

threats or protests, as in the *agon*-scenes of comedy; word rebounds against word, reproach against reproach, maxim against maxim. There is so little attempt to disguise the genre that the *agon* is even described as such in the choral anapaests that introduce the second half (1163). Thus as a method of representing the opponents, the *agon* appears to our minds to be unduly restricted by the formal nature of its construction. Instead of situations which develop from the *nature* of the pervading hostility, there is a ready-made *schema*, a mere substitute for it, which has to be filled with the appropriate ingredients. Perhaps the lack of development, movement and progress is due to the traditional nature of the form. Even the grudging retraction of Agamemnon which is provoked by Odysseus makes no difference. The attitudes of the opponents at the end are just the same as they were at the beginning; the strife continues to rage in all its fury but it does not shift its ground – and in this too it is similar to the *agon*-scenes of comedy.

The tableau on the stage makes amends to us for this in one respect: all the time that the brawl is growing in intensity, Tecmessa and Eury-saces kneel in the background, guarding the body, a silent, motionless group. The child holds in his hand the hair-offerings of his family as a gift to his dead father, in the posture prescribed by Teucer (1180):

*Teucer*

Take it, dear child, and guard it, and let no one  
Remove you, but cling fast, inclining over him . . .

At the end, the chorus divides, going away in groups to either side, as Teucer commands: to dig the grave, erect the tripod, fetch the armour. . . . Teucer and the boy remain by the dead man, they raise him – he is still bleeding.

Thus there is much in this play that is unique. Methods which will be discarded by Sophocles in his later work stand cheek by jowl with others which point ahead to later developments. Above all there is the conception of a single figure who is presented in only one or two situations, which is unparalleled in the later plays. To a greater extent than any of the later works, the *Ajax* seems to have been composed around this central character; the rest of the characters are seen in the light of this dominating figure, whether they interpret it, look back at it, or stand in contrast to it. But the interpretation falls short of the conception, and the form of the play seems to conform to the religious drama of the older style rather than to rise from the heart of the work. It is not until the *Oedipus Tyrannus* that both form and content grow together so as to form a perfect unity.

## 13

*ANTIGONE: DEATH AND LOVE,  
HADES AND DIONYSUS*

CHARLES SEGAL

Antigone's lonely journey to the cave and Hades follows an ancient heroic pattern, the dangerous quest into the unknown, which pervades ancient literature from the Gilgamesh Epic through the *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, and beyond. Her heroic journey, however, also has a distinctly feminine character. She defies the city in the name of the house, and she takes on the role of Kore the Maiden, carried off to marry Death in the Underworld and then returned, after a period of barrenness and mourning on earth, with the joyful new vegetative life of the spring. Antigone's cave is a place of contact between worlds: between life and death, between Olympian and chthonic divinity, between gods and men. In moving into the darkness of the cave Antigone effects a passage between life and death, the familiar and the unknown, vitality and sterility. This experience is in part modeled on that of Kore-Persephone in her descent to become the bride of Hades.

Antigone, however, is a Kore who does not rise again to new life. She refers to herself repeatedly as 'bride of Hades', a term that makes the analogy with Persephone unmistakable, particularly as the association with Persephone was a regular feature of funerary practices and funerary epigrams for girls who died young.<sup>1</sup> Yet although the Eleusinian Demeter plays a prominent role in the fifth stasimon, there is no clear allusion to the return of her daughter. When Antigone invokes Persephone by name in the context of her imminent descent to Hades as her 'underground bridal chamber' (*nymphaeion*, 891, 1205), it is to Persephone as queen of the dead, 'she who has received the greatest number of my perished (kinsmen) among the dead' (893-894).

*From Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1981) pp. 179-88. Reprinted by permission of the author. Text excerpted by the author from a lengthier chapter with certain footnotes omitted for this edition. Those referring to this essay for scholarly purposes are requested to consult the original version.

The mythic paradigm of Persephone enlarges the reversal of upper and lower realms predicted by Teiresias. Not only are rites of burial and sacrifice inverted but the Kore's cycle of descent and ascent as well. This Kore remains in the lower world and draws her living spouse down after her. We may recall again Antigone's special devotion to the cult of the dead and to 'the Justice who shares her house with the gods below' (451).

In the Kore myth the maternal figure, Demeter, remains a constant source of hope for the return to life and light. In this play that figure is Eurydice, whose name, 'the wide-ruling one', signifies the Queen of the Dead. At the end, more like Antigone's Niobe than the chorus' Demeter (cf. 1120 ff.), she mourns the hopeless death of her children and then returns to the death-filled interior recesses of the doomed house. A *mater dolorosa*, she too is drawn into the dark, Hades-like hollows of enclosure. There is no Demeter-like mother left alive to call the Kore back to life. The maternal figures of the fourth stasimon, Danae, Cleopatra, Eidothea, either suffer or inflict imprisonment and in the last example destroy rather than nurture children.

