tragedies, Sophocles dealt with sociological themes ([17] p.56) and the suffering of people. The poets, including Sophocles, changed the mythology according to the requirements of their desired intention of the tragedy. "The transformation of the myth consists [...] in the insertion into the polis and its new reference systems" ([5] p. 18). The fact that the tragic poet sets the problems of his time in a past contributes to the possibility of reception of the tragedy. In the tragedies Oedipus Rex and Oedipus at Colonus, for example, a reference to the social reality of the time in Athens is also assumed. "The [tragedies] [...] that were performed at the Dionysia [festival] are [...] characterized by an [...] interpenetration of present and past" ([38] p.437): "[...] tragedies [...] were organized as a competition, so that the poets had to take into account the sensitivities of the audience", see also ([12] p. 62 f.); and also ([38] p. 436).

However, the Athenians "did not take much pleasure in a theater that was critical of the times, that wanted to be socially relevant and also to have a radical enlightening effect" ([17] p.56). So how could Sophocles, for example, bring the incest theme to the stage in Athens, incest of mothers with sons (Oedipus Rex) and (especially blind) fathers with daughters (in Oedipus on Colonus,<sup>4</sup>) or other relatives, without the submitted play being rejected beforehand by the censor, archon, the highest political official and his two assessors (see also ([6] p. 10))? Classical philologists according to U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff ([36] p. 332) believe that the tragedy writers (like Goethe) were men of the theater, of the "boards" and knew how to deal with the audience.

Thus Goethe in the "Prelude to the Theater" of Faust I, among other things:

"How do we make it so that everything [...] with meaning is also pleasing? [...]"

just look at who you are writing for! [...] Little clarity in colorful images,

Much error and a spark of truth [...]."

Sophocles, Goethe's role model, evidently often succeeded in doing this<sup>5</sup> ([15] p. 249).

In the tragedy Oedipus Rex, for example, there is only a hidden reference to the not infrequent widow's wills of husbands, the famous oracle, which facilitated incestuous unhappiness.

Marriage in ancient Athens had to be subordinated to the material interests of the peasant court or the social and political interests of a respected house. It was not uncommon for marriages to take place within the family in order to avoid diminishing the household's wealth through a dowry. Marriage within the family was a sign of strong solidarity. A woman remained under the guardianship (kyriat) of either her father, husband, uncle, brother or son for the rest of her life. If she had no brothers who inherited her father's property, she was part of the property as an heir, i.e. the closest male relative who received the property had to take her as his wife. If

he was already married, he had to divorce himself or renounce his inheritance ([10] p. 234 f.); see also ([9] p. 188 f.), and ([8] p. 317; [23] p. 32 f.; [34] p. 123)). It was not uncommon for the husband to belong to the older generation of the bride's father ([23] p. 29), and he was often a brother of the bride's father (it is assumed that Euripides was also married to a niece ([37] p.7). If the bride's father had no brothers, the bride's mother's brothers were usually the next choice. The girls entered marriage at a very early age ([22] p. 47). There were probably also reverse age relationships, as illustrated with Oedipus and Iocaste. A husband could make provision for his future widow and designate a new husband for her in his will (see ([23] p. 33 f.; [9] p. 189, and [8] p. 316 f.). This was a measure that seemed sensible not only because of the age difference mentioned above, but also because of the frequency of wars (war widows). One can assume that the husband predetermined by the will for the young widow is also the son chosen by her and the will-writer in infancy, e.g. B. in the relatives for adoption (same social level), his own biological son could be given away, who as an adult, not knowing his origins, agreed to the marriage. Incest was not forbidden, "only marriage between parents and children was frowned upon" ([11] p. 219), but just frowned upon.

It can be assumed that the husband predetermined in the will for the young widow that it could also be her own biological son, given away by her and the author of the will writer in the infancy of the son, e.g. to relatives for adoption (same social level). The son, as an adult, unaware of his origins, agreed to the marriage. Incest was not forbidden, "only marriage between parents and children was frowned upon" ([11] p. 219), but only frowned upon.

*The well-known oracle concerning Oedipus, the Athenian widow testament law of the time*

The well-known oracle concerning Oedipus probably symbolically represents the Athenian widow testament law of the time, only in reverse: according to the will, it is not the widow who must marry her own son, but the son, according to the oracle, must marry his mother, the widow. Athenian bourgeois relations are thus shifted to the royal level in the *Oedipus Rex*, to the royal houses of Corinth and Thebes. The legal regulation of the "widow's will" of the husbands is transferred to Olympus in reverse as an oracle and is thus inevitable.

