

The College of Wooster

ANTIGONE ON CAMPUS

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Introduction

Antigone is by far the most frequently performed play on American college campuses.¹ Over the years the style of and motivation for performances of Greek plays has changed, and so too have characterizations of *Antigone*. On late nineteenth century campuses, where women were receiving higher education for the first time, productions emphasized *Antigone* as a moral agent, as a woman firmly ensconced in her female biology, and as a Christian martyr.² In the mid-20th century, *Antigone* began to be valued as a political agent, and ever since Anouilh's *Antigone* in 1942, she has resurfaced again and again as a symbol of grassroots rebellion against an oppressive government. Certain American colleges in the last several years have depicted Thebes as a place where reactions to war have reduced or obliterated the freedom of the people, often specifically commenting on or protesting the Iraq War and increased post-9/11 security measures.

The whole story of the current interest (and perhaps resurgence of interest) in *Antigone* is a more complicated story. Many institutions which are overtly Christian and conservative or which have no political motivations produce the play, and it is unlikely that their productions criticize of the current administration. Rather, these institutions are producing the play in light of the earlier tradition of *Antigone* as moral agent. The two traditions may at times overlap or coalesce, as certainly political activism is just as important for conservative colleges (albeit in a different way), but essentially come from two disparate motivations for production of Greek plays.

¹ This fact is made clear in Domis Pluggé, *History of Greek play production in American colleges and universities from 1881 to 1936*, (New York: Teachers college, Columbia University, 1938). Since his 1938 study, information from the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama indicates that this is still the case.

² Caroline Winterer, "Victorian *Antigone*: Classicism and Women's Education in America, 1840-1900," *American Quarterly*, 53:1 (March 2001), 77.

An important motivation for producing a play on college campuses is, of course, pedagogical, and *Antigone* obviously provides an educational opportunity no matter what ideological bent the production may have. Where we see where ideology and pedagogy overlap may additionally explain how we continue to find meaning and relevance in a play that is quite divorced from us both culturally and temporally. In short, what do we find so compelling (and occasionally repelling) about Antigone's story? College students and drama programs pick out and emphasize different parts of Antigone's character depending on what theme in the play on which they are focusing. By doing this they create what may be an illusory relevance to the Sophoclean Antigone, but even this mistaken relevance creates a dialogue about intrinsic values, which is pedagogically helpful. Ultimately, discovering the motivations for productions of *Antigone* may help to explain the importance of classical studies and Greek drama to the modern university and the American public at large.

The purpose of this project is two-fold. I mean for it both to capture a sense of *Antigone* as it is currently performed on college campuses, and also to examine how this compares with productions of *Antigone* (and Greek drama in general) in its original ancient context and in later revivals. The intention is to show how the uses of this particular play have shifted, thereby providing a context for modern college performances.

For the comparatively recent Victorian and early twentieth century productions, there is specific evidence for productions and productions values, as well as contemporary literature on the subject, which gives a good impression of the social context of these performances. For information on productions from the mid-twentieth

century to the present, I have relied mainly on the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama at Oxford University (where I first noticed the huge preference for *Antigone* at American colleges and universities), both productions they already had archived and productions for which I found evidence. The evidence for these is to be found mainly on the Internet, since most colleges keep a detailed production history online. Other useful sources include newspaper articles and theatrical journals. This is not meant to be a definitive catalog of recent productions, but rather a discussion of several productions, and overall trends as they currently appear.

An often unspoken assumption about modern performances of ancient drama is that they are picking up on themes inherent in the ancient drama. But any modern context must differ fundamentally from the ancient context, and the misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the ancient context are extremely important to understanding current motivations and theatrical practices. Jasper Griffin warns about using ancient drama:

It must always be remembered that it was not for us that it was composed, and that it is consequently impossible to reduce it without remainder to our familiar terms. The more exactly an ancient work seems to chime with our own most cherished notions, to sympathize with our liberal ideas about the state, to support our modern conceptions of ideology, the more carefully we should look at our analysis, to see where we have gone wrong³.

To see where (or if) modern college productions have gone wrong, we must understand the ideological and social reasons for drama production in Ancient Greece, and on *Antigone* herself in her Greek context. Was drama meant to have political consequences and affect political rhetoric? This question is much on the minds of contemporary scholars, and because there is so little primary evidence available for these ancient productions, there is a great deal of conjecture and contention over the subject.

³ Jasper Griffin, "Griffin, Jasper. "The Social Function of Attic Tragedy." *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 48, No. 1 (1998)

Antigone in Athens

Antigone: I would not bid you, even if you should wish
 To do this thing, you would not act in a good way with me.
 Just be what sort of person seems good to you, I will bury him.
 It is well for me to die doing this.
 I beloved will lie with him, with him beloved,
 When I commit this righteous crime; since there is more time
 Below, it is necessary for me to please those there.
 For I will lie there always. If it seems right to you,
 hold in dishonor the honored things of the gods. (*Ant.* 69-75)

This passage is Antigone's ultimatum to Ismene, and the essential statement of her character. She insists, in response to Ismene's fears, that no law of man or constraint of female nature will stop her from doing what she knows to be right. That the state does not take the proper thing to do in this case into account is a sign of deeply rooted corruption and indicates to Antigone the necessity of her actions. Her words here show her priorities in other ways too: she believes that her current life is less important than her life after death, and her actions in this life should never adversely affect her chances for a happy eternal life. Even though Polynices was a traitor, the other Thebans seem to agree that Antigone's actions were correct. This is a strong statement against living life ephemerally and accepting the law of a state so corrupt that it would deny what is right for all time, and it seems it must have had specific connotations in fifth-century Athens. But did they reflect actual sentiments, or were they meant to affect public actions?

Athens was the center of tragic composition and performance in the fifth century, and performances of tragedy were a part of festivals of Dionysos and dramatic competitions.⁴ Drama's social context is difficult to determine in the fifth century, since

⁴ Edith Hall, "Is there a *Polis* in Aristotle's *Poetics*?", *Tragedy and the Tragic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 304.

all we have are the plays, and these conceal their motivations. Clearly, theatre was a religious and public event, but it is less clear whether composition entailed political motivations, or if creativity and artistry were more important, and scholars are divided along these lines, diverging to extremes on both sides of the issue.

At the furthest extreme of political motivations for composition and production, Odonne Longo wants to insist that the Athenian theater was entirely public and community-oriented, excluding the author of the play as important other than “a nexus... between the patron or sponsor...and the public”⁵. He is responding to the previous generation of scholarship that had emphasized the author over social context and made authorial motivations the center of interpretation⁶. Longo would ask us instead to discount the role of the author completely, since public needs and desires would dictate the author’s composition, from both the practical level of writing a play that could win a competition, but also in a sense transcribing the whims of the people⁷. Such a radical view seems unlikely considering that the canonization of the three leading tragedians suggests that the public was aware and dependent on authorial personality. In addition, while it is true that performances were part of a festival, the Olympic Games were too, and those were highly dependent on individual honor and completely transcended the participating states. So it does not seem plausible that the Athenians were unable or uninterested in viewing tragic competitors as individuals pursuing their own creative goals.

⁵ Odonne Longo, “The Theater of the *Polis*”, in *Nothing to Do With Dionysos?: Athenian Drama in the Social Context*, ed. John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 13-14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

And indeed, it is precisely because the audience was not homogenous and collective that tragedy could extend over the range of topics that it did. The members of the *polis*, while generally espousing the principles of democracy, were never actually equal (despite efforts by Solon and others to reform the situation).⁸ Barry Ober and J. Strauss suggest that because drama and political rhetoric both rely on public opinion, they can be analyzed in a similar manner. If one can determine the public opinion being catered to in the writing, one can extrapolate what the current public opinion might have been.⁹ Drama has the important distinction that many people attending the theatre were not Athenian citizens, and so Athenian concerns were not the sole subject matter for drama, and in this way it explores “the world of the citizen and the world that the non-citizen cohabitated”.¹⁰

While no one could possibly deny the public nature of performance and composition with that in mind, Jasper Griffin finds it ludicrous to accept that the audience was collective beyond their physical presence, and still more so that there was any political motivation behind the performance of tragedy.¹¹ For one thing, the government of Athens was not equipped to spread propaganda through the theater, and it would be more plausible that “the archons simply tried to select the poets whom they thought their fellow citizens wanted to hear.”¹² The success and interest in tragedy lay partly in its entertainment value and partly in its ability to capture the great events of war and politics occurring in fifth century Greece. He suggests that moderns are unable to spot this due to

⁸ Josiah Ober and Barry Strauss, “Drama, political rhetoric, and the discourse of Athenian democracy”, in *Nothing to Do With Dionysos?: Athenian Drama in the Social Context*, ed. John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 237.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹¹ Griffin, “The Social Function of Attic Tragedy”, 42.