Antigone herself doubles with the grieving figure of the Great Mother. In comparing herself to the petrified Niobe, she projects an image of herself as the *mater dolorosa* as well as the maiden wedded to Hades. Logically, Antigone cannot be Kore and Demeter at the same time. Yet mythic imagery often operates with exactly this fruitfully illogical union of opposites. Here a mythic archetype is split into two contradictory and yet simultaneously coexisting aspects of the self. The Kore is also the mother at an earlier stage. So here Antigone, who takes on herself the task of burying and mourning the dead son, often the role of the mother or wife, is the Earth Mother who grieves over her children. The maiden claimed by Death, who ought to be resurrected with the new life of the year, will instead remain in the Underworld with her dead (893-894).

Sophocles' dramatic structure makes clear the discrepancy between the reality of Antigone's life and the mythic patterns to which she assimilates herself. She is a virgin girl, neither mythical *mater dolorosa* nor a maiden wedded to a god in the Underworld. Her union with death, though figuratively a marriage, is in fact a cruel, desolate end. Her future husband, a living mortal not the awesome god below, chooses the same cavernous hollow and the same doom but with no hope of any future union. The pattern of universal renewal of vitality implicit in the Kore myth contrasts also with the bleak reality facing Creon's city. It, too, has lost touch with those cosmic processes that involve passage between Olympian and chthonic realms, the interchange between life and death, renewal and destruction.

No longer a principle of continued life, this Kore-figure appropriates a *mater dolorosa*, ever-weeping Niobe, image of her own crystallized grief. No new life after a sojourn in darkness awaits her, but perpetual sadness and loss. Haemon, plunging into the cave, claims his bride-of-death as an inaccessible Kore, whom he can embrace only in a grimly funereal version of a sexual union (1236-41). In the Kore myth the grieving Demeter's withdrawal threatens to extinguish life on earth, but she relinquishes grief when Zeus 'leads holy Persephone forth from the murky darkness into the light' (Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, 337-338; cf. 302-309). Thereupon Demeter again 'sends the grain upward from the fertile plowlands, and all the wide earth is heavy with leafage, heavy with flowers' (471-473). In this play, however, the divinely sanctioned command, 'Send up the maiden (*korē*) from the dwelling dug beneath (the earth),' is not fulfilled (1100-1101). The phrasing of these lines, literally 'send the *korē* upward,' uses the same verb of ascent (*an-hiēmi*) as the Eleusinian text, where Demeter, mourning her daughter underground, refuses to 'send upward' the rising grain (*Hymn to Demeter* 307, 332, 471). Sophocles' Kore-figure, however, leaves house and kingdom plunged in darkness and sterility, both literally and metaphorically.

Each of the male characters discovers that aspect of the female appropriate to his experience and attitude. Haemon, a victim of Eros, is united with Antigone as the bride of Death. Creon will find in the female figure who dwells in the recesses of his house neither Kore nor Demeter but their complement, the grieving mother and 'wide-ruling' (Eury-Dike) Queen of the Dead, whose desolation has now spread over his entire realm. Having denied the basic ties of kinship and the sanctity of family bonds, he finds his wife a corpse, herself the 'all-mother of the corpse' (1282). As a manifestation of chthonic female power and maternal vengeance, she makes the interior spaces of his own house (*mychoi*, 1293) a dark place of corpses (1298-1300).

It is not by accident, therefore, that the tale of the disasters of his house centers on Eurydice. The full, grim account is addressed not to the chorus but to Eurydice as she emerges from the house (1181-82, 1184) to address Pallas Athena in prayer (1184). These prayers to Olympian Athena, goddess of the city in all its glory, are answered, in a sense, by Creon's belated, failed prayers to the chthonic Hecate and Pluto (1199-1200) as catastrophe inside the gates of house and city (*oikeion kakon*, 1187; *penthos oikeion*, 1249) overwhelms victories outside the gates. Creon had defended the gates and ramparts of 'seven-gated Thebes' from invaders outside, as the chorus joyfully sang in the parode (101, 122, 141). When Eurydice crosses the gate (*pylē*, 1186) of her house to the outside, it is only for a moment. Then she returns within (1255), to

draw Creon with her into the dark spaces of that Hades-house, as she draws him after her into the dark, passionate grief which she 'secretly hides held down in her angered heart' (*katascheton / kryphē(i) kalyptei kardia(i) thymoumenē(i)*, 1253-54; note the powerful alliteration).

These reversals and their spatial analogues of ascent or descent find other mythical correlates in the last two odes of the play. The three myths of the fourth stasimon, Danae, Lycurgus, and the blinding of Phineus' sons, all have to do with imprisonment and deprivation of light. The first myth, that of Danae, has the closest analogies to Antigone's situation. Danae, like Antigone, 'changes the light of the sky' for a confining chamber's vault (944-946) and is 'hidden in a tomb-like chamber' (946-947; cf. 886-887). Yet this downward movement of a mortal into darkness is balanced by a happier descent on the part of Zeus, whose 'gold-flowing seed' (*gonai*, 950) accomplishes a sexual union and a reunion with life which are denied Antigone. The implicit comparison, like Antigone's own comparison of herself to Niobe, has its pathos: Antigone will be the bride of Hades, not of Olympian Zeus. Like the Niobe simile, it suggests the frustrated rhythms of fertility and renewal (cf. 827-832). For King Lycurgus, however, who corresponds much more closely to Creon, imprisonment in a cave is a punishment only, and this is appropriate to Creon's 'descent'.