In line with this thesis, Sophocles uses Iocaste to demonstrate two examples of civil marriage: on the one hand, marriage by order of the brother as head of the family and, on the other hand, by order of the "widow's will" of a deceased (civil) husband. As already mentioned, the will is shifted to a divine oracle for Oedipus and masked. The sons in question presumably did not know who they had married for a long time, unlike their mothers ([31] p. 209). Iocaste knows that she has been married to her son and suffers from the incestuous marriage, but does not want to lose the wealth associated with the marriage. She does not want to jeopardize it with the truth and tries to prevent Oedipus from investigating his origins

further with the words: "Not, by the gods, [...] investigate this! (1060 f.) "I suffer enough already!". "Unhappy one! That you would never know who you are!" (1068) Why does she suffer? Because she knows that she has been married to her son. Schadewaldt, on the other hand, says that she later commits suicide after she realizes that she has been married to her son ([21] p. 214). Classical philologists, like Schadewaldt, are often prevented from producing a more realistic textual analysis or interpretation by their glorification and idealization of Greek tragedies, which does not take into account the social customs and laws of the time. Schadewaldt, for example, states: "The Greeks had no interest in such a psychological process as how a decision comes about" ([21] p. 216). A view that does not do justice to the great, psychologically astute tragedians<sup>6</sup>.

The intra-family marriage policy in Athens, which often led to emotional unhappiness, is also a clear theme in "The Women of Trachis", even before Sophocles' two Oedipus tragedies, see below. Towards the end of the tragedy, Heracles makes his son Hyllos promise to take his beloved prey wife Iole, who has brought misfortune to the family, as his wife after Heracles' death. This theme determines the end of the tragedy and shows how early Sophocles artfully criticized Athenian marriage policy and widow's wills and customs<sup>7</sup>. These social events and their negative social and psychological consequences clearly preoccupied Sophocles from an early and lasting stage. Decades later, in "*Oedipus at Colonus*", the sequel to "*Oedipus Rex*" (probably intended much earlier for theatrical performance by Sophocles<sup>8</sup>), Sophocles outlines the theme of father-daughter incest through statements by Antigone. Here it seems as if Sophocles is letting us listen in on his priestly activity in the Asclepion - a similar insight to that in the *Oedipus Rex*, in which he presumably used statements by sufferers, people seeking help<sup>9</sup>. In both tragedies, great suffering and harrowing fates are depicted, as they probably also occurred in family life in Athens at the time. However, the original Athenian laws and customs are hidden in the text - as Sophocles' text suggests, probably out of consideration for the censors and the audience. The social reference is even clearer in "The Women of Trachis", see below.

### 3. The Often Missing in the Interpretations of Classical Philology

As far as the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides are concerned, we must add to the previous picture by taking into account that these two poets in particular had great qualities in the field of psychological observation and in the psychiatric and sociological fields. If we do not include such qualities of Sophocles and Euripides in the consideration of their works, then we do not do justice to the Greece of the time and the two famous poets. As a result, these perspectives are often missing in the interpretations of classical philology. This is under-

standable, as they do not have the necessary psychiatric and psychological expertise. The actual observers in the field of mental illness, the psyche and mental conflicts at that time were not only medical doctors but also the poets. In the fifth century BC, mathematics was already very advanced in Greece; not only did Pythagoras' theorem exist at the time, but also Thales of Miletus (e.g. Thales' circle). Another example of mathematical ingenuity is Hippocrates, not the physician Hippocrates, but Hippocrates of Chios, a great Greek mathematician of his time (around 470 to 400 BC)<sup>10</sup>, a contemporary of Euripides and Sophocles.

Why shouldn't we also be able to credit the two great Attic poets Sophocles and Euripides with enormous ingenuity in a sector that also interested them greatly, such as medicine and what is now known as psychiatry and psychology? We can even provide plausible evidence of this with the necessary specialist knowledge.

As far as psychiatric illness is concerned, we need only mention Sophocles' "*Aias*" and Euripides' "*Orest*" and "*Bacchae*". In these three tragedies, we find excellent descriptions of psychoses that meet the requirements of modern psychopathology (even with observations such as a reference to neologisms in acute productive endogenous psychosis<sup>11</sup>). In *Aias*: verse 244ff // (243f): "Outcasting vile speeches, which no daimon and none of men taught Him." In the "*Bacchae*" Euripides describes symptoms of alcohol intoxication and delirium. This tragedy suggests that Euripides' mother was an alcoholic (according to tradition, she was responsible for the household wine supply). We can assume that the little Euripides in his childhood had recognized from observing his mother that, as a result of alcohol withdrawal, strange madness (delirium) could occur and that, in his childhood, the little Euripides than might be in danger again: in the entire tragedy, which is dedicated to the god of wine, Dionysus, not a single drop or sip of alcohol is consumed<sup>12</sup>. In this tragedy, first performed in 405 BC, the Oedipus complex, which Freud recognized in humans, is also described for the first time<sup>13</sup>: the son, King Pentheus, wants to observe his mother Agaue (the king's mother) during sexual acts as part of the Dionysus festival and hides for this purpose<sup>14</sup>. He is discovered and killed by his mother while delirious. Without applying psychiatric and psychological expertise to this tragedy in order to understand its content, it is not possible to understand it, and so the classical philologist Flashar ([6] p. 231) believes that the "*Bacchae* is such a difficult, controversial poem that invites many interpretations, that even the most serious philology could not point to a clear path. "People are still puzzling over it today" - this phrase coined by Karl Reinhardt in 1958 is basically still valid".