¹² *Ibid.*, 54.

our emphasis on institutional history over personal history.¹³ He makes the excellent point that the survival of the tragic form beyond the demise of democracy suggests that pleasure in viewing drama must not have lain in its glorification of Athenian imperialism.¹⁴

Something about Greek tragedy must be interesting beyond its immediate social context in the Athenian *polis*, and Edith Hall contends that Aristotle's *Poetics* makes no mention of the *polis* precisely because it is not necessary for the success of tragedy.¹⁵ There was definitely a public aspect to performances and a civic importance, and there was a realization even in antiquity that it was "Athenocentric", but Aristotle himself gives no particular weight to Athenian *topoi* in his discussion of what makes a proper tragedy.¹⁶ Plato wanted poetry to be both pleasurable and useful politically, but Aristotle said that since it is distinct from the rest of the world, this is not an appropriate way to analyze it.¹⁷ Aristotle seems to be doing something unusual here, but circumstances were beginning to alter at this time, and he is recognizing a shift in the use of drama.¹⁸ As Hall puts it, he "adumbrates the incipient and future status of tragedy as an international art form."¹⁹ So by recognizing that the *polis* is not crucial to the performance of tragedy, he makes it "transhistorical and apolitical."²⁰ Thus tragedy can work equally well outside of the fifth-century Athenian milieu, and this is another indication that it has relevance outside of its immediate context.

¹³ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴ Ibid., 61.

¹⁵ Hall, "Is there a *Polis* in Aristotle's *Poetics*?", 297.

¹⁶ Ibid., 298-300.

¹⁷ Ibid., 302.

¹⁸ Ibid., 304.

¹⁹ Ibid., 305.

²⁰ Ibid., 305.

It seems, of course, that playwrights might not find success by catering to public opinion, since art is often more successful when it tells people things they do *not* want to hear and challenges the social order. In a way a subtle balance between conflict and consensus in tragedy can mirror their balance in the successful state—too much conflict causes instability, too much consensus stagnation.²¹ Tragedy allows people to experience aspects of their world that they would never want to experience personally. But more than that, it can actually shape life and “color experiences with the light they cast in it”²². Great art has the ability to change one’s ideals and aspirations, and each person who experiences a work of art will take away something rather different. But there is another side of this—one shares the experience with a number of other people, and in the case of Greek tragedy the experience happens to be shared with everyone else in the theatre. The horrifying scenes played out in tragedy are part of a human need to observe suffering. Charles Segal points out that shared suffering unites humans, and that “drama’s effect is a concrete public sharing of grief.”²³

Even though tragedy certainly holds value beyond the political realm, in fourth-century Athens tragedy had already been recognized and canonized as an Athenian institution, and P.J. Wilson discusses the use of tragedy in Athenian political life and rhetoric in the fourth-century.²⁴ He thinks political use of drama would have been less likely to occur in the fifth century while the Dionysia was still held, since this would put the troubling issues of the day back out of the theater in which they were being abstractly

²¹ Ober and Strauss, “Drama, political rhetoric, and the discourse of Athenian democracy”, 241.

²² *Ibid.*, 247.

²³ Charles Segal, “Catharsis, Audience, and Closure in Greek Tragedy,” in *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond*, ed. by M.S. Silk, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 149.

²⁴ P.E. Wilson “Tragic Rhetoric: The Use of Tragedy and the Tragic in the Fourth Century,” in *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond*, ed. by M.S. Silk, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

(and more comfortably) presented.²⁵ In the fourth century, however, orators could use references to tragedy as a sort of “evidence” in court trials, though they had to walk a fine line between an appeal to the wisdom of the past and a desire not to look too smart.²⁶ As the fourth century wore on, there were fewer distinctions between tragedy and politics, and the people began perhaps not to differentiate the courtroom from the theater.²⁷

Orators used tragedy as a description of an idealized Athens of the past, even though tragedy originally had questioned and tested the status quo. This use of tragedy to describe the Athens of a century previously “led to a rather untragic vision of tragedy.”²⁸ Though Wilson does not want to insist upon this too much, he blames this tendency on “a sense of collective trauma and ideological vacuum that led to a desperate ransacking of the past.”²⁹ Given this, it is not difficult to draw a comparison between the fourth century appeal to the past and our own post-modern floundering. The fourth century was not devoid of its own creative endeavors; nevertheless, there was a great deal of focus on the past and appreciation of the value tragedy could have in informing political situations of the day.³⁰ Ober and Strauss point out an interesting aspect of political life: often politics are a kind of drama in which someone chooses a role and sticks with it as a way of acting out enculturated values³¹, and so “the cross fertilization of drama and politics is inherent in the ritual of political action.”³² When orators used tragedy, it was a way of putting themselves into the role of the tragic hero defending his cause to the end, and could lend considerable grandeur to their cause, as long as they did not cast the listener as a

²⁵ Ibid., 312.

²⁶ Ibid., 313.

²⁷ Ibid., 321.

²⁸ Ibid., 315.

²⁹ Ibid., 315.

³⁰ Ibid., 323.

³¹ Ober and Strauss, “Drama, political rhetoric, and the discourse of Athenian democracy”, 245.

³² Ibid., 245.

character in the tragedy as well.³³ Tragedy was a way of stabilizing Athenian society by “communication between citizens in a language composed of a vocabulary of symbols.”³⁴

In another way the Greeks of the fourth century affected our modern understanding of tragedy, since it was Lykourgos who did so much to canonize the three great tragedians in an effort not only to acknowledge their inapproachable greatness but also to preserve their texts, since he understood that their reputation reflected well on Athens.³⁵ What this means is that we have preserved what the Athenians of the fourth century viewed as the most important relics of their recent past, and so our Greek canon is a result of the opinions of people of several generations after its composition. This too makes it seem unlikely that Greek tragedy of the fifth century was successful because it was only applicable to fifth century situations.

In what way did *Antigone* specifically enlighten and entertain the Athenians of the fifth (and the fourth) centuries when it was originally presented in 441 B.C.E.? Any answer to this question must naturally be misleading in some way, because as with all facets of Greek tragedy, scholarly opinion differs greatly. What follows is a sample of scholarly opinion on Antigone’s unique characteristics that give her particular meaning and relevance.

Like all tragic heroes, Antigone is not meant to be a conventional or pleasant person. She is attempting to uphold one aspect of civilization (religious and familial duty) where it clashes with another (duty to the state and civil laws), and thereby questions the

³³ Ibid., 248-9.

³⁴ Ibid., 249.

³⁵ Wilson, “Tragic Rhetoric” 316. And in fact, one will still see statues of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides on the streets of Athens, which shows that Lykourgos understood well.

social order.³⁶ Her classic characterization is one of a normal Sophoclean hero: she is consumed by her conviction that her actions are correct, and this is what makes her a hero.³⁷ She is not quite androgynous in this view, but certainly her femaleness matters much less than her youth and her stubbornness.

Antigone is, nevertheless, a woman, and that has bearing on her actions. Later interpretations and uses of Antigone in popular culture make much of her actions as indicative of her femininity, whereas her actions are unfeminine in her original context.³⁸ Helene Foley examines the connection between female dramatic roles and female social roles. For one thing, female characters seem to break with Aristotle's ideas because they are making decisions in marginalized roles, but Foley believes that Aristotle would have found actions in tragic women unconvincing if they were not found in real women as well.³⁹ Her motivation is, as stated, to bury a member of her family and to fulfill a religious obligation, and she is convinced that she is right. But knowledge of what is right does not compel her do it in this situation—it would not have been thought necessary for a surviving girl to fulfill all her familial obligations, though she would certainly have had the right to do so and thereby be subjected to the same dangers as men.⁴⁰ So it is indicative of character that she chooses to exercise her right of vengeance.⁴¹ In the context of fifth century Athens Antigone's actions are extremely unusual and would have been considered a product of exceptional circumstances.⁴² Those circumstances are the

³⁶ Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 152.

³⁷ Bernard Knox, *The Heroic Temper*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 28-29.