In the grim third myth, the tale of the blinding of Cleopatra's two sons by their stepmother in Thrace, the motif of the cave veers between savagery and divine ancestry. Daughter of the wind god Boreas and the Athenian Oreithyia, Cleopatra 'received her nurture in distant caves, amid the winds of her father' (983-985). Yet her kinship with Boreas in the far North also connects her with the violence of nature (*thyellai*, 'winds,' usually indicates destructive storms). At the opposite extreme from the subjugated nature of Creon's city and close to Niobe in her identification with the forces of the wild, she is nevertheless deprived of the civilized city par excellence, the Athens of her mother, 'seed of the Erechtheids of ancient birth' (*sperma archaiogonōn antas' Erechtheidān*, 981-982). 'Seed' and 'birth' here take up the theme of marriage and fertility from the previous strophe.

Cleopatra's blinded sons 'have their origin from an unhappily married mother' (so Jebb for *matros echontes anympheuton gonan*, 980). *Anympheutos gona*, however, means literally 'wedless birth'. Not only does it contrast to the 'ancient birth' of her Erechtheid ancestry in the next line, but in moving from the sky god's 'birth seed' (*gonai*, 950) to the dark, cavernous spaces of dangerous stepmother it cancels out Danae's Zeus-sent, fruitful 'births' (950) and recalls the unfulfilled 'birth' of Antigone, the 'brideless bride' of Hades (*nympheusō*, 816; *an-hymenaios*,

876; *nympheion*, 891). The grim 'bride rites' (*nymphika*) of Hades in the cave will then definitively cancel 'births' (1240; cf. *nympheion Haidou*, 1205). In the same semantic field as 'birth,' 'the dragon's seed' (*spora drakontos*, 1125) is connected with the death of Creon's sons in present and in past (cf. 1302-1305). Thus Danae and Cleopatra interlock with Niobe as multivalent paradigms for the hopes of fertile marriage and their destruction in the house of Antigone and Creon. They also bring the deeper mythic pattern of Kore and Demeter closer into the foreground. The struggle between Creon and Antigone expands to include a dialectic between house and cave, city and wild nature, central Greece (Argos, Athens) and the remote periphery (Thrace) in these myths of royal women encountering divinity.

The fifth stasimon, the Ode to Dionysus, returns us again to nature's fertility (1131 ff.) and to astral imagery (1126 ff., 1146 ff.). The starlit night sky of the purifying Dionysus (1144, 1146-47) sets off by contrast Creon's figurative descent from happiness to misery (1155 ff.) and the literal details of his descent to the cave (1204 ff.).

This cave and the dark forces which it contains prove to be the final test of Creon's conception of human power and of Antigone's tragic heroism. For her it is a place of tragic isolation and tragic fulfillment, ambiguous locus of the tension between her devotion to loved ones and death-bent, stony heroism.<sup>2</sup> For Creon the cave symbolizes all that he has repressed. It is the subterranean reservoir of dark passions and the place of lonely encounter with love and death, Eros and Hades. The Eros which Creon denied in a crude image drawn from the arts of civilization ('There are other fields for him to plow,' 569) returns in the cave to defeat him: Eros takes his son from him and gives him to Antigone for an inverted union in the realm of the dead (1240-41).

The conflict between Creon and Antigone is not only between city and house, but also between man and woman.<sup>3</sup> Creon identifies his political authority and his sexual identity. 'If this victory (*kratē*) rests with her without punishment, then I am not the man, but she's the man' (484-485). The word *kratē*, 'victory', 'power', repeatedly describes his sovereign power in the state (166, 173, for example). He sees Antigone, then, as a challenge to his most important values and his self-image. 'A woman will not rule me (*arxei*) while I live', he says a little later, again linking the conflict of the sexes with political power.

In this same speech Creon confronts an opposing principle of an especially feminine kind, Antigone's 'reverence for those of the same womb', *homosplanchnous sebein* (511). On this basis Antigone defends herself against the male-oriented, civic ethic of the polis. She makes kinship a function of the female procreative power: she defines kinship in

terms of the womb (*splanchna*). Thus at the end of her great speech on the unwritten laws she calls Polyneices 'the one (born) from my mother, dead' (*ton ex emēs / mētros thanonta*) whom she, for that reason, will not leave 'a corpse unburied' (*athapton . . . nekyn*, 466-467). As her defiance of Creon continues into the stichomythy, her word *homosplanchnos* some fifty lines later etymologically defines 'brother' as 'one of the same womb' (511). *Homosplanchnos* calls attention to the root meaning of the familiar word for 'brother', *adelphos*, from *a-* ('same', equivalent to *homo-*) and *delphys* ('womb', equivalent to *splanchna*).<sup>4</sup> In this view of kinship she reopens, on a personal level, the debate between Apollo and the Erinyes in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*;<sup>5</sup> however, she gives the decisive tie of blood not to the father's seed, as Olympian Apollo and Olympian Athena do (*Eumenides* 657-666, 734-741), but to the mother's womb.