Many wars were fought in Greece in the fifth century BC. Where were the wounded and physically ill? Or the mentally ill? There were no military hospitals in Greece at that time, although there were Aesclepeions and some doctors took seriously ill patients into their homes until they had recovered or not, but there were no large clinics, sanatoriums or similar

facilities at that time. We can assume that the wounded and sick could be seen on the streets of Athens, for example, as in Hamburg after the First and Second World Wars, so that interested people, such as poets, could make detailed observations in Athens.

As a priest, Sophocles heard a great deal of psychological suffering and family fates, and he was certainly told of many dreams. As a priest, he will also often have acted as a quasi-psychotherapist ([31] p.210). Recognizable in *Oedipus Rex*:

Iocaste:

Many a mortal has also slept with his mother in a dream.  
But to whom such things count for nothing, life is easiest!  
(981 ff. // 981ff)

(Oedipus did not report such a dream.)

Iocaste: [trying to reassure her son]

To live into the day is best, as one can!

But you, as far as marriage with your mother is concerned,  
have no fear! [...]

A great ray of hope is [...] your father's grave! (979, 980, 987; emphasis R.T.).

Although Sophocles described the above very clear symptom in a dream, he did not recognize the Oedipus complex in sons, as can be seen from *Oedipus Rex*<sup>15</sup>. However, we can assume that Sophocles recognized the Oedipus complex in daughters a little more than 20 years later. He probably inferred this from the suffering of abused daughters, which he alludes to in *Oedipus of Colonos*. In this text, Sophocles asked himself (or was he asked this as a priest and thought it was worth mentioning?) whether daughters should be able to feel free after sexual intercourse with their father, after incest, the "incomprehensible" (ÖK, 1675 translated [26]//(1675)) and after "bad" (1697 [26] // (1697)), "with no love" (1698 [26]// (1698)), and thus again comes very close to the Oedipus complex ([31] p. 215).

The social and family conditions described at the time in classical Athens, in which girls and women were treated lovelessly and scandalously from today's perspective, almost like chickens, allow us to better understand the situation in families in which female slaves and so-called "prey women" lived at the time, and thus also the tragedy of "*The Women of Trachis*".

#### 4. "*The Women of Trachis*" Content and Construction

The second verse indications after the verse indications in the Schadewaldt edition are taken from the TUSKULUM edition, as these are somewhat more line-exact than the Schadewaldt edition and this edition also contains the text in Greek, lines exactly. According to Flashar, a recognized Sophocles specialist ([5] p. 80), formerly professor of classical philology in Munich, two tragedies deal primarily with two sections of the rich and colourful Heracles myth, the

madness that Hera sent and in which he killed his wife and children (this is the subject of the Euripidean Heracles) and the end of Heracles on Mount Oeta, which Sophocles depicts in the "Women of Trachis". At the time of Sophocles, the whole story was known to the public, the myth of Heracles was known to the contemporary audience<sup>16</sup> ([19] p. 163 f.): Nessos, who offered to take Deianeira across the river, attacked her. Heracles killed the centaur with a poisoned arrow. The dying Nessos causes Deianeira to scrape some of the blood from the wound as a supposedly magical remedy for healing and love. However, it is a deadly poison. Deianeira later (in the tragedy "The Women of Trachis") sends a shirt soaked in this poison to her husband Heracles, who is poisoned by the shirt and dies after putting it on. Thus a divine prophecy is fulfilled for Heracles: he will die by a dead man.

"The Women of Trachis" was probably written between 438 and 433 BC ([5] p. 82). Sophocles was probably the first to transform the Heracles material into the conventions of tragedy. This also includes the fact that the tragedy takes place fictitiously within one day. ([5] p. 83). Sophocles has, contrary to the usual tradition, portrayed Heracles as married to Deianeira for several years (his son Hyllos is now of marriageable age and can be urged by Heracles to take his prey woman Iole as his wife after Heracles' death). And at the end of the play, Heracles is not accepted into the heaven of the gods; the so-called apotheosis of Heracles does not take place here in the tragedy. Everything remains on a bourgeois, human level.