³⁸ Helene Foley, "Antigone as Moral Agent," in *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond*, ed. by M.S. Silk, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 49.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 57.

only way in which Antigone as a virgin girl is able to take on male autonomy, and so Foley believes that “her heroic action cannot serve in any simple sense as a timeless, gender-free model for civil disobedience.” Antigone is heroic because she takes advantage of a very limited opportunity to maintain the honor of her birth family over her marital family.⁴³ She is contrasted with Creon, who is too morally unsophisticated to apply a general principle correctly to this very unusual situation.⁴⁴ Antigone’s use of emotion and familiar responsibility in determining moral truths seems to be an indication that the city can and should operate in the same way⁴⁵. In a similar vein, Creon does not seem to recognize the opposites inherent in human life, which is the sort of thing that would only happen in Thebes.⁴⁶

Antigone is a Theban princess, and Thebes was a *mise-en-scene* to Athenian tragedy, where anything could happen (and usually did). Froma Zeitlin suggests yet another angle at which we can get at the meaning of Athenian tragedy: because Thebes was meant to be the “other” and opposite of Athens, its use as a *topos* will display the ideology of Athenian tragedy.⁴⁷ Oedipus is the most notable man in Thebes, and of course in trying to find his spiritual home he mistakenly found his birth home instead.⁴⁸ Thebes is where all the opposites of human existence are displayed and played with, and Oedipus exemplifies this tendency; in fact in himself he unites three generations of his family.⁴⁹ Zeitlin calls this an “endemic problem in Thebes—that of the unstable

⁴³ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁶ Froma Zeitlin, “Thebes: Theatre of Self and Society in Athenian Drama,” in *Nothing to Do With Dionysos?: Athenian Drama in the Social Context*, ed. John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 151.

⁴⁷ Zeitlin, “Thebes: Theatre of Self and Society in Athenian Drama”, 131.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 134.

arithmetic of the self.”⁵⁰ Theatre is already a step removed from real life, and to make the setting Thebes distances the action from the observers by yet another step. In addition, Athens is often a place of refuge and escape, which makes Thebes a place to look at the bad side of life without hurting the Athenian self-image.⁵¹ It is also the “paradigm of the closed system”, which is never physically destroyed, and problems mostly occur when interactions with the outside are attempted.⁵² Thebes is, in short, a safe place to experiment with human nature and to give unconventional women like Antigone a central role in the story.

More overtly political aspects in the play are the problems with tyranny and an over-zealous ruling class. We see Creon as a weak ruler because he dismisses well-argued speeches with rhetorical clichés.⁵³ He aligns himself with the city to too great a degree and ignores that the city actually favors Antigone.⁵⁴ Her success lies not so much in her actions but in that she is acting against a regime that is ready to fall. She is pious in a more real and humane manner than Creon, who becomes more and more concerned with his own personal ability to control the Thebans. This is perhaps Antigone’s one saving grace—despite all her faults, we have the sense that she is right in what she is doing. Whether or not she should have died for it is another matter: she did die, and this seems a fitting conclusion to the twisted family piety that characterizes the whole saga of Oedipus and his children.

We might imagine that the success of the play in fifth century Athens had something to do with the political situation, even if it was not that alone. As a democracy

⁵⁰ Ibid., 139.

⁵¹ Ibid., 144-5.

⁵² Ibid., 148.

⁵³ Ober and Strauss, “Drama, political rhetoric, and the discourse of Athenian democracy”, 260-263.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 260.

prone to oligarchy, citizens must too have found it comforting to see an example of a bad ruler meeting his downfall when he failed to respond to an exceptional circumstance. But without a doubt much of the play's vigor lies in the person of Antigone, who is a complicated and outrageous heroine but still personally accessible to the audience. Her personality is explicit and her motivations are clear. Antigone is powerful and meaningful outside of her original context, and her actions have been endlessly recontextualized over the years. Even when these recontextualizations are anachronistic in terms of the fifth century and its religious practices most especially, the burial of Polynices becomes a symbol for decisive action, no matter what the circumstances are. What these all get at is a universal Antigone who is placed in outrageous circumstances and comes through with her moral standards (if not her person) intact.

Antigone Enlightened

Since the late fifth and early fourth centuries there have been meditations on Antigone in an unbroken stream, and the story permeates our literature, and replays in historical events⁵⁵. It is impossible to chart the evolution of the play over the millennia in any exhaustive way⁵⁶, but two main strands of history are important for this project—how *Antigone* gained its status in nineteenth century America and how it evolved into what it is today.

In the nineteenth century, Antigone was regarded as not only the best Greek tragedy, but the most perfect work of literature, and this perception remained until

⁵⁵ George Steiner, *Antigone*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 107-108.

⁵⁶ George Steiner makes a very convincing attempt at cataloging and explaining the different aspects of the intellectual history of *Antigone*, and this book is crucial for anyone trying to understand what Antigone means to Western culture.

scholarly focus shifted to *Oedipus Tyrannos* in 1905 with the work of Sigmund Freud.⁵⁷ Greek tragedy in particular seemed to align perfectly with two major trends in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century thought, Idealism and Romanticism. Sophocles himself was supreme among the Greek tragedians, because he was a good balance between an overly enigmatic Aeschylus and overly aesthetic Euripides.⁵⁸ Intellectuals of the time had a hyperbolic enthusiasm for *Antigone*; George Eliot for one seemed to find in the text (in Steiner's words) "an insistent closeness to her own most absolute concerns."⁵⁹ German thinkers used Greek tragedy as a basis for their intellectual movements, and Winterer describes the German interest in Greece as "part of a cultural revolt against a sterile Augustan classicism, religious oppression, fussy baroque décor and aristocratic content."⁶⁰

Steiner explains the explosion of interest in *Antigone* in particular in Western Europe through a series of events. First, in 1789, the publication of *Le Voyage du jeune Anacharsis* by Abbé Jean-Jacques Barthélémy, which was extremely influential towards European taste and contains "the seminal passage in the Antigone vogue."⁶¹ Next, in 1790, Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling were all in seminary together at Tübingen. All major figures in the intellectual history of *Antigone*, their convergence here seemed to create a fascination for each of them with the play.⁶² Lastly, in 1841, a production with choral compositions by Mendelssohn was staged in Potsdam, which was wildly

⁵⁷ Steiner, 1.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁹ Steiner, 5.

⁶⁰ Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-1910*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002) 51.

⁶¹ Ibid., 7.

⁶² Ibid., 7-8.

successful and remained in vogue for the rest of the century.⁶³ In addition, the ideological shifts occurring in Western Europe due to the French revolution must have had an effect, as the personal began to be consciously entwined with the historical.⁶⁴ Antigone's story is about the personal clashing with the public, and Antigone's embodiment of the separate elements of society in one form made her so attractive to the German idealists. Steiner suggests that Idealists and Romantics found Antigone most compelling as a sister figure.⁶⁵ Antigone sees herself as primarily a sister: "I beloved will lie with him, with him beloved" (73), and additionally Steiner suggests that sorority was a philosophical and aesthetic compromise between the solipsism that Idealism could tend towards and the impending doom looming in romantic desire.⁶⁶

American intellectual life, while absorbing some of these ideas, remained disparate from that of Europe for many years. Before the 1820s, a classical education in America had a utilitarian purpose, and thus the whole system of education had to change before America and Europe were interested in similar aspects of classical antiquity.

British colonists first set up colleges in the seventeenth century on the British model, with a curriculum entirely filled with Greek, Latin, and Hebrew.⁶⁷ These colleges were meant primarily to train a learned ministry, and this meant that Greek drama was not read, because educators shied away from "heathen" Greek texts even if they seemed to contain elements of Christian truth.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 16-17.

⁶⁷ Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism*, 12.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 13.

Politicians and lawyers in the late eighteenth century needed a college education, and through receiving a classical education, they incorporated classical learning into their work and public life, thereby (according to Winterer) creating a “culture of classicism.”⁶⁹ Tales of the Roman Republic and its downfall were used in oratory as cautionary lessons for the young nation, and Greek republics were presented as bad examples to be avoided.⁷⁰ Women looked to Rome for inspiration as well, although their educations were much more limited and rarely included classical languages, which were regarded as strictly a masculine province.⁷¹ Nevertheless, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, some American women were learning Latin, and learned women were pulling out pieces of the classics to describe themselves in terms of, for instance, Roman matrons, to create a parallel between themselves and the learned men of the day.⁷²

America had different educational needs with the advent of industrialization, and so the old style of classical learning began to be questioned with renewed vigor. Students had extensive training in grammar, but very little training in classical history or art.⁷³ This method of teaching tended to produce students who could not actually read the ancient languages, but ended up being dilettantes who had not learned through the classics to be the morally grounded person whom the republic needed.⁷⁴ As the Industrial Revolution and westward migration created a populist country, higher education became more democratic, especially in the new western frontier colleges that again were meant to train a learned ministry.⁷⁵ The traditional classical education was not apparently useful in a

⁶⁹ Ibid., 16-17.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 19-20.