Antigone's definition of kinship as *homosplanchnous sebein* reaches deep into the conflicts of values in the fifth-century polis. The establishment of Cleisthenian democracy at the beginning of the century rested, in part, on breaking down the power of the clan and blood ties; instead, allegiance to the polis was to subsume and transcend the ties of blood. Benveniste's study of kinship terminology in Greece takes this conflict back a stage further.<sup>6</sup> The Greek vocabulary of kinship sharply distinguishes between male and female lineage. The old Indo-European term for 'brother', *phratēr* (I.E. *\*bhratēr*, Latin *frater*) survives in the Greek term for the members of a phratry (*phratēr*; cf. *phratra*). The phratry consists of men united as members of the male band through the masculine, patriarchal line and 'issued mystically from the same father'.<sup>7</sup> Though based on kinship, it is kinship extending beyond the *oikos* into the polis, where it has political power.<sup>8</sup> An old term for 'brother', *kasis*, *kasignētos*, which may originally have denoted maternal lineage, becomes assimilated to the strictly paternal line, and the original Indo-European word for 'sister' (equivalent to Latin *soror*) is then lost. For brothers related by blood Greek then develops a new term, *adelphos*, 'of the same womb' (*a-delphys*), which denotes kinship through the mother. Symmetrical to *adelphos* is *homogastrios*, or the doublet, *ogastōr*, literally 'co-uterine', from *gastēr*, 'belly', 'womb'. Antigone's *homosplanchnos* is the exact equivalent of *homogastrios*. Whether or not *homogastrios* and *homosplanchnos* are historical survivals of a pre-Indo-European matrilinear system of kinship in Greece does not concern us here. What is important for the *Antigone* is that the distinction between paternal and maternal lineage is a live issue for audiences of mid-fifth century Athens.

Antigone does not phrase her conflict with Creon strictly in terms of maternal versus paternal kinship, but that division is relevant since

Cleisthenes' reforms involved cutting across the exclusive blood ties of the clan or *genos*, where ties through the mother are more obvious.<sup>9</sup> As Freud long ago pointed out, paternity is only an inferential relation, whereas maternity is immediate and visual. There can be no doubt about the mother who has given birth to the child, but there is no equivalent certainty about the father who sired it.<sup>10</sup> It is in keeping with Creon's fierce adherence to the polis and his inferential, abstractive mentality that he leans heavily on patriarchal lineage and authority (639-647; cf. 635). His stress on patriarchy, though illogical in one sense (see 182-183), is congruent with his antifeminine, antimaternal attitude (see, e.g., 569).<sup>11</sup> The conflict between him and Antigone, then, is not just between family and city, but between fundamentally different concepts of life.

That conflict necessarily involves Creon's son, the extension of his power in the male line both in the city and in the house. As the victory of Orestes in the *Eumenides* reflects a successful separation of the male adolescent from his ties to the mother and an initiation into the male society of phratry and polis,<sup>12</sup> the death of Haemon reflects just the opposite: the failure of the political tie of the male band to pull the youth away from the mother to the city and a return to the womb as the underground cavern, the mysterious seat of life-and-death, the elemental procreative power which remains under the control of the woman, the 'All-Mother', whom Creon will soon encounter in her destructive and vengeful aspect. Haemon thereby rejects not only his father but also his adult male role of political responsibility in the city, succeeding his father to the throne of Thebes. In both literal and symbolical action he fulfills Creon's worst fear, 'alliance' with the woman (740; cf. 648-651).

The tie through blood alone, through the womb, Antigone makes the basis of her *philia*. *Philia*, which includes notions of 'love', 'loyalty', 'friendship', and 'kinship', is another fundamental point of division between Creon and Antigone. An exchange a few lines after her 'reverence for the *homosplanchnoi*' (511) sharpens the clash between the two views (522-523):

Creon: The enemy (*echthros*) is not a loved one (*philos*), not even when he is dead.

Antig.: It is my nature to share not in enmity, but in loving (*synechthein, symphilein*).

Creon here repeats his political definition of *philos* from his first speech (182-183), but now it is opposed by Antigone's fierce personal loyalties. Once more the 'sameness' of the womb cuts through that principle of differentiation that separates *philos* from *echthros*. Creon's 'politicization

of burial' distinguishes between the two brothers as hostile political forces: 'The one he promotes in honor; the other he dishonors' (22).<sup>13</sup> To Antigone, however, those 'of the same womb' are worthy of the same degree of honor (*timē*) and love (*philia*). The *homo-splanchnoi* are to be joined in the sister's *sym-philein*.

Antigone's claim of sameness, however, overlooks a critical difference. As the first ode points out, origin from that one womb is a source of horror and pollution: the two brothers are the 'miserable wretches who, born from one father and one mother, levelled double-conquering spears against one another and so won, both of them, a common share of death' (143-146).

The contrast of 'one' and 'two', the use of the dual forms, the interplay between 'common' and 'both' in the last line all stress the pollution: 'They destroyed one another in double portion on one day, smiting and being smitten with pollution of the same hand' (*autocheir miasma*), says Creon soon after (170-172). That those so intimately linked in 'oneness' should suffer such violent 'difference' is itself the expression of an infectious division in the house. It is Antigone's tragic task to insist on the ultimate 'oneness' or 'sameness' and thereby close over this difference.