Sophocles has reduced the mythological material to a bourgeois format and also tightened it up in terms of time, making it humanly credible, almost realistic. Thus, the twelve well-known heroic deeds in Sophocles' tragedy take place during the time of his marriage to Deianeira. It is not only his frequent absences, but also his numerous escapades and relationships with other women that cause his wife Deianeira to suffer for decades.

In this framework of the Heracles material created by Sophocles, there is now also room for human feelings such as jealousy, hatred and revenge, as can occur in a family under particular stress with this subject matter. All of this is very believable. However, offered for the stage in mythological disguise.

In the tragedy, the famous hero Heracles has been absent from his family for 15 months. His wife Deianeira lives with her children, including their son Hyllos, in exile in Trachis. Right at the beginning of the tragedy, we learn that there is clearly something fundamentally wrong in Deianeira's marriage to Heracles. Deianeira, who has been married to Heracles (in Sophocles) for decades and therefore all of his heroic deeds fall within the period of his marriage to her, complains about her fate right at the beginning of the tragedy. Deianeira:

"But I know of my life very well, verses 4-31 // (5-30)... [...] That (my fate) it was unhappy and hard: that I was still in my father's house... because of my marriage fear stood out, worst, as only an Aitol woman can." ... [.....]

Only later, but welcome to me, came Heracles [...] But there was a good end Zeus, [...] If it was good. For as a chosen bed To Heracles bound, I always nourish Only fear for fear, around him hardening me. For one night brings, and the next, the next scares it away again, the sorrow.

So she complains about her marriage to Heracles. She goes on to describe how Heracles is hardly ever at home, only to bear children and give birth (the word love does not appear once in the entire tragedy in relation to the marriage). She is now "completely without a customer - and that is a terrible sorrow". 46 // 45

A nurse then accuses her of not inquiring about Heracles or looking for him. She then instructs her son Hyllos to enquire about Heracles. The viewer may now wonder why Deianeira did not actively enquire about Heracles herself. The explanation then becomes quite clear in the course of the tragedy:

Heracles has already had many lovers during this marriage. (Verses 459-460// (459-460). He has therefore often given his wife Deianeira cause for jealousy and offended her. She must therefore fear, among other things, that she will experience something similar again.

She now learns that he is well, but that he has in fact already sent the young, beautiful king's daughter, Iole, a prey woman, a slave for whose sake he has waged war, to her house with Lichas the Herald of Heracles in the course of the tragedy, together with other young prey women whom Deianeira has already taken in (without knowing exactly what happened to Iole). Heracles is in love with this Iole. She is to live with her, Deianeira, in the house and sleep in the bed with her as Heracles' wife (verse 428 // (428)).

Deianeira: (verse 376 ff // (375ff):

"woe is me! I unhappy one! Where am I now? What disaster have I taken into my house, unsuspecting! Poor me!" Deianeira initially tries to excuse Heracles, but at the same time she feels sorry for Iole, in whom she can also see part of her own fate from earlier times. After all, Deianeira has not been asked to marry Heracles, but he has obtained her by winning a duel. In the tragedy, Deianeira also never speaks of the best husband, but only of the best man. Deianeira describes Heracles, probably as an apology for his actions, as being afflicted by this disease (love for Iole) (verse 447 // (445). Later she says that Heracles: "has been ill with this disease so often". (verse 544 // (544)).

Deianeira then tries to show nobility of spirit and generosity: Lichas advises her to accept the woman, as she had done before she knew who she was (485f // (485f)).

Deianeira responds: "Well, we are also so minded to do this. And we do not want to bring a new disease upon ourselves by fighting against gods for our misfortune". (This refers to Eros).verse 490 ff // (490ff). Deianeira tries to show nobleness (so-called "Sophrosyne". Schadewaldt, vol. 4; p. 261), so she says of Iole: "In any case, she should not receive new suffering from me in addition to the existing evils". (Verse 331f // (330f). Deianeira tries to come to terms with what has happened by stating that she is pow-

erless against Eros. (Verse 441ff // (441ff). She intends not to reproach her husband:

"And therefore, if I wanted to reproach my husband for being attacked by this disease: furious I would be;" (Verse 446 ff // (445ff).

From a psychological point of view, we can virtually watch Deianeira repressing her offense in these words, because she is, by nature, at least preconsciously, furious, offended, as will later be shown by reality and as she also assesses herself (see VERSES 446ff above).

She then complains once again in detail about the fate that has befallen her and is about to befall her, having to share her husband with Iole.

