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ASSUMPTIONS AND THE CREATION OF MEANING: READING SOPHOCLES' ANTIGONE*

THE notion that texts are not read neutrally, but through perceptual filters shaped by culturally determined assumptions which determine perception and reaction¹ would, I believe, be accepted—in some form—by most literary critics by now. But the extent and radical nature of the cultural determination of reading and their methodological implications are often not fully realized. For they entail that, if we wish to read a text such as the *Antigone* as closely as possible to the ways in which its contemporary audience did, we must reconstruct in detail their cultural assumptions, by means of which meaning was created, and try to read through perceptual filters created by those assumptions;² otherwise we will inevitably read through our own assumptions by default, and as these are very different from those of the Athenians of the late 440s,³ they will inevitably produce very different meanings from theirs.

We must also block the intrusion of all preconceptions, for they corrupt the reading by functioning as unconscious centres organizing the text into patterns which reflect them, not only by privileging certain interpretations, but also at a basic level of reading, by leading us to stress

* Severe limitations of space prevent me from confronting the earlier literature; references are cut to the minimum. A draft of this paper was delivered at a seminar at King's College, Cambridge, in 1983 and subsequently also at Oxford. I am grateful to many scholars who discussed aspects of the play with me, especially to Professor Pat Easterling, Dr Ruth Padel, Dr Robert Parker and Dr Oliver Taplin for discussions and advice, and the editor of *JHS* Dr Christopher Pelling for his manifold help. I discuss other aspects of this play elsewhere, and use the following abbreviations for these papers: MT: *Le mythe dans la tragédie, la tragédie à travers le mythe: Sophocle, Antigone vv. 944–87* in C. Calame (ed.), *Métamorphoses du mythe en Grèce antique* (Geneva 1988) 167–83; FS: *The fourth stasimon of Sophocles' Antigone*, published in *BICS* xxxv (1989). BW: *Sophocles' Antigone as a bad woman*, forthcoming in F. Dieteren and E. Kloek (eds), *Women's history in theory and practice*. FL: *Familial loyalties: norms of feminine behaviour in classical Athens*, to be published in a collection ed. by L. Archer, S. Fischler and M. Wyke. AAR: *Antigone 904–20: a reading*, forthcoming in *AION sezione filologico-letteraria*. I use the term 'reading' partly metaphorically, to include making sense of a play in performance; the points I am making have even greater force in the latter case.

¹ For references to works discussing the cultural determination of perception cf. C. Sourvinou-Inwood, in C. Bérard, C. Bron and A. Pomari (eds), *Images et société en Grèce ancienne. L'iconographie comme méthode d'analyse* (Lausanne 1987) 52 nn. 2–4; to discussions of signification and the creation of meaning: *op. cit.* nn. 5–8. For the placing of such insights in reader-oriented criticism: J. Culler, *On deconstruction. Theory and criticism after structuralism* (London, Melbourne and Henley 1983) 17–83 *passim*; S. R. Suleiman in S. R. Suleiman and I. Crosman (eds), *The reader in the text. Essays on audience and interpretation* (Princeton 1980) 3–45. The model I follow in my attempt to reconstruct the reading process is based on U. Eco, *The role of the reader* (London 1981) 3–43.

² I discuss the questions associated with this process

in BW, section 2. Cultural determination cannot be wholly eliminated but it can be blocked to a very considerable extent (Sourvinou-Inwood 1987 [n. 1] 52 nn. 3–4). Such reconstruction is a construct of some minimum common sets of assumptions that can be presumed (when they can) to have been shared by this other construct: all or most mid-fifth century Athenians.