The struggle is marked in her opening words. Her striking phrase of address to Ismene, 'common self-(wombed) sister' (*koinon autadelphon*, 1), attempts to reaffirm family unity in blood against the harsh reality of Ismene's picture of the 'two' brothers who on 'one day' died with 'double hand' (13-14). Antigone's 'common' sister contrasts also with the chorus' 'common death' (146) of the two brothers. That phrasing of kinship in the first line of the play intensifies the blood tie and points back, in turn, to the deeper horrors of sameness in the house of Oedipus, the incestuous marriage and the patricide.<sup>14</sup> 'The woes that come from Oedipus' occur in her second line. Even her dual form when speaking of herself and Ismene in the third line has its significance, for it repeatedly denotes the polluted fratricides (recall 143-146, above) and comes to mark a shift of allegiance on Antigone's part as she leaves the living kin for her bond to the dead. Creon's path is, of course, just the opposite: he insists on 'difference' and carries it to its logical conclusion in the face of those bonds of 'sameness' which the gods finally vindicate. The list below will recapitulate:

<i>Creon</i>	<i>Antigone</i>
<i>Philoï</i> as those devoted to city	<i>Philoï</i> as kin ties
Differentiation by political loyalties	Oneness of 'same womb'
Separation from mother	Return to womb and mother (earth)
Patriarchal kinship (phratry)	Matrilinear kinship ( <i>homosplanchnoi</i> )

Earth as a political territory	Earth as locus of blood kinship
Earth as plowed terrain	Earth as receiver of the dead
World above (Olympian religion)	World below (chthonic gods)
Control over nature	Fusion and sympathy with nature
Use of death	Acceptance of death
Rejection of <i>eros</i> (cf. 569)	Tragic death as 'Hades' bride'
<i>Logos</i> (mutually exclusive alternatives)	<i>Mythos</i> (paradox)
Future or gnomic present	Past (the dead, inherited curse)
Calculations of time	Timeless
Manipulative rationality	Emotionality

Parallel to the loss of the unreturned Kore in the house of Oedipus is the premature death of the unmarried son in the house of Creon. Here Creon's strength crumbles at its weakest point, that is, at the point of his own link with the cycle of generation. In the two encounters with Haemon in the middle and at the end of the play Creon has his sharpest confrontation with forces beyond his control. Haemon is Creon's link with a house through procreation. Antigone and the cave act, in a sense, as the agents of the powers of the house, earth, and death when they rob Creon of his last human ties. 'You will give one of those from your own loins' (*splanchna*), Teiresias warns, 'a corpse in exchange for corpses' (1066-67). Through Haemon Creon too feels deep physical and biological ties to the *splanchna*.<sup>15</sup> This word, as we have noted, generally denotes the womb and not the loins. It thus confuses Creon's rigid differentiation of male and female and thereby puts him in touch even more fundamentally with life and death.

Creon himself is deeply concerned with family solidarity, as his opening lines to Haemon make clear (639 ff.). Haemon sensitively exploits this sympathy with his father: he begins his plea, 'Father, I am yours' (635). But this concern on Creon's part only increases the pathos of his downfall through his alienation from every member of his house, living and dead (1302-1303). Exhibiting something of what Bergson called 'intellect's congenital lack of comprehension for life', he disregards until too late what his blood kin might teach him about the meaning of familial ties. Hence his house, instead of being a locus of civilized values and the place that transmits new life from generation to generation, becomes, like the house of Antigone and Oedipus, a place of death and savagery, a cavern-like 'harbor of Hades'.

Fleeing his father's house for the cave, Haemon exposes that house to the terrible savagery which in the fourth stasimon occurs in a far-off Thracian setting at the very limits of civilization. Here too the act of savagery (see *agria damar*, 'savage wife', 973) was directed against the

eyes (*ommata*, 974; cf. *agriā ossa*, 'savage eyes', 1231). These 'savage eyes' turned against the father by the son ironically echo the bitter father-son conflict earlier, where Haemon shouted out his bitter threat, 'Never will you see my face as you look upon me with your eyes' (764). 'Eyes' mark a progression from angry looks to deeds of bloody vengeance. Now 'the evils in the house', *ta en domois kaka* (1279-80), are the last blow to the king's tottering strength. Deeper father-son hostilities lurk in the background (cf. the Freudian equation, eyes = penis), but we cannot discuss those here.

When Creon uses the language of procreation, it is only to reinforce his authoritarian principles. Thus in his encounter with Haemon, he praises 'obedient offspring', literally 'obedient births' (*gonai*, 642). 'Begetting (*phiteusai*) useless offspring', he generalizes in his favorite mode of speech, only 'sires' (*physai*) trouble for oneself and laughter for one's enemies (645-647). Haemon's reply about the gods' 'planting' (*phyousi*) wits in men (683) takes a very different view of the process of birth as a metaphor for man's relation to nature.<sup>16</sup> This verb, *phyein*, involving growth, birth, procreation, not only points back to more mysterious aspects of birth (cf. 144, 866) but also includes Antigone's utterly opposite attitude toward birth, kinship, and 'inborn nature' or *physis* (see 523, 562).