Deianeira steps out of the house with a servant 531-546 // (531-546) While...in the house the guest (Lichas)... speaks with the captive girls, I have come to you secretly[...], partly to say what I have prepared with my hands, partly to lament with you what is being done to me. For the virgin - but I think: no longer a virgin, but already his wife - I have taken her in, just as the skipper traded a heavy cargo for me, a shameful reward for my mind. And now the two of us wait under a blanket for the embrace. This is what Heracles - the faithful, the fair one, as he called us! - As a household reward for the long time [...].

But again to live together in the same house with this one: what woman would be able to do that, to share the same marriage with her! 546

In the context of this theme of jealousy and grievance, she then mentions the gift of Nessos: as a young woman she had scraped the encrusted murder blood of the centaur, Nessos, from the edge of the wound and kept it over the years (the encrusted blood contains a poison).

Nessos had prophesied to her that if she gave this substance to Heracles, Heracles would never look at another woman again and would love her more than Deianeira. (V576f // (576).

She wants to use this substance, this alleged magic remedy, with the deliberate intention of winning Heracles back, but explains twice that she does not want to understand or learn bad and daring arts and that she hates women who dare to do such things (verse 583 ff // (583ff).

She soaks a shirt in this substance, which she wants to give to Lichas, the herald of Heracles, in return for the gifts received from Heracles. Physical poison for spiritual poison? One could already ask here.

The chorus admonishes Deianeira to check what she is doing beforehand to see if she can rely on it.

Deianeira: "Reliance exists as far as appearances go. I have not yet dealt with a rehearsal." 590f // (590f).

Choirmaster (very insistently):

"Meanwhile, you must know when you act! For it may seem so: Knowledge - you do not have it as long as the rehearsal is missing." (V 592ff // (592f).

But Deianeira says: "Well, soon we will know." (verse 595 // (594). Time is supposedly pressing here, because she

already sees Lichas coming out of the door and setting off for Heracles. This is followed by four extra lines that clearly have a revenge theme:

Deianeira (to the chorus):

"only one thing: see to it that my cause From you remain hidden! In the dark, not even those who commit shameful deeds will fall into disgrace" (verse 596 ff // (596f).

After Deianeira later commits suicide because she has inflicted a severe fatal burn or illness on Heracles with the shirt soaked in Nessos' blood, the chorus then states that this was revenge:

Chorus:

"It gave birth, gave birth to her, the newly born bride (meaning Iole), To these houses a great revenge-demanding Erinys!" (VERSE 895ff // (893ff).

This probably means that the new bride Iole in the house caused Deianeira's hatred to overflow and led to the exercise of revenge. Here the connection to the repressed hatred in the text above, "I would be furious" (verse 446 ff // (445ff), is easy to establish. Sophocles would thus have depicted a preconscious layer in Deianeira's psyche.

Schadewaldt ([21] p.260) says: "only in this is the transgression that Deianeira has easily disregarded the warnings of the chorus." Flashar, on the other hand, says: Deianeira knew the risk. She is neither naive nor completely blinded. She puts herself in an avoidable danger, taking into account the possibility of failure. Flashar (2000, p. 91) says: her "blindness consists in the fact that she did not sufficiently take into account the logically expected destructive effect of the poison from the outset."

Neither of the above interpretations is sufficient, because Deianeira already knew about the substance's severe toxicity beforehand, as the text shows (see below): at the moment she renounced the sample and further reflection, her hatred and desire for revenge triumphed over all other feelings in her and against reason and knowledge. Everything else was repressed, so to speak, at that moment, but it probably remained pre-conscious, because she remembers it soon after the crime. She took revenge because she knew about the effect of the poisonous substance, as the text shows:

Deianeira (715 ff // (714ff):

"The arrow that struck, I know, damaged even the god, Cheiron, damaged, and all those whom he Even touched, the beasts, he destroyed.

And hence: this black juice in the blood that

From his wound, how should he

Not destroy him (Heracles) too? As I see it: yes."

Among other things, Schadewaldt comments on Deianeira's actions ([21] p. 260): "we had seen [...] that the tragedy of this play stems from a peculiar brightness of consciousness and how this action is also seized by the demonic. This is what makes it different from all Sophocles' other plays. [...] Sophrosyne (here briefly translated as composure or acquiescence, so to speak) lives in Deianeira as a genuine ethos, but it becomes questionable when her entire happiness and ex-

istence as a woman is at stake. One could perhaps understand the tragedy here in the demonstration of the tragic questionability of Sophrosyne herself". From a psychological point of view, however, we can recognize how decidedly Sophocles has portrayed here that even the noblest wife cannot bear permanent and, on top of that, the most serious insult without hatred and revenge.