³ The exact date of the *Antigone* is not certain beyond doubt, but the generally accepted date in the late 440s is extremely likely. The story (Radt, *TrGF* vol. 4, 45 T. no. 25) that Sophocles was elected general because of the success of the *Antigone* (on this story cf. L. Woodbury, *Phoenix* xxiv [1970] 209–24; M. R. Lefkowitz, *The lives of the Greek poets* [London 1981] 80–3; U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Aristoteles und Athen*. vols. I–II [Berlin 1893] 298 n. 14), which suggests a date in the late 440s, since Sophocles was general at 441/440 may be an invention, but was it based on correct information about the play's date? Lefkowitz *op. cit.* 82 rightly notes that other stories, one of which was ascribed to Satyros, place the *Antigone* at the end of Sophocles' life, which suggests that in the third century there was no fixed information on the date of the *Antigone*. Despite this, there are reasons for thinking that the story about Sophocles' generalship contains correct historical information, and that this tragedy had indeed been produced in the late 440s. First, this story, unlike the others, is certainly known to contain one piece of correct information, that Sophocles had been a general, indeed, that his career as a general included an involvement with Samos. Second, and most importantly, there is a reflection of *Antigone* 909–12 in Euripides' *Alcestis* 293–4; cf. also 285–6 (H. J. Blumenthal, *CR* n.s. xxiv [1974] 174–5). *Alcestis* was produced in 438, which thus gives us the *terminus ante quem*; the inspiration would make perfect sense if the *Antigone* was produced in the late 440s. Finally, the story's invention makes best sense as a *post hoc* transformed into a *propter hoc*. (Cf. Wilamowitz *op. cit.* 298 n. 14. For a discussion of the play's date: cf. esp. Woodbury *op. cit.*; W. M. Calder III, *GRBS* ix [1968] 389–90.)

some parts of the text and underplay others. If the preconceptions which thus unconsciously organize the text are incorrect, the reading is corrupted—though such readings appear convincing because they are coherent and self-validating. The case limit of such unconscious structuring through prior assumptions is the excision of passages that challenge those assumptions. Jebb's case against the authenticity of *Ant.* 904–20⁴ is an example of an argument which begins implicitly with certain unconscious views about the play—and about tragic writing—being taken as a 'given' with which vv. 904–20 is not easily compatible; no account is taken of the possibility that the logical flaws create specific meanings (which fit perfectly with the rest of the play when it is read through the ancient perceptual filters).

Two types of prior assumptions can lead to major distortion. First, those created by earlier readings which can create filters through which the text is unconsciously structured. Thus, if we apply to the *Antigone*—even if only to question it—the perceptual model 'individual opposing the state to obey his conscience', we run the risk of structuring the play through an alien schema and of introducing a multifaceted distortion. The polis was not simply 'the state', the political establishment, it was the ordered world of its citizens, in which religion was centrally important. Also, that perceptual model represents an established schema with potent connotations in our own world, but not, in my view, in that of the fifth century Athenians.⁵ This entails that we would be organizing and understanding the text differently from the latter, instead of trying to reconstruct how this specific situation would have been perceived by them. The most obvious source of distortion from this perceptual model is the ideological bias.⁶ For⁷ we privilege individual freedom and distrust the state's claim to supremacy, and so are hostile to the views expressed by Kreon at vv. 175–90, unlike the Athenians, for whom loyalty to the polis was a necessity, and the notion that one's supreme loyalty was to the polis was part of the commonly shared ideology. Thus Kreon in vv. 175–90 speaks the polis discourse, exemplifying democratic patriotism—which is indeed how Demosthenes took the lines.⁸ Ideological bias does not simply affect readers' reactions and assessments, but also the perception of the text itself, what aspects the reader will privilege, stress or ignore within the text (*cf.* n. 6).

Another potential source of distortion is the assumptions generated through the knowledge of the play's outcome, when we read backwards.⁹ First, since our aim is to try to reproduce the process of signification through which the original audience made sense of the play, we should eschew this type of reading which had no part in that process. Then, since the perceptual filters we deploy lead us to stress or neglect some aspects, and structure others in certain configurations, if we assume that, for example, the meaning 'Antigone is right' is the centre of the play, we shall implicitly organize and read it through this centre, with the inevitable result of reducing, or even concealing, the play's complexities, polysemies, ambivalences and ambiguities, and any multivocality and warring discourses it may contain, and thus implicitly collapsing its meanings into a straightforward development of a simple, monosemic message and assume that it is unilinear and univocal. Contemporary literary criticism has taught us that the assumption of monosemy and of such an extraordinary unity of discourse impoverishes and distorts the reading of texts.¹⁰ To put it crudely, if we privilege the point of view or character which eventually

⁴ R. C. Jebb ed., *Sophocles. The plays and fragments*. Part III. *The Antigone* (Cambridge 1888) p. 164 ad loc. and esp. Appendix pp. 257–61. On 904 ff. *cf.* BW and FL.