Creon's demand for obedience assimilates the order of the house to the order of the city and levels out the difference between them: lack of authority, *anarchia*, 'destroys cities and overturns houses' (672-674). Scornfully dismissing ties of kinship with a slur on Antigone's reverence for 'Zeus who looks after kindred blood' (658-659), he asserts his principle that the man who is good in the realm of the house will also be just in the city (661-662). Creon's word for 'order' here, as elsewhere in this speech, is *kosmos* (660, 677, 730), the word used to describe Antigone's burial of the corpse (396, 901). The one subordinates kin ties to the 'order' of the polis; the other defies the polis to 'order' the rites owed to a dead kinsman.

## ON MISUNDERSTANDING THE *OEDIPUS REX*

E. R. DODDS

On the last occasion when I had the misfortune to examine in Honour Moderations at Oxford I set a question on the *Oedipus Rex*, which was among the books prescribed for general reading. My question was 'In what sense, if in any, does the *Oedipus Rex* attempt to justify the ways of God to man?' It was an optional question; there were plenty of alternatives. But the candidates evidently considered it a gift: nearly all of them attempted it. When I came to sort out the answers I found that they fell into three groups.

The first and biggest group held that the play justifies the gods by showing — or, as many of them said, 'proving' — that we get what we deserve. The arguments of this group turned upon the character of Oedipus. Some considered that Oedipus was a bad man: look how he treated Creon — naturally the gods punished him. Others said 'No, not altogether bad, even in some ways rather noble; but he had one of those fatal *hamartiai* that all tragic heroes have, as we know from Aristotle. And since he had a *hamartia* he could of course expect no mercy: the gods had read the *Poetics*.' Well over half the candidates held views of this general type.

A second substantial group held that the *Oedipus Rex* is 'a tragedy of destiny'. What the play 'proves', they said, is that man has no free will but is a puppet in the hands of the gods who pull the strings that make him dance. Whether Sophocles thought the gods justified in treating their puppet as they did was not always clear from their answers. Most of those who took this view evidently disliked the play; some of them were honest enough to say so.

The third group was much smaller, but included some of the more thoughtful candidates. In their opinion Sophocles was 'a pure artist' and

11. He has already called for him from his closed tent; this is therefore not a result of Tecmessa's plea.

12. Here too it is characteristic of Ajax that he speaks of his son's future *fate* as a hero; the comparison between youth and age, 554 ff., is similar to *Trachiniae*, 144 ff. in its gnomic style.

13. On the 'speech of deception' see Wolfgang Schadewaldt, *Neue Wege zur Antike*, viii (1929), 70 ff.; Wilamowitz, *Hermes*, lix (1924), 249 ff. (= *Kleine Schriften*, iv, 343 ff.); Welcker, *Kleine Schriften*, ii, 264; and the commentaries.

14. The ends of these two speeches are also similar, *Ajax*, 684 ff. and *Trach.* 467 ff. *Ajax*: 'But these things will be taken care of.' (This refers to his future friendships and enmities.) 'But you go in and pray to the gods that they may grant fulfilment of my heart's desire.' Similarly *Trach.* 467 ff.: 'But let all that drift away on a favourable wind. To you I say: tell lies to others if you like, but tell the truth to me.' In both passages the similarity does not lie only on the surface; the wish which appears to be benevolent really carries a sinister meaning: my friendships and enmities will be well taken care of when I am dead. Similarly in the other case: 'But let all that drift away on a favourable wind'; Deianira seems to accept the new liaison so calmly, but in fact she herself invites the danger which it implies. (I translate: 'with a favourable wind'; Radermacher's interpretation seems to me untenable. The accompanying wind is also 'favourable' in Aeschylus' *Septem*, 690: favourable, that is, for the downfall, since that is the direction in which Apollo is forcing the house of Laius.)

15. The comments of Wilamowitz, *Hermes* (lix), 1924, 249 ff. (= *Kleine Schriften*, iv, 343 ff.), on this passage are very odd. Ajax's comparisons with the world of nature mean nothing to him; he ignores the tragic element in the tone of the speech; and he analyses it as follows: first, Ajax intended to apply 'a universal law', but suddenly, after a 'new reason had occurred' to him in the form of the *gnomē* of Bias on friendship, 'he could no longer pronounce the lie that he was giving in, but had to take refuge in an ambiguous expression . . . 'He loathes having to deceive', so that he 'soon gives up deception' and so forth. A complete reversal, then, according to Wilamowitz. Just imagine the actor, suddenly called on to express loathing of deception, and then inability to continue the deception! How is he to express this loathing? There is nothing about it in the text, so presumably he has to stop to insert a mimed interlude and no doubt other nuances so as to show his disgust. . . .

Moreover, imagine someone on the brink of suicide who is 'disgusted' by having to tell the 'lie' that he is going for a walk!

On the comparisons see also W. Schadewaldt, *Monolog und Selbstgespräch* (1926), 87.