#### 4.1. The Two-part Plot, Diptych Form, of the Tragedies

The Diptych Form of tragedies is still carried out in this tragedy. In the so-called Deianeira part, it is about the wife's offense, hatred and subsequent subtle revenge. The second part, the Heracles part, is about Heracles' cauterization, illness and his brutal desire for revenge on his wife (at first, he wants to beat her up just as he was beaten up by her). The revenge is actually carried out by both protagonists. Heracles smashes the messenger of misfortune Lichas (he had brought Heracles the poisoned shirt), which can be seen as a displacement (here, too, we see the brilliant psychologist of the time, Sophocles). Heracles is mentally blinded by hatred and revenge as a consequence of enormous physical insult. The wife's revenge, on the other hand, is portrayed as more subtle, almost as unintentional (but only almost, in this sense, as preconscious and negligent). Heracles' revenge is an openly brutal, conscious male revenge.

This is followed by Heracles' son Hyllos' forced promise to take the prey woman Iole as his wife after Heracles' death. In this way, Sophocles shows how psychological individual, family and social misfortune has successors through social law, or custom, over generations.

Throughout the play there is no reflection by Heracles that he has greatly offended his wife! This seems to be one of Sophocles' main messages to the Athenians. Since Sophocles has made this the overall theme of this tragedy, we can assume that in Sophocles' time, actions like Heracles' were not entirely uncommon in Athens. We can assume that it was not only at the time of the Iliad that wives and concubines were common in Athens. Women had little say in Athens at the time; they were usually not even allowed to leave the house. For example, they were only allowed to look after wine stocks if they had already earned the trust of the man of the house (Euripides' mother, for example, but for this woman this trust was probably fatal, because she became an alcoholic, as we can assume from the Bacchae ([32]). Can we assume that serious accidents happened more often in Athenian households, as described with Deianeira's actions, so that Sophocles designed this tragedy in this way? Did Sophocles set this tragedy, the only one of Sophocles' surviving tragedies, in Trachis rather than in one of the traditional locations such as Thebes, Argos, the camp of Troy, Athens or Attica ([5] p. 80), in order to soften the realistic social reference to the Athenian bourgeoisie? So as not to make the audience too afraid that something similar might happen to them? After all, there were

certainly quite a few prey-wife owners with presumably similar family circumstances among the viewers. There was social attention and concern and corresponding care and action on the part of the Athenian state, as we can see from the form of social assistance for all disabled and incapacitated people that Pericles introduced in Athens. Sophocles was a friend and advisor to Pericles. Is the tragedy "Women of Trachis" an attempt to sharpen the family and social view of the citizens and to bring about family and women-friendly relief?

Flashar believes that the shift in emphasis to female figures, who are not in the foreground in the given myth versions, is also characteristic of Sophoclean tragedy and cites Antigone and Electra as examples ([5] p. 85).

It is also worth mentioning that after the audience has learned of Deianeira's suicide and it has been made clear by the chorus that Deianeira's deed (the fatal cauterization of Heracles) was revenge, Deianeira's suicide is then described in detail for two extra pages by the same nurse. This almost seems like an extra chapter. This seems to me to be typical of Sophocles as an amateur doctor (here a psychiatrist and psychologist, so to speak). We learn in detail about Deianeira's suicidal tendencies and the exact execution of her suicide (875-932 // (874-931). Sophocles described suicidal tendencies and suicides very well on several occasions. (especially, disguised for the audience, in *Oedipus at Colonus* ([31] 4. Gestaltung des Todes des Ödipus, p. 226 ff).

Heracles' severe injuries, burns, illness and pain caused by the poisoned robe are also described with a medical mind. The fact that the realization that help is no longer possible leads to suicidal tendencies and the wish that Hyllos', the son, should bring death to Heracles is also medically, psychologically and psychiatrically comprehensible (think of S. Freud's death).

#### 4.2. Heracles Forced His Son Hyllos to Promise to Take the Prey Woman Iole as His Wife After Heracles' Death

*In this quasi as only a second request:* "Another small favor to those other great ones! 1217 // (1217) of the long-suffering Heracles is embedded as the final request of Heracles (and of the tragedy), the moral enforcement of Hyllos' promise that he should take Iole, the prey-woman, as his wife after Heracles' death: Heracles (vers1225-1228 // (1225-1227): Take her as your wife! And do not disobey your father. And no other man [...] shall ever receive her except you.

Hyllos is horrified, but then makes the promise to his father. With this (actual) final act of the tragedy, Sophocles again shows, as later in *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, how marriage politics (by order, destiny, will), which were common at the time, banished individuals, women and men in the bourgeoisie of the Greek classical period into psychological, familial and ultimately social unhappiness. It is a great achievement of Sophocles to have brought these themes to the stage for social reflection.

