Among the many classical voices echoed in the works of modern artists, Sophocles’ voice is one of the most audible and most distinct. Endorsed by Aristotle as the creator of the finest of dramas, Sophocles has been read as the pinnacle of the classical achievement, resting midway between the raw severity of Aeschylus and the baroque innovations of Euripides. His is a voice of inspiration, heroic individual perseverance in the face of overwhelming opposition and crushing adversity. A modern audience, however, will also recognize in his works distressing images of mental anguish and emotional damage, self-absorption and self-delusion, and more than enough doubt and uncertainty to sate the modern appetite for anxiety. His legacy today rests largely on two of the seven tragedies that survive intact. One is Antigone, the monumental clash of the state and the family, the group and the individual, conformity and disobedience, political law and divine law. In a century that suffered tyranny in so many vicious guises—National Socialism, fascism, and communist totalitarianism—Antigone is repeatedly adapted to voice the defiance of the oppressed. The other is Oedipus Tyrannus, the supreme illustration of man’s inability to control his destiny, to appreciate the significance of his own actions, or to grasp fully his true nature. Freud’s embrace of the myth as an archetype for the darkest impulses repressed in the human soul has certainly fuelled its popularity, but Sophocles’ drama remains the authoritative source of inspiration for artists seeking to tap the tragic power of the Oedipus legend. The other plays are emulated with much less frequency, Ajax and Trachiniae hardly at all. But the twentieth century witnessed powerful resurrections of the

1 On the reception of Greek tragedies and Greek tragedy in general, see especially Burian (1997b); Flashar (2009); Garland (2004); Hall/Macintosh/Wrigley (2004); McDonald (1992) and (2003). Also see the notes below on adaptations of individual plays.

2 On the reception of Antigone, see Steiner (1984).

3 On adaptations of Oedipus Tyrannus, see Burian (1997b) 240–253.

intransigent hero of *Oedipus at Colonus*, the bloodthirsty heroine of *Electra*, and even the bitterly hateful Philoctetes.⁵

Metaphors and models for describing the relationships between classical works of art and their modern analogues are plentiful, from the botanical classification of roots and branches, to the Oedipal obsession with intergenerational conflict. And while no single metaphor, biological or otherwise, can fully encompass the creative engagement of artist with model, I find it helpful to read this engagement as a dialogue, a dialogue which the attentive audience is frequently invited to overhear. The interlocutors may or may not agree; their exchange may lead to heated confrontation, rejection, and denial; or they may build on each other’s ideas, discovering new possibilities through their co-operative efforts. The more engaging dialogues are generally those involving a process of give and take, acknowledging both the classical and the modern contribution, recognizing universality through the juxtaposition of particulars. They challenge the audience to hear both voices and to discern the harmonies and the dissonances between them. In what follows I offer a limited survey of examples from the early twentieth century to the present. I have omitted consideration of painting and sculpture, as the modern predilection for visual abstraction resists extended engagement with Sophocles and with narrative art in general. I have concentrated instead on some of the more audible Sophoclean echoes in theatre and film, but even here the list is hardly comprehensive, and many simulating works have been unfairly excluded. This limited selection will nevertheless suffice to demonstrate the richness and complexity of the modern dialogue with Sophocles.

Hugo von Hofmannstahl’s 1903 play *Elektra* and the opera Richard Strauss subsequently produced in collaboration with Hofmannstahl (1907) feature a decidedly modern reincarnation of Sophocles’ heroine.⁶ A century earlier Goethe had endorsed purification and healing as tragedy’s highest spiritual functions in his *Iphigenie in Tauris* (1786), a reworking of Euripides’ drama. Orestes suffers from a debilitating madness as a consequence of murdering his mother—one of the most horrific violations in the mythological repertoire—but he achieves a miraculous catharsis through the saintly purity of his sister Iphigenie. The incorruptible heroine succeeds both in abolishing the barbaric ritual of human sacrifice and in soothing violent

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⁶ On Hofmannstahl and Strauss, see Puffett (1989).