16. Wilamowitz, *Hermes* lix, (1924), 250 (= *Kleine Schriften*, iv, 344), in order to explain Ajax's behaviour, refers to Pollux, viii, 120. So too Radermacher's commentary. But we would be failing to respond to the tragic tone of the passage if we were to take it as no more than a description of an effective magic ritual, as a plausible reason for Ajax to leave the stage. Ritual magic is accommodated to the tragic framework only in the sense that it draws attention to Ajax, in that it no longer appears as magic but as an action, that is, an act of dissimulation. Similarly, washing off the stain is the 'proof' which is 'to be found' so that he may demonstrate that he is a worthy son of his father, 472.

17. It is usually assumed that the stage remains empty for a while, and that Ajax then enters from the side through the *parodos* or behind a hitherto unnoticed bush, buries his sword in the earth in silence, and when he has done this stands in

front of it and speaks. Not to mention the impossibility of conveying the effect of great distance in this way, or the problems raised by the miming, this arrangement would also entail that the main scene, where Sophocles says 'Behold, the man', is thrust to one side of the stage instead of occupying the centre. This would have an extremely strange effect on the end of the play. No lamenting retinue, no funeral procession leaves the stage. The chorus exits in groups to either side; Teucer and the boy remain alone by the body and lift it up. This is the end. But how is the stage to be cleared? How will the group around the dead man leave the scene? Are the bushes to suffice for that too? He would have to be carried out eventually. But he could only be dragged along - by Teucer and the boy! And no curtain falls to hide them. The *ekkyklema* resolves all the difficulties. The width of this apparatus would allow its wings, its scenery, and the necessary properties to be pushed out together from the rear wall. Ajax's speech to his sword could begin at the same moment as the new scene was being pushed forward. Since its function was to reveal what cannot be seen on the stage, the *ekkyklema* could probably represent not only an interior but also a distant scene if necessary.

E. Bethe, *Rheinisches Museum*, lxxxiii (1934), 21 ff., tries to prove that the *ekkyklema* was never used. But there are too many arguments for its existence, not only from the comic poets, but also from indications in the texts themselves. The subject requires investigation in a monograph.

18. Cf. Radermacher's commentary, where the evidence is given.

Charles Segal: *Antigone: Death and Love, Hades and Dionysus* (pp. 167-176)

1. See J.-P. Guépin, *The Tragic Paradox* (Amsterdam, 1968), 141 and n. 35. For Antigone as the bride of Hades and the connections with Persephone see R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles, The Plays and Fragments*, Part III *Antigone* (Cambridge, 1891) on 1204; J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles Part III Antigone* (Leiden, 1978) on 801-5; H. J. Rose, 'Antigone and the Bride of Corinth', *Class. Quart.* 19 (1925), 147-50; P. Roussel, 'Les fiançailles d'Haimon et d'Antigone', *Rev. Et. Grec.* 25 (1922), 71, who points out also the inversion of the nuptial to the funeral procession.

2. For the care and the 'in-between' state of Antigone see Karl Reinhardt, *Sophocles*<sup>3</sup> (Frankfurt a.M., 1947), 90. This heavy emphasis on the cave may be Sophocles' invention. According to Ion of Chios (740 Page) she was burnt with Ismene by a son of Eteocles in a temple of Hera.

3. For the male-female conflict see 525, 678-80, 741, 756, and also Ismene in 61-2 and Creon in 290. See in general C. Segal, 'Sophocles' Praise of Man and the Conflicts of the *Antigone*' (1964), in Thomas Woodward, ed., *Sophocles: A Collection of Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966), 69-70; Kamerbeek on 484-5; R. F. Goheen, *The Imagery of Sophocles' Antigone* (Princeton, 1951), 88; J. H. Kells, 'Problems of Interpretation in the *Antigone*', *Bull. Inst. Class. Stud.* 10 (1963), 51-2.

4. In Aesch. *Sept.* 1031-2 Antigone laments the doom of her house connected with the burial of Polyneices with the cry 'Terrible the common womb - *koinon splanchnon* - from which we were born from our wretched mother and ill-fated father.' *Homosplanchnos* is used at *Sept.* 889-90 also in connection with the curse of the incestuous house, but in a somewhat different sense, as referring to the double fratricide. For *splanchna* of the womb and birth, see also Pindar, *Ol.* 6.43 and *Nem.* 1.45.