⁵ *Cf.* also *G&R* xxxv (1988) 29–39.

⁶ On ideological bias *cf.* Eco *op. cit.* (n. 1) 22–3; *cf. id.*, *A theory of semiotics* (Bloomington 1976) 289–90; T. Eagleton, *Criticism and ideology*² (London 1978) *passim*, esp. 11–43.

⁷ *Cf.* B. M. W. Knox, *The heroic temper* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1964) 84–7; *id.*, *Word and action* (Baltimore, London 1979) 166–7.

⁸ *Cf.* Dem. xix 247 (*cf.* 246–8) and Knox 1964 (n. 7)

181 n. 52); *cf.* C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean tragedy* (Oxford 1964) 68.

⁹ Especially as this procedure would interact with our assumptions which include perceptions of the *Antigone* developed over the years which privilege the backwards reading (which partly generated them), so that the two fallacies would reinforce each other and distort in the same direction.

¹⁰ Even those who do not accept that all texts and myths are polysemic and multivocal cannot deny the possibility that they may be, and so should avoid methodologies that would distort the reading if their assumptions are wrong.

'prevails' we distort the reading, for in the play this was only one possibility, eventually realized out of several others, and this was an important aspect of the process of meaning creation; also, its 'victory' may not have been absolute in the play, it may have been modified or deconstructed by elements which are understressed or ignored when the reading is centred on the final outcome—an outcome which in such a process is itself perceived more monolithically than the text in fact presents it, precisely because the earlier complexity and multivocality has been missed. This, in my view, is the case with the *Antigone*: the privileging of Antigone's discourse by modern readers has led to readings which ignore the play's complexities and ambivalences, and obscure what I see as a central concern of the play, a question at the very centre of classical Greek religion. Readings centred on a play's final outcome also implicitly presuppose, and to a large extent create readings involving, a notion of character as a static 'essence' (with or without an underlying notion of psychological coherence), instead of the shifting constructs created interactively by the author, the text, and the audience, which is what characters in Greek tragedy are.¹¹

Severe limitations of space prevent me from setting out the correct step by step systematic reading of the *Antigone*; I shall present a condensed version of some aspects of, and some conclusions derived from, that reading, concentrating on the role of two types of assumptions in the process of meaning creation. The first pertains to the articulation of the tragedy. I begin with a pair of textual devices pertaining to the relationship between the world of the play and that of the audience. In this play, the concept 'polis' is most important. The relationship between the semantic field 'Athenian polis of the late 440s' as an empirical reality and also an ideality (the collective Athenian representation of the Athenian polis, which is not to be reduced to this empirical reality) and the Theban polis of the play is very complex. It must not be assumed that the latter was perceived by the audience as a mimetic representation of Athenian democracy—which would have entailed that Kreon would have been judged by these standards of democratic behaviour.¹² But neither was it perceived as an alien world ruled by a tyrant, insulated from Athenian reality. The distancing involved in situating the action of the play in the distant mythological past (and in Thebes¹³), may well have been in the foreground, but it was only one facet of a very complex relationship.

The empirical reality of, and the ideality about, fifth-century Athens inevitably provided the raw material out of which were shaped the filters through which mythical Thebes was viewed, shaping Sophocles' selections in the play, and determining his audience's perception of, and reaction to, that polis; we all inevitably make sense of the world, and of texts and plays, through filters formed by our own experiences and cultural assumptions—unless care is taken to block and replace them with others. These assumptions included the intertextual frame 'heroic age polis ruled by a king'—constructed through earlier plays—in all its diversity (*cf.* n. 12). In my view, the relationship between the world of the audience and that of the play was not constant and inert, but was created by the play, manipulated in different ways in the course of it. In the *Antigone* (and not only here) this relationship is manipulated through two types of textual devices: 'distancing devices', which had the effect of distancing the action from the world of the fifth century Athenian polis, differentiating the two; and 'zooming devices', which had the effect of bringing the world of the play nearer, pushing the audience into relating their experiences and assumptions directly to the play.