Flashar ([5] p. 84) believes that Sophocles' tragedy does not allude to the apotheosis of Heracles. This would also contradict the transformation of this tragedy into the bourgeois quasi-realistic, which we can recognize, and thus the sociological concern of Sophocles regarding the representation of the great family misfortune which the husbands with prey wives caused in their families and thus in the bourgeoisie of classical Athens.

Flashar writes that Heracles embodies an archaic vitality that bursts into the world of values of the polis of the fifth century (BC) as if from a pre-rational early age ([5] p. 97). He also believes that the Sophoclean design of the "Women of Trachis" corresponds to a basic situation that was current at the time of the poet ([5] p. 96).

## 5. Conclusions

The tragedy suggests that in Classical Greece, nothing had probably changed in the treatment of women (prey women and family) compared to the time of the Iliad and that the Athenians continued to live in the time of the Iliad and the earlier "dark centuries" in this respect.

Without a sociological, psychological and medical approach, applied to the tragedies that contain such themes in Sophocles and also Euripides in excellent execution, we will not do justice to these brilliant poets. We are left with interpretations that lack sociological, psychological and medical understanding<sup>17</sup>.

Intensive sociological research would probably bring to light more evidence of how significant Sophocles' theme of the prey women was in classical Athens. People are apparently still inclined (see Wikipedia, above) to accept the principle of the prey women as not particularly worth mentioning. This tragedy by Sophocles shows us the opposite.

## Note

Sophocles (2007): Dramas Greek and German. COLLECTION TUSCULUM. Scientific advice Gerhard Fink Niklas Holzberg. Rainer Nickel. Bernhard Zimmermann. Edited and translated by Herbert Willige, revised by Karl Bayer. With annotations. With notes and an introduction by Bernhard Zimmermann. 5th edition 2007. 2003 Patmos Verlag GmbH + Co. KG. Artemis and Winkler. Düsseldorf. The second verse references after the verse references in the Schadewaldt edition are taken from the above TUSKULUM edition, as these are somewhat more line-exact than the Schadewaldt edition and this TUSKULUM edition contains the text in Greek line-exactly.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

## Appendix

K. R. Eissler (1985; 1992): 2 letters to Dr. Tiedemann on the publications in the Jahrbuch Psychoanalyse Vol. 18, 1986; Vol. 22, 1988; Vol. 35, 1995. The author sent the manuscripts of these 3 publications simultaneously with the submission to the editors of the Jahrbuch Psychoanalyse, Dr. Eickhoff and Prof. Loch, also to K.R.Eissler for information.

At [www.goethe-psy.de](http://www.goethe-psy.de)

You can read Eissler's handwritten letters in Sütterlin script. This script is mostly unknown to today's readers, so the texts are reproduced here in the appendix in block letters. Also translated into English with DEEPL.Deutsch: EISSLER-BRIEFE 1985 u. 1992 to author

K.R. EISSLER. M.D. 300 CENTRAL PARK WEST NEW YORK. N.Y. 10024 TRAFALGAR 3-2746

28 // II // 85

Sehr geehrter Herr Tiedemann

Sie haben mir mit der Zusendung Ihres Ms eine große Freude bereitet. Es ist ein Vergnügen es zu lesen + ist überzeugend.

Ich freue mich, dass es im Drucke erscheinen wird.

Mit herzlichen Empfehlungen

verbleibe ich Ihr

Ihnen ergebener

KR Eissler

Englisch: EISSLER-LETTERS 1985 and 1992

K.R. EISSLER. M.D.

300 CENTRAL PARK WEST

NEW YORK. N.Y. 10024 TRAFALGAR 3-2746

28 // II // 85

Dear Mr. Tiedemann

You have given me great pleasure by sending me your ms. It is a pleasure to read it + is convincing.

I am glad that it will appear in print.

With warm regards

I remain your

devoted to you.

KR Eissler

-----  
Deutsch: VIA AIRMAIL

Dr. Tiedemann Germany

K.R. EISSLER. M.D. 300 CENTRAL PARK WEST NEW YORK. N.Y. 10024 TRAFALGAR 3-2746 27 Nov 1992

Sehr geehrter Herr Doktor

vielen Dank für die Zusendung

von 2 Ihrer Arbeiten. Es ist

ein Genuss sie zu lesen

Sie sind charmant, magisch

+ (und) sehr belehrend.

Sie loben mich zu sehr +

erwähnen nicht die Fehler

+ Vergehen die Sie sicher

bei mir entdeckt haben.  
Mit den besten Empfehlungen und  
Wünschen Ihr Ihnen ergebener K. R. Eissler.

Englisch: VIA AIRMAIL  
MD AUTOR Germany  
K.R. EISSLER. M.D. 300 CENTRAL PARK WEST NEW  
YORK. N.Y. 10024 TRAFALGAR 3-2746 27 Nov 1992

Dear Doctor

Thank you very much for sending me  
Of 2 of your papers. It is a pleasure to read them

They are charming, magical

+ (and) very instructive.