⁷¹ Ibid., 22-23.

⁷² Ibid., 24.

⁷³ Ibid., 24-37.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 41-42.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 44-46.

new industrial society, and had to change. Classical scholars hoped that antiquity would be useful in American political life as a way to protect against rampant materialism and lack of education.⁷⁶ Winterer describes this new trend as “a new path to self-reformation,”⁷⁷ which was as much due to new methods of scholarship as anything else.

Beginning in the 1820s, scholars (most notably Edward Everett) brought back new emphases in teaching from Germany and attempted to realign America’s connection with the past through modern historicism and philological criticism.⁷⁸ Finally scholars in America and Europe were beginning to study the same texts for similar reasons. If democracy had made the perfect literature of Greek tragedy possible, then by studying Greek tragedy people might be able to understand what had made Athenian democracy work—and this included, quite specifically, *Antigone*.⁷⁹ But beyond the political, tragedy’s elements of Christian truth “showed the remarkable ancients to have glimpse the essence of Christian revelation centuries before the birth of Christ.”⁸⁰

Why was there interest in those underlying Christian truths that had been avoided previously because of their “heathen” overlay? Certainly ideological shifts in both America and Europe made a newly emotional and aesthetic version of Christianity compatible with Greek tragedy.⁸¹ The interest came also out of a new interest in the scientific study of ancient texts. *Wissenschaft* scrutinized all ancient texts, including the Bible, under the light of historicity, and philology made ancient texts interesting less for their parallels to the modern world, than for their historical contexts. For people having

⁷⁶ Ibid., 76.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 82.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 49-51.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 93-94.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 94.

⁸¹ Ibid., 95.

removed ultimate divine authority from the Bible through scientific study it was not impossible to train oneself morally by reading *Antigone* because it was written by a pagan author.

Along with this new interest in Greek tragedy, a different sort of heroine became popular. No longer were staunch Roman matrons the ideal, but rather a younger and more idealistic young woman who “most clearly displayed the emotionalism and femininity that made the tragedies fonts of Christian morality.”⁸² A number of Greek tragic heroines fit this description (Alcestis, for one), but Sophocles had become a kind of spiritual guide, and it was Antigone who most clearly seemed to embody the Victorian feminine ideal. Winterer 2002 mentions a student who “tellingly penciled ‘Amen’ at the end of his textbook of Antigone.”⁸³

Beginning in the 1840s, women in America first began to receive a classical education similar to, if not better, than men had previously received.⁸⁴ This should have helped to liberate women, but it failed to do so. One possible reason is that the traditional classical education was by this time not a useful way to get anywhere in society. The modern university was much larger and more specialized, often emphasizing professional training. Women’s education was more comprehensive than it had previously been, and allowed women to participate fully in the general classical education that an educated person was still expected to have, but it still was behind the times.⁸⁵ But in another way, women’s classical education worked against them. Winterer emasculated all of Antigone’s actions so that they would align and reinforce Victorian stereotypes of

⁸² Ibid., 95.

⁸³ Ibid., 96 and 124.

⁸⁴ Winterer, “Victorian Antigone”, 71.

⁸⁵ Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism*, 149-154.

women. For example, Theodore Dwight Woolsey, who published the first American edition of *Antigone* in 1841, emphasized in his introduction Antigone as feminine and pious to the exclusion of all other human motivations. Antigone's role in the domestic sphere was also adapted to correspond with Victorian ideals—her love for her family was of a pure nature, unsullied by pursuit of pleasure or beauty.⁸⁶ She was by not by nature meant to involve herself in politics, but did so only because of the extreme circumstances,⁸⁷ and her death at the end, which could give her a “masculine” aspect, could be explained as a feminine characteristic because they happened not out of any particular political motivations, but were part of her “feminine” nature to hold family and religion most dear.⁸⁸

The “emasculatation” of Antigone's character certainly was emphasized by scholars and commentators throughout the period and did affect their reading of the play, but their readings were not entirely inaccurate for the Antigone's original context—she was no more believable an actress on the political stage of Athens than she was in early nineteenth century America. Antigone was interesting to people precisely because of her femininity, whether it was the novelty of her attempt to act politically in a male-dominated society where extreme circumstances made this unusual behavior necessary, or whether it was her martyrdom (for young female martyrs are fascinating to many people). Some of this focus on her femininity in the nineteenth century must have been due to Hegel's discussion of her as woman, since analysis of *Antigone* depended on the debate about Hegel after the mid-nineteenth century.⁸⁹ Even uses of Antigone in feminist

⁸⁶ Ibid., 79.

⁸⁷ Winterer, “Victorian Antigone”, 78.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 80.

⁸⁹ Steiner, 41.

Victorian literature seemed to emphasize only her feminine characteristics. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps wrote an Antigone story in which a modern Antigone pursues a typically male education despite the detrimental effects to her health, and eventual death.⁹⁰ This Antigone is a feminist, and emphasizes the problems inherent in Victorian society, and yet she is only a feminist—she has not moved beyond the feminine. Winterer describes the contradiction: “Phelps undermined the rigid polarity of Victorian sexual mores... yet she did not universalize Antigone to speak for human truths that transcended both time and gender.”⁹¹ Antigone would remain in this role in American public life for some time to come.

Antigone on Campus: Act One

Greek tragedy’s role on the American campus changed radically in the late nineteenth century: in 1881, Harvard produced the first Greek play in America⁹². As it happened, it was *Oedipus Tyrannus*, but it might have been Antigone (in the original Greek, no less), since that was the first play discussed⁹³. The production was carefully planned and rehearsed and was such a wild success that hundreds of productions were mounted: over the next fifty-five years there were at least three hundred and forty-nine productions of ancient drama at American colleges and universities⁹⁴. Since Domis Pluggé determined that number in 1938, there have certainly been hundreds more—since 1992 there have been at least 64 productions, and doubtless this figure is grossly understated.

⁹⁰ Winterer, “Victorian Antigone” 2001, 84.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁹² Pluggé, 1. This is, at any rate, the first play for which there is any evidence. It is almost certain that schools and colleges would have mounted scenes for didactic purposes, but the Harvard production is the first full-scale costumed, historically accurate production.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

The initial motivation for the Harvard production seems to have been the completion of the Sanders' Theater of Harvard in 1876 as well as a successful production of *Agamemnon* done at Oxford in 1880⁹⁵. The generation of students who had first begun to study Greek tragedy in light of German scholarship had now become professors and doubtless saw pedagogical opportunities in the actual performance of Greek drama. The new interest in Greek tragedy had emphasized the context of the drama as important in understanding its meaning, and so in mounting a historically accurate production students could fully immerse themselves in the experience of drama. Winterer sees this trend as an illustration of her theory of the mid-century transformation of classics as "preparation for civic duty to platform for private self-culture"⁹⁶ She sees the Harvard production as necessarily insular because it took place on the campus, which was part of a great movement of colleges to move into themselves and focus less on politics and outside concerns⁹⁷. Whether or not her latter analysis of American college culture is correct, the Harvard play was in many ways not insular at all: various attendees included "Holmes, Emerson, Longfellow, Howells, and other distinguished men of letters."⁹⁸ Its success also prompted a professional production which toured New York and Boston⁹⁹. But certain aspects of the production, and others like it which followed, show certain emphases of Greek tragedy which have little to do with the meanings inherent in the plays. Winterer calls this "historically accurate escapism."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁶ Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism*, 148.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Pluggé, 4..

⁹⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁰ Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism*, 150.

But this is because the first college departments to put on Greek tragedy were actually departments of Greek rather than Speech or Drama, and it was not until 1904 that a Speech or Drama department put on a production of an ancient drama.¹⁰¹ Greek departments chose generally to give productions with at least a flavor of the original style of Greek drama, which depended on the current scholarship available. As better information about ancient productions became available, modern productions changed accordingly; for instance after 1902, when the results of Dörpfeld's excavations were available in America, productions tended to present the chorus and actors on one level stage rather than the two levels which had been previously thought historically accurate¹⁰². "Traditional" treatments such as this always depended on what would work on a modern stage, however, and Pluggé suggests that this style is difficult because of the lack of information available about what actually took place on the ancient stage that directors would have to make compromises and end up with productions that lack unity of purpose and vision. The chorus seemed to present particular problems for modernization, since it could easily conflict with the main dramatic action.¹⁰³

Between 1881 and 1914, colleges produced *Antigone* more than any other Greek play. It appears that between 1915 and 1926, performances of *Antigone* dropped off slightly (and were surpassed by *Iphigenia at Tauris* and *Trojan Women*), but then it emerges again as the most popular between 1926 and 1936. Altogether there were seventy-five productions of *Antigone* between 1881 and 1936, which is twenty-five more than the next most popular, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and thirty more than *Alcestis*, the next in

¹⁰¹ Pluggé, 148.