Another important textual element pertaining to the articulation of the tragedy is furnished by the schemata, particular models of organizing experience which structure myths, collective

¹¹ *Cf.* also P. E. Easterling in C. Pelling ed., *Characterization and individuality in Greek literature*, forthcoming.

¹² On kings in tragedy *cf.* P. E. Easterling, in Javier Coy y Javier de Hoz (ed.), *Estudios sobre los generos literarios ii* (Salamanca 1984) 33–45. *Eur. Suppl.* 399–441 can be seen also as an attempt to articulate a relationship

between the Theban polis ruled by Kreon and its *politeia* to the Athenian political myth of Theseus the democratic king. *Aesch. Suppl.* 365–9, 397–9, 600–5 presents a democracy with a king in Argos.

¹³ On this *cf.* F. I. Zeitlin, in J. P. Euben (ed.), *Greek tragedy and political theory* (Berkeley 1986) 101–41.

representations and texts—such as the 'patricide' schema, which structures all myths involving patricide—and are themselves structured by, and thus express, the society's collective representations and ideologies, its cultural assumptions.¹⁴ I shall be suggesting that the deployment of such schemata (which helped articulate the tragedy, functioning as matrices shaping the elements that make up the story) triggered off certain reactions and expectations.

I shall now discuss a cultural assumption which is crucial to the reading of the *Antigone*, and has often been misunderstood. In the classical Greek world it was the polis which articulated religion, which provided the basic framework in which religion operated and anchored, legitimated and mediated all religious activity and had the ultimate authority in, and control of, all cults; it encompassed and sanctioned all religious discourse within it, including that of its constituent units such as the *oikos* and the phratry. It was the polis which mediated the participation of its citizens in Panhellenic cult. In the absence of scriptural texts, revelation, of a canonical body of belief, and of a 'professional' divinely anointed clergy claiming special knowledge or authority, and of a church, it was the polis, the ordered community, that assumed the authority that structured the world into a religious system. Correlative with those absences mentioned is the fact that a central category in Greek religion is unknowability, the belief that human knowledge about the divine and about the right way of behaving towards it is limited.¹⁵ Prophecy, the only direct means of access to the divine world in Greek religion, provides the only anchoring for the polis' endeavour to ensure the correct behaviour towards the gods. But in Greek mentality prophecy is flawed, because human fallibility interferes and the gods' words are often misinterpreted. In tragedy, prophecy is always right; but this is a piece of intertextual knowledge possessed by the audience; in the world of the play, in the eyes of the *dramatis personae*, prophecy is as likely to be flawed as it was in fifth-century Athens—and this would have been perceived to be so by the audience.

Thus it is a misunderstanding of the ancient realities which leads to a misreading of the text to believe,¹⁶ that Kreon, in privileging the polis, has focused exclusively on politics; or that¹⁷ Antigone on the one hand, and Kreon as a spokesman for the polis on the other, have different religious loyalties, the former privileging and championing the chthonic gods and the funerary rites, which the polis allegedly underprivileges, while Kreon as spokesman of the polis is only concerned with the Olympian civic gods, and ignores and excludes the claims of the nether gods, of funerary practices, which belong to the domain of the family and not of the state. The polis does not exclude or undervalue chthonic cults; it encompasses all religious discourse and practice. Neither are all civic cults Olympian; many are chthonic, both heroic and divine cults (including, in Athens, the important civic cult of Poseidon Erechtheus). In denying burial to Polyneikes Kreon was not undervaluing funerary cults. He was simply exercising the polis' taken-for-granted right to deny burial to a traitor. The polis had ultimate jurisdiction over funerary discourse and practice, as is shown by the funerary legislation issued by various poleis, through which they regulated all 'private' funerary practice.¹⁸ The funeral was a family affair, but this does not affect the fact that it was the polis that sanctioned funerary discourse and practice. In Athens the war-dead were given a public burial by the polis; in it their families play only a limited role—and the women of the family a very limited and strictly demarcated one.¹⁹ The mirror image of the public funerals of the war heroes, the disposal of the traitor's body, also belonged to the public sphere. It was normal Athenian practice for traitors, sacrilegers and

¹⁴ I discuss schemata, especially 'child-parent hostility' ones in *Theseus as son and stepson* (London 1979) 8–18; and in *OpAth xvii* (1988) section 2.