You praise me too much +

do not mention the faults

+ misdemeanors that you surely

have discovered in me.

With the best recommendations and

wishes your devoted K. R. Eissler.

*Dr. Rolf Tiedemann. Facharzt für Psychiatrie,  
Psychotherapie*

*Einsteinstrasse 127. 81675 München. Germany.*

[www.bnppn.de](http://www.bnppn.de)

[www.goethe-psy.de](http://www.goethe-psy.de)

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- theorems known to the Pythagoreans and probably also presented a certain part of circular geometry. Hippocrates was known for his squaring of bisecting circles (lunar shapes). He also contributed to the solution of the problem of cube doubling ([18] p. 291. Edited by M.C. Howatson).
- 11 ([33]).
- 12 ([32] Lecture. Publ. in preparation.
- 13 ([31]).
- 14 Goethe considered the Bacchae to be Euripides' best tragedy ([16]. The Auerbachs-Keller scene in FAUST1 presumably pays homage to Euripides' Bacchae. In it, Goethe shows that he is also able to describe the symptomatology of alcoholism in a first-class manner ([30] p.20-24).
- 15 ([31] p.215[.
- 16 A. Rubel describes how the Dionysia was a special event for the Athenian public. Up to 14,000 spectators gathered in the theater, including tourists from other cities and representatives of the League of Nations. Almost everyone had practical experience in the field of music. The Dionysia alone required around 1,200 citizens and boys as performers. Many Athenians were familiar with the world of music and theater or had come into direct contact with it. In the schools reading and writing were practiced on Homeric texts. The audience was therefore well prepared for the tragedies. All this spurred the authors, tragedy and comedy writers to perform at their best. The informed and art-critical audience was a persistent and enthusiastic mass audience. Athens celebrated itself in the Dionysia ([19] p. 163 f.).
- 17 Euripides is known to have had a library ([37] p.11). It is assumed that Euripides came into contact with the oldest writings of the Corpus Hippocraticum. Presumably Euripides would also reflect pre-Hippocratic medicine, which went far beyond the heroic medicine of the Homeric epics and thus of the Bronze Age. It
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- 1 Extended version of a lecture at the conference "Psychopathology, Art and Literature" on September 23, 2011 in the Aula Scarpa, University of Pavia. Symposium "Gelosia - Jealousy". Apertura dei lavori: Profs. Dietrich von Engelhardt - Elena Agazzi - Angelo Canavesi - Federica La Manna. 23-25. Sept. 2011.
- 2 In Reclam's Lexicon of Antiquity (2006), the term "prey woman" ("Beutefrau") is not found, neither among women nor among female slaves ([18]).
- 3 <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophokles>; und des Heilgottes Amynos ([5] p. 17).
- 4 ([31]).
- 5 Sophocles was awarded first prize at the Dionysian Festival at least 18 times, as attested by inscriptions ([15] p. 249), and never third prize.
- 6 To avoid any misunderstandings: I greatly appreciate W. Schadewaldt, especially for his pioneering contributions to Goethe research, particularly on FAUST. Schadewaldt published 27 years before me ([29] that the boy's fairy tale from "Dichtung und Wahrheit", DuW, is the basic structure of FAUST-2 and that both poems correspond exactly ([20]. K.R. Eissler, the author of the large 2-volume psychoanalytic study of Goethe ([2] found, as he wrote to me, the idea that Goethe had elaborated the boys' fairy tale, consisting of two children's dreams, into FAUST poetry by means of some dream laws already recognized by Goethe convincing ([3]).
- 7 The Trachians were listed earlier than Oedipus Rex, probably between 438 and 433 BC ([5] p. 82).
- 8 ([31] p.219 and p.226).
- 9 ([31] p.215 and p.229); and ([1] p.77).
- 10 His writings are lost. He was the first to compile a volume of Elements of Geometry (the forerunner of Euclid's Elements), which must have contained the

can also be assumed that Euripides was interested in the immediate contemporary innovations of the awakening Hippocratic medicine and that he always sought to be at the cutting edge of knowledge ([14] p.342f; p.371]. Moog points very impressively to Euripides' interest and ability in psychological problems and representations. However, he apparently did not consult a psychiatrist or psychologist for his interpretation of the bacchae. For example, the delirium symptoms described for pages and a detailed description of the identification process (Pentheus with the later aggressor Agaue, his mother ([32]), are not mentioned by Moog. In the book "Euripides" ([24], some authors acknowledge Euripides' interest in psychology but, very noticeably, do not consult any psychological or psychiatric expertise. On psychopathology in the Hippocratic writings, see ([13].