5. See Froma I. Zeitlin, 'The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the *Oresteia*', *Arethusa* 11, (1978), 149-84.
6. See in general Emile Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* (Paris, 1969), i, 212-15, 217-22.
7. *Ibid.*, i, 222.
8. The relation of the phratry to the significant political unit of the deme under Cleisthenes is not entirely clear. There seems to have been some overlap, and the phratries had some political significance: see W. K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1968), 92, 95-7.
9. See Lacey, 90-9.
10. For Greek views of filiation in the mid-fifth century and their relation to these issues see Zeitlin, *passim*, esp. 168-74 with the references in the notes on pp. 180-1.
11. For these contradictions in Creon's use of the family as a model of civic order (cf. 659 ff.) see Seth Benardete, 'A Reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*, II', *Interpretation* 5.1 (1975), 32-5.
12. See Zeitlin, 160 ff.
13. See Seth Benardete, 'A Reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*, I', *Interpretation* 4.3 (1975), 152, 176, 183.
14. See e.g. 51-2, 56-7, 146, 172 of the two brothers; 864-5 of Oedipus' incest. Compounds in *auto-* also mark Antigone's defiant burial of her brother: 503, 696, and also 821, 875, 900. Note Creon's use of *autocheir* in 306 to brand the criminal nature of the burial. Cf. also 700, 1175, 1315, and Benardete (above, n.13), 149; Kamerbeek on 49-52 and 172; B. M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper*, Sather Classical Lectures 35 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964), 79; W. H. Will, 'Autadelphos in the *Antigone* and the *Eumenides*', *Studies presented to D. M. Robinson* (St. Louis, 1951), 553-8. For *koinos* of the family curse cf. 146. The word also describes Antigone's exclusive allegiance to kin ties in 539 and 546. Contrast Creon's political usage ('common decree', 162) and the larger sense of the word beyond the perspectives of both protagonists in 1024, 1049, 1120.
15. The two passages contain the only occurrences of *splanchna* in this sense in the extant Sophocles. The word occurs one other time, in a different sense, at *Ajax* 995.
16. Note also Creon's use of *physis* as a criterion of authority in 727; contrast Haemon in 721. Goheen, 89 remarks Antigone's 'instinctive identification of *physis* and *nomos* as part of her identification of herself with a final order of things that is partly natural and partly divine.'

#### E. R. Dodds: On Misunderstanding the Oedipus Rex (pp. 177-188)

1. For the full evidence see O. Hey's exhaustive examination of the usage of these words, *Philol.* 83 (1927), 1-17; 137-63. Cf. also K. von Fritz, *Antike und moderne Tragödie* (Berlin, 1962), 1 ff.
2. The danger is exemplified by Mr P. H. Vellacott's article, 'The Guilt of Oedipus', which appeared in *Greece and Rome* 11 (1964), 137-48, shortly after my talk was delivered. By treating Oedipus as a historical personage and examining his career from the 'common-sense' standpoint of a prosecuting counsel Mr Vellacott has no difficulty in showing that Oedipus must have guessed the true story of his birth long before the point at which the play opens - and guiltily done nothing about it. Sophocles, according to Mr Vellacott, realized this, but unfortunately

- could not present the situation in these terms because 'such a conception was impossible to express in the conventional forms of tragedy'; so for most of the time he reluctantly fell back on 'the popular concept of an innocent Oedipus lured by Fate into a disastrous trap'. We are left to conclude either that the play is a botched compromise or else that the common sense of the law-courts is not after all the best yardstick by which to measure myth.
3. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (London, Modern Library, 1938), 108.
  4. A. W. Gomme, *More Essays in Greek History and Literature* (Oxford, 1962), 211.
  5. B. M. W. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (Yale, 1957), 39.
  6. C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford, 1944), ch. v.
  7. Herodotus I. 45. Cf. H. Funke, *Die sogenannte tragische Schuld* (Diss. Köln, 1963), 105 ff.
  8. A. J. A. Waldock, *Sophocles the Dramatist* (Cambridge, 1951), 158, 168.
  9. G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca, 1958), 271.
  10. C. H. Whitman, *Sophocles* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), 133-5.
  11. V. Ehrenberg, *Sophocles and Pericles* (Oxford, 1954), 141 ff.
  12. B. M. W. Knox, op. cit. ch. ii.
  13. Heraclitus, fr. 102.
  14. Sigmund Freud, op. cit. 109.
  15. *Ajax* 124-6.
  16. *O.C.* 607-15; 1211-49.

#### Jean-Pierre Vernant: Ambiguity and Reversal: On the Enigmatic Structure of Oedipus Rex (pp. 189-209)

1. *Ambiguity in Greek Literature* (Oxford, 1939), 163-73.
2. A. Hug, 'Der Doppelsinn in Sophokles Oedipus Koenig', *Philologus*, 31 (1872), 66-84.
3. 'Nouns are finite in number, while things are infinite. So it is inevitable that a single noun has several meanings.' Aristotle, *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, 1, 165a 11.
4. See Euripides, *Phoen.* 499-502: 'If all men saw the fair and wise the same men would not have debaters' double strife. But nothing is like or even among men except the name they give - which is not the fact' (tr. Elizabeth Wyckoff, in *Euripides V*, ed. David Grene and Richard Lattimore [New York, 1968]).
5. The same ambiguity appears in the other terms which hold a major place in the texture of the work: *dikē*, *philos* and *philia*, *kerdos*, *timē*, *orgē*, *deinos*. Cf. R. F. Goheen, *The Imagery of Sophocles' Antigone* (Princeton, 1951), and C. P. Segal, 'Sophocles' Praise of Man and the Conflicts of the Antigone', *Arion*, 3, 2 (1964), 46-66.
6. Benveniste, in his *Noms d'agent et noms d'action en indo-européen* (Paris, 1948), 79-80, has shown that *nemein* retains the idea of a regular attribution, of an apportionment ruled by the authority of customary law. This meaning takes account of the two great series in the semantic history of the root \**nem*. *Nomos*, regular attribution, rule of usage, custom, religious rite, divine or civic law, convention; *nomos*, territorial attribution fixed by custom, pastureland, province. The expression *ta nomizomena* designates the whole of what is owed to the gods;



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