¹⁵ I present the arguments on which these views are based in a paper ('What is polis religion?') forthcoming in S. Price and O. Murray (eds), *The Greek city from Homer to Alexander*. Cf. also K. J. Dover, *Greek popular morality* (Oxford 1974) 306.

¹⁶ Cf. e.g. G. F. Else, *The madness of Antigone* (Heidelberg 1976) 40. For a much subtler version of the

notion of Kreon's narrowly political bias cf. e.g. R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles. An interpretation* (Cambridge 1980) 148.

¹⁷ Cf. Knox 1964 (n. 7) 99–102.

¹⁸ I have discussed funerary legislation in R. Hägg (ed.), *The Greek renaissance of the eighth century B.C.: tradition and innovation* (Stockholm 1983) 47–8.

¹⁹ Cf. N. Loraux, *L'invention d'Athènes* (Paris, La Haye, New York 1981) *passim*: cf. esp. 23–6.

certain other categories of transgressors to be denied burial.²⁰ The opposition between war-dead and traitors was very important; democratic Athens made the public funerals of the war-dead an occasion and focus for its own glorification. By the late fifth century at least, Kannonos' decree²¹ decreed that anyone convicted of having wronged the Athenian people should be executed and thrown into the pit.

I shall now set out a small incomplete sample of my attempted reconstruction of the fifth century readings of the *Antigone*. At the very beginning of the play the audience saw two women in the dark, in a place which (it becomes clear in vv. 18–19) is beyond the courtyard's gates, and thus a place where they ought not to be.²² This frames them negatively, and this is intensified when the woman who spoke first, whom the audience would have immediately identified as Antigone, mentions their father and the misfortunes of their family, since for the Athenian audience this would have activated the perception that the two women belong to a perverted family, whose doom is caused (the established mentality pertaining to such matters would lead the audience to understand) by the gods' will and their own actions. This perception is explicitly articulated by the chorus in the second stasimon.²³ The notion of doom, and the role of the gods, is explicitly stressed through Antigone's reference in vv. 2–3 to the ills derived from Oidipous which Zeus visits upon them. This places what follows in that context of disorder and ills which Oidipous' activities have caused to be visited upon his descendants by Zeus. Antigone first mentions Kreon and his prohibition of burial through the expression (v. 8) κήρυγμα θεῖναι τὸν στρατηγὸν (. . . [this] proclamation that [they say] the general has issued . . .). Kreon is not referred to by name, but is defined entirely through a civic office, one which was important in the fifth century Athenian democratic polis, and which was naturally associated with *kērygmata* (proclamations, decrees).²⁴ Antigone, that is, is describing the action she objects to, and the person who has taken it, neither of which are specified, through the terminology of democratic Athens in which both are legitimate and positively coloured. Thus, before they heard what the *kērygma* said or who the *stratēgos* (general) was, this formulation in v. 8 functioned as a zooming device which made the audience perceive Kreon's authority in terms of the Athenian institutions and polis authority, and thus to colour positively the action which he was perceived to be performing in the name of the polis, and negatively Antigone who objects to it. The positive colouring of the unnamed *stratēgos* and his *kērygma* must have been intensified when Ismene's words (vv. 11 ff.) made clear (before the content of the *kērygma* was announced) that the polis has just overcome great danger, that the Argive army brought by Polyneikes against Thebes was defeated, and Eteokles and Polyneikes had killed each other. The negative colouring of Antigone is further intensified through vv. 18–19, which make clear that the two women are out of their proper place and stress the conspiratorial nature of the encounter.

²⁰ Cf. references to ancient sources and discussions in R. Parker, *Miasma. Pollution and purification in early Greek religion* (Oxford 1983) 45–7; G. Cerri, in G. Gnoli and J.-P. Vernant (eds), *La mort, les morts dans les sociétés anciennes* (Cambridge, Paris 1982) 121–31 *passim*; V. J. Rosivach, *Rheinisches Museum* cxxvi (1983) 193–4; T. C. W. Oudemans and A. P. M. H. Lardinois, *Tragic ambiguity. Anthropology, philosophy and Sophocles' Antigone* (Leiden 1987) 101–2; J. Bremmer, *The early Greek concept of the soul* (Princeton 1983) 90–2. Whatever the status of the story of the clandestine burial of Themistocles' bones in Attica reported in Thuc. i 138–6, the law forbidding the burial of traitors in Attica was probably in existence at 462. The story is likely to have been part of the anti-Themistoclean propaganda. Perception of the action would have been coloured by the fact that Themistocles' status as a traitor was not unambivalent.