¹⁰² Ibid., 63-64.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 154-60.

popularity.¹⁰⁴ The popularity of *Antigone* in the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century is a result of Antigone's place in the American intellectual character, since Antigone was the epitome of classical Greek learning. The number of productions given in the original Greek reflects this: there were sixteen performances in Greek between 1881 and 1903, contrasted with twenty-five in English.¹⁰⁵ By 1925 the number of plays given in Greek had declined sharply, for which one obvious explanation is that enrollments in Greek classes were the smallest they had ever been. Winterer sees the drop-off as due in many respects to the retreating role of antiquity in public life and a that Antigone herself had lost her power to speak for women of the time.¹⁰⁶ It turns out, however, that this was due to an interesting and important shift in the use of ancient drama: after 1904 Speech and Drama departments were producing Greek tragedies, and by 1926 they were producing twice as many as Greek departments¹⁰⁷. Speech departments had little interest in producing historically accurate productions; instead they were beginning to incorporate modern theatre practices into productions, which Pluggé describes as “a synthesis of all the elements that enter into the process of putting on a play.”¹⁰⁸ This method was meant to contrast with the artificiality of the nineteenth century productions, emphasizing “simplification and suggestion.”¹⁰⁹ Greek drama was well-suited to this style of production, since a simple set and costumes, if done appropriately, could establish a great deal of emotion and meaning in a play¹¹⁰. A college play, as a writer in the early 1930s suggested, should be suitable for the experience of the actors,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 14-31.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 149.

¹⁰⁶ Winterer, “Victorian Antigone”, 87.

¹⁰⁷ Pluggé, 148.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 115.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 116-117.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 128; 155-58.

suitable for the understanding of the audience, easy to produce, and have literary value¹¹¹. Greek plays fit all of these criteria. Pluggé summarizes all the advantages of Greek drama for the college theatre:

In the first place, Greek plays are theatrically effective. They act well. Audiences like them. This has been proved over and over again y many performances given in colleges and universities throughout the country. In the second place, Greek plays are worth doing. They are significant. Besides being examples of fine workmanship and beauty, they are the embodiment of some changeless fact or aspect of life. And, finally, Greek plays afford a stimulating and enlightening educational experience in that they furnish opportunities for a variety of different learnings, both intellectual and appreciative.¹¹²

Performances of *Antigone* may have decreased as Speech departments attempted to get away from the ideologies and styles of the nineteenth century which *Antigone* represented, but the vogue for performing *Antigone* did not disappear despite a dip in the number of productions between 1915 and 1926. By 1926 it was again the clear favorite and was now almost exclusively performed in a modern style¹¹³. Productions of Greek tragedy had surpassed their earlier place on American campuses as a way in which students could learn about ancient theatre and literature—and as a way they could experience and comment on the world in which they currently lived. The First World War began a process which, by the Second World War, would change the conception of the play and give it a new and striking place on American college campuses.

Antigone at War

During and after WWI, *Antigone*'s struggles were not striking solely for their basis in the popular conception of feminine biology, (though the feminine aspects of

¹¹¹ Ibid., 152.

¹¹² Ibid., 163.

¹¹³ Pluggé, 150.

Antigone's character remained as a comparison with the rash acts of men).¹¹⁴ Antigone came to represent the innocent who must face the aftermath of a war that has torn apart her family and home, and in Europe there were numerous adaptations and references to Antigone before, during, and after the war. Nineteenth century productions of the play had not emphasized *Antigone* as a war play, but earlier versions written in times in which humanity felt more uncertain of its place in the world saw it more clearly as a play about war. One example is Robert Garnier's adaptation of 1580. Garnier knew first-hand what war and the ills of a crumbling society were like¹¹⁵ and was working in a time in which Martin Mueller sees "a shift from a collective to a private vision of tragedy,"¹¹⁶ and in many ways this mirrors what happened in the Enlightenment and then again in the early twentieth century with *Antigone*. The shift to a modern style of productions of *Antigone*, followed by numerous adaptations of the play into a modern context, also mirrors Garnier's work in another way. Mueller describes Humanist adaptations of *Antigone* in a way which is relevant to later adaptations as well: "Garnier's *Antigone* is a good example of this slightly paradoxical situation in which gross dramaturgical deficiencies may appear, from another perspective, as the formal correlative of thematic concerns of unquestionable strength and integrity."¹¹⁷ Constantly throughout the history of *Antigone* (and Greek drama in general in many ways) we see that fifth-century Athens is not present except to set the stage on which we play out our own contemporary dramas.

In America, where the effects of the war were less immediately visible, the play may not have returned to its previous popularity until after the war. The increased

¹¹⁴ Steiner, 141-142.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 138-139.

¹¹⁶ Martin Mueller, *Children of Oedipus, and other essays on the imitation of Greek tragedy, 1550-1800* (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 18.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

popularity of *Trojan Women* at the same time shows that people were concerned with the after-effects of war on the people, especially the innocent people who had been unwillingly forced to choose a side. *Antigone* also could address another horror of modern warfare, in which mass killings meant that countless dead were left unburied. Suddenly the true meaning of Creon's actions could become apparent.¹¹⁸ Monuments to the Unknown Soldier in countries which participated in the World Wars (and more recent wars as well) represent the burial and memorial that was impossible for so many. Antigone's reasoning for burying Polynices is that he is her brother, no matter for what side he was fighting, as she says, "Just be what sort of person seems good to you, I will bury him" (71). For people on the home front mourning the far away death of a loved one, her struggle to give dignity to Polynices' death would have especial meaning.

Jean Anouilh's 1942 adaptation of *Antigone* marked in some ways the culmination of all the post-WWI work on the play and the beginning of a truly new era in the use of *Antigone* in political life. Leo Aylen summarizes Anouilh's work thus: "All his myths ultimately coalesce into this single question [saying *oui* or *non*], and in every situation it is right to say '*non*.'" ¹¹⁹ Anouilh's adaptation succeeds in particular because his Antigone is a more accessible character than Sophocles' Antigone for modern audiences. A modern person (perhaps not acquainted with ancient Greece) who would not understand Antigone's indelible duty to the gods in fifth-century Athens could understand the motivation of Anouilh's Antigone, which are less contingent on morality and more on psychological circumstances. Antigone does not want to be treated as a little girl incapable of making her own decisions, as she says in this striking speech:

¹¹⁸ Steiner, 288.

¹¹⁹ Leo Aylen, *Greek tragedy and the modern world*, (London, Methuen, 1964), 281.

Understand! The first word I ever heard out of any of you was that word “understand.” Why didn’t I “understand” that I must not play with water—cold, black, beautiful flowing water—because I’d spill it on the palace tiles. Or with earth, because earth dirties a little girl’s frock.¹²⁰

Anouilh’s *Antigone* is not concerned with religious ritual as is the Sophoclean *Antigone*. Nevertheless, she alludes to ritual in her defense of her actions to Creon: “I owed it to him. Those who are not buried wander eternally and find no rest...I owe it to him to unlock the house of the dead in which my father and my mother are waiting to welcome him. Polynices has earned his rest.”¹²¹ But Creon does not believe that this was her real motivation, somewhat later he asks her, “Tell me, *Antigone*, do you believe all that flummery about religious burial?”¹²² And he is right, for she admits she did it: “For nobody. For myself.”¹²³

This *Antigone* “precisely captured both the hysterics and embarrassments of unmerited survival,” according to Steiner and was wildly popular with schools, colleges, and other educational institutions in the post-war period.¹²⁴ The reaction was rather different in professional theatre: *Antigone* had never been successful in professional theatre despite its collegiate success.¹²⁵ Outside of its original context in Occupied France, Anouilh’s *Antigone* lacked relevance or interest for American audiences, and critics did not see that *Antigone* had any political relevance.¹²⁶ Lewis Galantière’s translation and adaptation of Anouilh’s play appeared in 1947, and his first version changed certain aspects of Anouilh’s work in order to give it sense outside of its previous

¹²⁰ Jean Anouilh, *Antigone*, trans. Lewis Galantière, in *Selections*, (New York : Noonday Press, 1990), 11.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹²⁴ Steiner, 293.