²¹ Cf. Xenoph. *Hell.* i 7.20 but cf. J. Diggle, *CR* xxxi (1981) 107–8; Parker (n. 20) 47 n. 52; it cannot be dated precisely.

²² On the use of space in the *Antigone* cf. O. Taplin, *Omnibus* vii (March 1984) 13–16; P. E. Easterling, *BICS* xxxiv (1988) 22–3.

²³ On which cf. H. Lloyd-Jones, *The justice of Zeus* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1971) 113–14 (cf. 114–17); P. E. Easterling, in R. D. Dawe, J. Diggle, P. E. Easterling (eds), *Dionysiaca. Nine studies in Greek poetry presented to Sir Denys Page on his 70th birthday* (Cambridge 1978) 141–58.

²⁴ Cf. Thuc. iv 105. On *kērygma* cf. also Calder (n. 3) 392–3 and n. 20. One *stratēgos* could sometimes be given supreme command in a particular campaign, and one or more could be granted special powers (cf. C. Hignett, *A history of the Athenian constitution* [Oxford 1952] 247–8, 353–4). Knox 1964 (n. 7) 82–3 sees Antigone's reference to Kreon's edict in terms similar to mine. Cf. also Winnington-Ingram (n. 16) 122 and n. 18.

After this framing has been set in place, Antigone reveals that Kreon has buried Eteokles with honour and refused burial to Polyneikes, whose corpse he ordered to be left exposed to be eaten by carrion birds. The Athenian audience who took for granted the authority of the polis to dispose of the bodies of traitors and sacrilegers would have seen the differential treatment of the two brothers, and the denial of proper burial to Polyneikes, as perfectly reasonable. They would have perceived Polyneikes as a traitor.²⁵ As a moment of supreme danger was overcome, Kreon, like Athens, used death as a symbolic focus for the reconstitution and glorification of the shattered polis, by evaluating the leader who died for the polis, and its opposite, the traitor who endangered the existence of the polis, as *politai*, giving the former an honourable funeral while refusing burial altogether to the latter. This is normal, legitimate polis discourse. It is doubtful whether the audience would have meditated on the particular form of the dishonourable treatment meted out to Polyneikes' corpse, for the centre of gravity created by Antigone's words was on the differential treatment of the two brothers and the dishonour done to Polyneikes. Soon (45–6), it moves to the notion that she will defy the *kérygma* of the *stratēgos*. The Athenian audience would have understood this to entail that she would be acting against the will of the citizens; this perception is articulated explicitly at v. 79, when Ismene makes clear that Antigone's plan involves acting *biai politōn* (against the will of the citizens). This extremely important formulation is taken up again by Antigone herself at 907, when she almost explicitly admits that she buried Polyneikes *biai politōn*.

There can be no doubt that Antigone's behaviour and actions would have been perceived by the Athenians as illegitimately subversive of the polis. She proposed to break the law in disobeying the decree, and also she was challenging the polis' control over the funerary discourse, and its fundamental ordering and articulation, which declared the disposal of the body of both the war-dead and of traitors a public matter; she challenged, invaded and disturbed the public sphere in the service of her private interests. The polis values dictated that the citizens' private interests had to be subordinated to the public interests of the polis (*cf.* Thucydides ii 60). Kreon's speech expressing these sentiments (175–90) was quoted with approval by Demosthenes (xix 247 *cf.* 246–8) as the epitome of democratic patriotism. Antigone privileged her own interests over those of the polis and subverted the very articulation of the polis.²⁶ For the fifth century Athenians her actions were not a response (let alone a correct or acceptable one) to 'legitimately' conflicting duties, towards the *oikos* and towards the polis. The notion that in Athenian eyes it was Antigone's family duty to bury her brother is, I submit, wrong. First, the head of the *oikos* to which Antigone became attached on the death of her brother Eteokles was Kreon. Thus her *oikos* duty was to obey Kreon. (Kreon was also the father of her prospective