¹²⁵ Karelisa Hartigan, *Greek tragedy on the American stage : ancient drama in the commercial theater, 1882-1994*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 112.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

context as play produced during the Nazi occupation of France, but this adaptation had many deep-rooted misunderstandings of both Sophocles and Anouilh.¹²⁷ Leo Aylen complains: “nor has Galantière taken trouble to turn the play properly into a Christian one; he never makes up his mind about the right emphasis to give to the views about immortality.”¹²⁸ But this first attempt at adaptation was immediately popular in American colleges, either because or in spite of Galantière’s changes (a later version of this translation stays faithful to Anouilh). Smith College was the first in America to produce this version in 1947, and Bryn Mawr College followed with a production two years later.¹²⁹ It may be coincidental that these were all-female institutions, but Anouilh’s adaptation also succeeds in capturing the dilemmas in modern femininity. Antigone explains to Haemon why she dressed up and put on makeup, “It was because I was stupid. I wasn’t very sure that you loved me as a woman; and I did it—because I wanted you to want me. I was trying to be more like the other girls.”¹³⁰

The original success of Anouilh’s *Antigone* has meant that a second generation of students continues to use his version, though not all using Galantière’s adaptation. We have seen this similar transmission of adaptations and usages throughout the history of *Antigone*, which each add a new facet of interpretation. Each new interpretation has a snowball effect and creates new movements in adaptation and production of the play. In the fourth century, orators quoted pieces of the previous generation’s drama for political purposes, placing it in a new light. Many centuries later, what had been new German scholarship for one generation meant that the next generation viewed *Antigone* as a play

¹²⁷ Aylen, 283.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ APGRD Database report

¹³⁰ Anouilh, 18.

about internal moral and religious characteristics. And so we have yet again in the mid-twentieth century an interpretation of *Antigone* as a play about a political activist, and adaptations which followed picked up where Anouilh left off. Two productions are especially notable for their contributions to the interpretation of *Antigone* in the political activism vein.

Bertolt Brecht's 1948 *Antigone* extends Anouilh's vision by making a more obvious comparison of Creon and Hitler in his "proto-Marxist" adaptation that picks up on Hölderlin's anarchic *Antigone* of the late eighteenth century.¹³¹ For Julian Beck and Judith Malina of the Living Theatre, this adaptation was the basis of their own groundbreaking 1967 production.¹³² After seeing a production of Anouilh's *Antigone* in 1946¹³³ (the same one in which critics saw no political relevance), Malina and Beck realized the potential of play, and their production, which toured Europe in 1967 and 1968, used *Antigone* as an example of political conscience in action.¹³⁴ This production also revitalized the femininity of *Antigone*, making her "the embodiment of millennially outraged, patronized, excluded womanhood."¹³⁵ *Antigone* was speaking for the dissatisfaction and desire for action of a generation.¹³⁶

The Living Theatre's production captured the *zeitgeist* of the 1960s but failed to incite actual political change. Athol Fugard's 1973 adaptation *The Island*, which George Steiner calls "the satyr play to all preceding 'Antigones',"¹³⁷ was a fierce attack against

¹³¹ Cyndi Rosenthal, "Antigone's Example: A View of the Living Theatre's Production, Process, and Praxis". *Theatre Survey* Vol. 41, No. 1 (May 2000), 74 and 77.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 73.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

¹³⁵ Steiner, 150.

¹³⁶ Rosenthal, 70.

¹³⁷ Steiner, 143-4.

the apartheid regime in South Africa.¹³⁸ It was actually based on a cancellation of a 1965 South African production of *Antigone* when the lead actor was sent to prison on Robbens Island. Prisoners on the island found meaning and relevance in classical drama, particularly *Antigone*, and Fugard used reports of their production to write *The Island*. Nelson Mandela played Creon, a role that for him represented the dangers of a bad leader.¹³⁹ *Antigone* did not end apartheid in South Africa, but she was there to give a voice to the struggle, as she did for so many other political struggles in the late twentieth century.¹⁴⁰

While the text of *Antigone* has immediacy for us as modern readers, *Antigone* does not speak to us without adaptation and translation into a modern vernacular: even a production in the original Greek will benefit from modern scholarship in its costuming, staging, and theatrical expression.¹⁴¹ For the vast majority of productions which take place in English (or Modern Greek, or German, or French and so on), the translator holds power over Sophocles. And clearly how translators have wielded that power has changed. George Steiner says about modernity and *Antigone*:

The distance which separates Gilbert Murray's translation of *Antigone* from the 'Antigones' proposed under pressure of Ezra Pound's vision and practice of translation is one of the radical moments in the history of the *Antigone* material itself. The music of meaning has altered.¹⁴²

Murray's opinion of *Antigone* is clear. He writes in his introduction that *Antigone* is not simply following rituals or her personal feelings for her brother: "She puts her faith

¹³⁸ Lorna Hardwick, "Greek Drama and Anti-Colonialism: Decolonizing the Classics" in *Dionysus since 69: Greek tragedy at the dawn of the third millennium*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 238.

¹³⁹ Anthony Sampson, *Mandela: The Authorized Biography*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 232.

¹⁴⁰ Also Foley, Helene Foley, "Modern Performance and Adaptation of Greek Tragedy", *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 129. (1999), pp. 1-12.

and Edith Hall, *Dionysus since 69 : Greek tragedy at the dawn of the third millennium*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 18-26.

¹⁴¹ Steiner, 283-4.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 197.

simply in that eternal law of right which Greek thought... a law whose ordinances are beyond death, beyond man and his anthropomorphic gods, unwritten and never failing... Antigone has become... the most famous ideal virgin martyr of Greek tragedy.”¹⁴³ For Murray, Antigone’s ultimatum to Ismene in lines 69-75 reads this way:

I ask thee not; nor, shouldst thou come to me
 With offers, would I welcome aid from thee.
 Be what thou wilt! My brother’s burial I
 Will make, and if for making die
 ‘Tis well. I shall but sleep with one I love,
 One who loves me, and my offence shall prove
 Blessed. I need the love of Them Below
 More than of earthly rulers, for, I know,
 There I shall live for ever. Get thee gone;
 Despise what God counts holy, and live on.¹⁴⁴

Seamus Heaney’s 2004 translation goes at Antigone in a completely different way. He remarks in his afterward that a motivation for composing his translation came in 2003 when the Bush administration began pushing for war in Iraq using similar rhetoric as Creon (and he is by no means the only person to notice this). He says, “Just as Creon forced the citizens of Thebes into an either/or situation in relation to Antigone, the Bush Administration... was using the same tactic to forward its argument for war on Iraq.”¹⁴⁵

He renders Antigone’s words this way:

You and the laws of the land!
 Sister, let me tell you:
 From now on, and no matter
 How your mind may change,
 I’ll never accept your help.
 I will bury him myself.
 And if death comes, so be it.
 They’ll be a glory in it.
 I’ll go down to the underworld

¹⁴³ Murray, Gilbert. *The Antigone*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), lines 69-75, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴⁴ Murray, 20.

¹⁴⁵ Seamus Heaney, *The burial at Thebes : a version of Sophocles' Antigone*, (New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 76.

Hand in hand with a brother.
 And I'll go with my head held high.
 The gods will be proud of me.

The land of the living, sister,
 Is neither here nor there.
 We enter it and we leave it.
 The dead in the land of the dead
 Are the ones you'll be with longest.
 And how are you going to face them,
 Ismene, if you dishonour
 Their laws and the gods' laws?¹⁴⁶

Language makes the presentation of the text relevant. The different “musics of meaning” in these passages is immediately evident. Plain language and blank verse would have scandalized Murray because he would have seen it as a violation of the poetry of Sophocles and hence the meaning. Murray is interested in the sound of the language, of how the meter and rhyme interplay to create lines of poetry that sound almost biblical—and he has said that he sees the biblical in Antigone’s character. Murray’s was not necessarily the most popular translation of *Antigone* in particular, but his translations were the most popular at one point in the history of Greek drama on American college campuses.¹⁴⁷ Colleges probably do not use Murray’s translations anymore for performance, even if they might use them for inspiration in creating their own translations. Murray’s translation is unsuitable for modern theatre partly because he is approaching the text as a philologist who sees the meaning in individual Greek words, which can be a useful way to read a text, but is ultimately limiting.¹⁴⁸ In order to gain a unity of meaning (which is crucial for modern theatre), the details have to dissolve.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 10-11.

¹⁴⁷ Pluggé, 110 and 142. While his translation of *Antigone* was not published until 1941, it is representative of the earlier style—presumably it was his translations of Euripides which were commonly used previously.

¹⁴⁸ Steiner, 290.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 292.

Lyricism is also evident in Heaney's work, though it appears in a very different manner. Antigone's spirit and drive comes through her clear dismissal of Ismene's fears. This Antigone lets Ismene know that her discomfort with objecting to unjust laws will do her no good in the end. Ismene represents the vast majority of people who stay quiet in order to seem "patriotic" when their silence actually puts the moral standing of their country in jeopardy. Heaney's work is just one example of many modern translations of *Antigone*. This adaptation is interesting in part because it follows his previous translation of *Philoctetes*, which was so influential in describing the political situation in Northern Ireland.¹⁵⁰ This *Antigone* is describing the war in Iraq, critical acclaim is widespread only a year after its premiere in Dublin, and a quick internet search shows that American colleges are adding his translation to their library collections. We may begin to see a number of institutions use this translation for their productions¹⁵¹ because, as we will see, it captures the ideological motivation behind a number of recent productions of *Antigone*. Antigone has fought and will fight in many wars.

Antigone on Campus: Act Two

It's misguided. It's wrong. You have taken one of the world's great plays, and reduced it to a juvenile polemic on current events.
-Another Antigone¹⁵²

When A.R. Gurney wrote *Another Antigone* in 1988, he was commenting on several aspects of modern American academic life; not only is he talking about political correctness, he is answering Jasper Griffen's question about where we have gone wrong

¹⁵⁰ Oliver Taplin, "Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, Seamus Heaney's and Some Other Recent Half-Rhymes", in *Dionysus Since 69* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 146-7 and passim.

¹⁵¹ Its American premiere was in February 2005 at the Salem Theatre Company in Salem, Massachusetts. See *What's Happening with the Salem Theatre Company*, April 25, 2005, <http://salemtheatre.tripod.com/id7.html>, (accessed April 28, 2005).

¹⁵² A.R. Gurney, *Another Antigone*, (Garden City, New York: The Fireside Theatre, 1988), 6.

in our interpretations. He presents us with an “Antigone” in the figure of a female student named Judy who writes her own *Antigone* about nuclear arms, which her professor flatly refuses to accept. As he complains to the dean: “It will stir up a lot of cheap liberal guilt and a lot of fake liberal piety and a lot of easy liberal anger at the poor Creons of this world who are really working on this nuclear thing, and frantically trying to keep the world from blowing itself up!”¹⁵³ Carol Iannone, writing in a conservative academic journal, suggests that Gurney is giving us an Antigone who has the same determination as the original, but whose motivation comes solely from a system of political correctness that puts everyone who does not see things in her own way against her.¹⁵⁴ Judy is not an Antigone with the weight of moral right behind her, and her slow discovery of this creates a tragedy on a modern academic scale, which is to say very limited and not especially tragic. Nevertheless, the existence of this play shows that the politicization of *Antigone* on campus has been an important issue for at least twenty years.

The proliferation of *Antigones* after the first re-birth of interest in the 1940s continued throughout the rest of the twentieth century and is still happening today, with constant permutations on the Antigone story. The APGRD has records for twenty-nine productions between 1943 and 1988 (but doubtless the true number is greater). More recently, at least sixty-two productions were given since 1992 alone, with thirty-six of those occurring since 2001 (see Appendix 1). Institutions producing the play vary enormously in size and curriculum. For some institutions, *Antigone* is just one of a number of productions of ancient drama; for many others *Antigone* is the only Greek play they have ever produced. It is no accident that *Antigone* is this popular and that it seems

¹⁵³ Ibid., 24.

¹⁵⁴ Carol Iannone, “PC on Stage”. *Academic Questions*. Fall 1993. 77.

to represent all of Greek tragedy for a number of schools, but shows that American colleges remain just as fascinated with *Antigone* as they ever were. It seems, however, that recent debates in America have once again re-drawn the *Antigone* boundaries to discuss current events in America. Institutions that are fundamentally politically disparate are producing the same play, yet they may have different motivations for those productions. A concrete answer to this question will require much more specific information about productions of *Antigone* at different colleges, but for now we have the adumbration of a dichotomy between liberal colleges producing *Antigones* about areligious political activism, and conservative colleges producing *Antigones* about moral choice in a religious context.

Since 2001, some interpretations of the play have drawn parallels between Creon and George W. Bush, which seem to accuse both of a lack of moral sophistication. Heaney noted this, and so have several other directors of recent productions. John Wilson, a Christian commentator, asks in response to these parallels:

Why does the crudity of this surprise me? Maybe in part because one of the principal charges against Bush and all who voted for him is their allegedly simplistic view of the world. And the ‘ready parallel’ between Creon and George Bush is...subtly nuanced?¹⁵⁵

In fact, a major liberal charge against Bush is that he applies religious principles to state situations where religion ought to play no role in America, which is the opposite of Antigone’s charge against Creon. Antigone says her actions are ὄστος, and a desire for holiness pervades her actions. But should not the state have the same duty to honor divine laws? Wilson asks what role Christianity has in a global superpower which often acts against what is morally correct in the name of right. Antigone chose to die for her

¹⁵⁵ John Wilson, “Christian Realism”, *Books and Culture: A Christian Review*, January/February 2005, Vol. 11, No. 1, 5.

religious observances, but some see America's role in the world as inherently unchristian.¹⁵⁶ But Wilson sees a place for Christianity in politics, as he says in curiously Sophoclean language: "a Christian perspective on America's role as a superpower... must begin with our fallenness, a condition which results not only in tragedy but also in dark absurdity.... A squad of American soldiers dropped in Afghanistan or Iraq is at once an emblem of human depravity and of human nobility." No matter from what political or religious bent we approach *Antigone*, we find a possibility for discussing immediate and crucial concerns. Recent productions on college campuses are urging students, through the medium of *Antigone*, to discuss and act on these issues. Yet we see that politically liberal colleges emphasize Antigone as a political agent, and ask their students not to go as far in their own political activism, whereas politically conservative colleges emphasize Antigone as a moral agent and challenge their students to act on what is morally right.

Professor Ansley Valentine commented on the 2003 production at The College of Wooster in Ohio, which was a politically liberal production. He chose to do the play, he said, because it is an accessible story for both the audience and the actors, and is a play about ethics and deciding what is right. "Antigone is a political activist from the religious right... people are drawn to the play because this happens throughout history... There's a pendulum swing with the government legislating personal life."¹⁵⁷ In trying to find examples of how modern political rhetoric would portray the Theban situation, Valentine read speeches by George Bush and Donald Rumsfeld. He noted that their speeches were exactly like Creon's, and that some aspects of rhetoric and political aesthetic are inherent in leaders—"certain situations breed a certain kind of rhetoric, and Sophocles in writing

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ansley Valentine, Interview by Margaret Heller, 4/6/05, Wooster, OH.

the play was responding to that.” His reinterpretation of *Antigone* into a rock musical complete with Theban Identification Cards (which were the suggestion of a student) came out of a need to make the play “savvy to hook a college audience.” He hoped that students would take away from the play that Antigone’s actions were excessive and that they should think about how to make decisions about their political actions.

Stephanie Burlington, the director of Wheaton College’s 2002 production, had a similar didactic motivation. She says in a press release, “What excites me about the theatre is the opportunities it presents to inspire the audience to be more active. We can educate on relevant issues.” That includes political activism—like Valentine, Burlington wanted to encourage thought and action without overreaction:

Relating it to today’s political climate, we talk about Bush and about Iraq and Pakistan, and what has led us into those political standoffs... People have a voice that needs to be heard, that can be heard... I want them to go away questioning their involvement in our political system.¹⁵⁸

At institutions where religion is at the center of the curriculum and where political conservatism often goes hand in hand, interpretations of *Antigone* are simply not going to contain criticism of the President and the war in Iraq. When a religious college produces Anouilh’s adaptation (as some do), they seem to be in a way removing the religious aspect of the play. But what Anouilh does is take Sophoclean religion and put in a modern setting where being conflicted about religion and religious ceremonies is normal. Dana Robinson, a student director at Patrick Henry College in Virginia gave her reasons for choosing Anouilh’s version:

I thought that the existential themes and the moral ambiguity were even more pronounced in Anouilh's version than in Sophocles. Our school has a classical core curriculum, so some people are familiar with Sophocles,

¹⁵⁸ *Antigone*, ed. Betsy Cronin, <http://www.wheatoncollege.edu/acad/theatre/production/antigone> (accessed April 2, 2005).

and I thought Anouilh's version would be an interesting new perspective. I really like the way he deals with questions like the meaning of happiness and the necessity of compromise, without giving a definitive answer. I think that raising a question without an answer provokes more depth of thought.¹⁵⁹

Robinson noted that much of the audience did not find the play particularly accessible, but that “many other people, especially among our poly-sci students and the more philosophically inclined, were moved to ponder the questions raised for a considerable time afterward.”¹⁶⁰

Bethel College, an Evangelical Christian college in Indiana, produced Anouilh’s *Antigone* in 2005, and the director, Dr. Brock Fisher explained the motivation for performing that version:

We had decided to do *Antigone*. I’ve been a fan of Anouilh since my undergraduate years, so I wanted to do his version. A student came up with the Barbara Bray translation, which she found to be smoother than the former translations. So, we went with that. The play was appropriate, but in post show discussions there was a focus on why we chose the script and what values and morals it was teaching.¹⁶¹

This was Bethel College’s first production of an ancient drama, and the audience’s reaction was mixed to it. Dr. Fisher elaborates on this:

I believe that audiences will always be mixed about Anouilh’s version. It really is an adaptation as opposed to a translation. He does what he wants with the story, and one of the biggest changes is making Antigone far less likeable than in the original. I think that is somewhat hard for the audience to accept, because they want desperately to like somebody and Anouilh doesn’t really let them.¹⁶²

Productions going at the play from either ideological vein often feel the need to “modernize” the play (even when performing Anouilh’s version) in order to make it clear to audiences that it still has relevance to them. But is “relevance” really necessary to speak to a college audience? *Another Antigone* speaks to a weakness modern college productions seem to have when they over-politicize *Antigone*. Some productions do not

¹⁵⁹ Dana Robinson, E-mail message to author, April 29, 2005.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Brock Fisher, E-mail message to author, April 18, 2005.

¹⁶² Ibid.

wish to modernize in order to present the messages. Dr. Joe Ricke of Huntington College in Indiana said of their 2001 production:

Antigone explores important and sometimes difficult themes—the nature of heroism; the problem of knowing the will of God in a complex, seemingly ambiguous, situation; the corrupting nature of political power; even the long-term effects of a dysfunctional family. We have designed the play to be as far away from a contemporary television or film experience as possible... No one can recreate the atmosphere and excitement of ancient Greek tragedy authentically. But we are trying to suggest that world in as many ways as possible.¹⁶³

This approach to the play puts more trust in Sophocles' ability to resonate with modern audiences and has certain similarities with the approach the first Greek plays had in trying to maintain a unity with the original context of performances. Just as Antigone's "fevered emotions" aligned with the Second Great Awakening in nineteenth century America to teach morals and aesthetics¹⁶⁴, her religious zeal is a model for a number of institutions producing the play as a way to teach morality to college students through drama. Antigone's ultimatum to Ismene takes away Ismene's choice to change her mind and join in with Antigone. She has denied the power of God and her own internal convictions, and Antigone is through with that sort of attitude from the surrounding Thebans. We may be uncomfortable with Antigone's religious mania—but some of us may admire it.

Conclusion: Antigone Again and Again

More productions of *Antigone* are being staged on colleges all the time—halfway through 2005 at least six colleges were announcing productions. Again, a snowball effect occurs when one college does a play that meets with success, as we saw with the Harvard

¹⁶³ *Antigone explores heroism, duty, and honor: HC Theatre presents timeless Greek tragedy March 1-3*, <http://www.huntington.edu/news/0001/antigone1.htm>, (accessed 4/28/05).

¹⁶⁴ Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism*, 95.

Greek play of 1881, and then other colleges follow suit. Much of the history of *Antigone*'s influence is matter of coincidences: Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling all being in seminary together at Tübingen, the First World War causing people to re-examine the Antigone material, and the cancellation of the Antigone performance which led to *The Island*, just to name a few. But even if this is all coincidence, Antigone is most accessible to modern audiences precisely because we all operate in this culture which has been largely shaped by the Antigone current running through it. Steiner says that no one can be naïve about Antigone, because it is in our cultural vocabulary and everyone, whether or not they know the play will understand in some way what the problem it is getting at means.¹⁶⁵ College students find *Antigone* particularly compelling also because they easily identify with a young person being told what to do by elders who "know better," whether in the guise of political leaders or campus administration.

People are interested in struggling with the issues that Antigone raises. *Antigone* addresses the issues that are most important to Americans at this time such as the separation of church and state, religious fundamentalism and zealotry, and the rights of the government to dictate policy unilaterally to a democracy in a time of crisis. The number of productions recently shows that we still find *Antigone* a useful way to talk about these issues, and as new interpretations appear, new uses will be found for the play. Antigone is not leaving campus anytime soon.

¹⁶⁵ Steiner, 295-296.

Appendix 1

Performances of *Antigone* at American colleges and universities since 1992 for which there is either a production history folder at the APGRD or I have a (usually) a press release available. The college's official religious affiliation is noted; however, in many cases the religious affiliation has no bearing on the college's practices. For colleges at which religion is a highly important factor, I have bolded the religious affiliation.

Additionally, many colleges only report that they are performing "Sophocles' *Antigone*" without mentioning specific translations, in which case the version is noted simply as "Sophocles".

Year	College	Religious affiliation	Version
1992	University of Washington	None	Richard Emil Braun
1992	Pierce College	None	Sophocles
1993	Louisiana State University	None	Opera
1994	Mary Washington College	None	E.F. Watling
1994	Fullerton College	None	<i>Antigone 3000</i>
1994	Emory University	Methodist	<i>Tegonni: An African Antigone</i>
1994	New England College	None	Sophocles
1994	Regis College	Catholic	Anouilh
1995	University of Indiana	None	Another Antigone
1996	Union University	Southern Baptist	Sophocles
1996	Northwest Missouri State University	None	Sophocles
1996	Kutztown University	None	<i>The Island</i>
1998	Marietta College	None	Sophocles
1998	University of Michigan	None	Sophocles
1998	Doane College/Navajo Nation	Congregationalist	<i>Navajo Antigone</i>
1999	University of Columbia (South Carolina)	None	Director's own translation
1999	Ohio Wesleyan University	Methodist	Sophocles
1999	Furman University	None	Unknown
1999	Western Illinois University	None	Unknown
1999	Whittier College	None	Unknown
1999	Shimer College	None	Unknown
2000	LaGuardia Community College (New York)	None	Philip Lerman
2000	University of Alaska, Anchorage	None	Anouilh
2000	Randolph Macon Women's College	Methodist	Kenneth McLeish

2000	Old Dominion University	None	Unknown
2000	Agnes Scott College	Presbyterian	<i>Antigone's Dream</i>
		Evangelical	
2001	Huntington University	Christian	Sophocles
2001	University of California, Irvine	None	Director's own translation
2001	St. John's College	None	Sophocles
2001	University of North Carolina, Charlotte	None	Unknown
2001	College of the Ablemarle	None	Unknown
2002	University of South Carolina, Columbia	None	Nicholas Rudall
2002	Jacksonville University	None	Sophocles
2002	Bryn Mawr College	None	Sophocles
2002	Transylvania University	Christian	Sophocles
2002	University of Cincinnati	None	T. Wertenbaker
2002	Wheaton College	None	Unknown
2002	Rice University	None	Unknown
2002	University of Oklahoma	None	Unknown
2003	Covenant College	Presbyterian	Sophocles
2003	Bluffton College	Mennonite	T. Wertenbaker
2003	Troy State University	None	Unknown
2003	College of Wooster	Presbyterian	Director's own adaptation
2003	Cornell University	None	Sophocles
2004	Olivet College	None	Sophocles
2004	Patrick Henry College	Christian	Anouilh
2004	Seattle Pacific University	Methodist	Sophocles
2004	University of Washington	None	Anouilh
2004	Quinnipiac University	None	Unknown
2004	Southwestern Minnesota State University	None	Unknown
2004	Cameron University	None	Unknown
2004	University of Massachusetts, Boston	None	Unknown
2004	El Camino College	None	Unknown
2004	Millsaps College	Methodist	Anouilh
2004	University of Wisconsin, Fond du Lac	None	Sophocles
2004	Connecticut College	None	Anouilh
2004	Lehman College	None	Sophocles
2005	Chaldron State College	None	Anouilh
		Evangelical	
2005	Bethel College	Christian	Anouilh
2005	American University	None	Sophocles
2005	Peace College	Presbyterian	Anouilh
2005	Yale University	None	<i>Antigonia</i>
2005	Campbell University	Southern Baptist	Sophocles

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