²⁵ A man who raises a foreign army to march against his own city to destroy it would indisputably be a traitor in the eyes of the Athenians who had declared Themistocles a traitor for much less (*cf.* Thuc. i 135–8). A large section of the audience had experienced the events of 458/7, when treachery had endangered Athenian democracy, when there was a Spartan army in Boeotia and a threat of a Spartan invasion of Attica, encouraged and probably urged by some extreme Athenian oligarchs who hoped to overthrow democracy with Spartan help. The stories told about Kimon and his followers fighting for Athens make clear that such behaviour was seen as treachery abhorred by the traitors' political allies, not as a legitimate move in a political play between oligarchs and democrats. Given the interactive process of meaning creation, the experience and memory of these events, and its traces in the collective *imaginaire* inevitably helped shape the audience's perceptual filters, so that they could not have thought of Polyneikes as other than a traitor. This perception was strongly reinforced by the ways in

which Polyneikes is presented in the text (*cf.* 110 ff.; 285–7. *Cf.* also Knox 1964 [n. 7] 83–4). He wished to do to Thebes and its *hiera* the opposite of what Athenians swore to do in the ephebic oath, which would characterize him as an impious traitor in their eyes. Any intertextual echoes that may have come into play would have operated in the same direction. He is characterized very negatively at A. *Sept.* 580–5 by Amphiaraos, who is a wise man and a seer. This negative characterization is reinforced by his marriage, which Antigone calls ill-starred (v. 870), and which places him even more strongly on the wrong side in Athenian eyes: he contracted a marriage alliance with the leading family of a foreign state, which he used against his own city. This was aristocratic behaviour seen to be inimical to the democratic polis who feared conflicting loyalties and foreign power-bases; it was one of the reasons behind Pericles' citizenship law of 451/0.

²⁶ There was no notion of individual (human) rights limiting the polis' right to demand the sacrifice of private interests (*cf.* Dover [n. 15] 156–60; 289).

husband. Here the natal family and the [prospective] husband's are one.) Moreover, it is very doubtful whether the Athenians would have understood that Antigone, a woman, would have been allowed, let alone had the duty, to bury her brother. The person whose duty it would have been to bury Polyneikes if he had not been a traitor was Kreon. Of course, when the man responsible for a burial does not perform it others do so. But even when no disobedience to the polis was involved, such others would normally be men.²⁷ Thus, it was not the case that, as has been suggested, the association between women and the death ritual entails that Antigone is acting in her appropriate role as a woman. For, because of the women's close symbolic association with disorder, they carried the main ritual weight in the first part of the death ritual, which was dominated by ritual disorder and pollution, while in the burial ceremony, which terminated the period of abnormality and restored order, it was carried by men. Antigone's choice was deeply subversive, as is expressed symbolically in the fact that the family whose interests she privileged above those of the polis is a deeply flawed, perverted family—as is stressed in the play. Antigone and her brother were the products of an incestuous union. The brother she wants to bury was killed by her other brother whom he killed at the same time. This negative colouring of the oikos whose interests Antigone privileges against the established ideology, intensified further through Ismene's words at 49 ff., which strengthen the notion that they were a perverted family acting out their own destruction, helps give negative connotations to Antigone's actions. The fact that in Athenian eyes Antigone's was a perverted choice is made explicit and intensified at 904–12 where she states that she would not have acted in this way for a husband or a son, while in the ideology of the time her familial duty was very much more compelling in those cases.²⁸

The perception that Antigone's action was a self-willed act of rebellion against the polis and the established order was both reinforced, and expressed, through the fact that she is a woman out of her proper place, conspiring in the dark to act against the polis at a critical moment, when the polis had just been saved from a dreadful danger brought about by the traitorous actions of the man for whom she planned to subvert the law. Ismene's words at 61–2 γυναιῶν ὅτι ἔφουμεν, ὡς πρὸς ἀνδρας οὐ μαχομένα (for we were born women, not meant to fight against men) not only helps frame Antigone's behaviour as bad when set against what was considered proper for women, but also, I suggest, activates schemata in which the notion that women act on their own subversively are articulated and evaluated (very negatively) 'women in charge' and 'women out of control'.²⁹ When Kreon says more than once (484–5; 525; 678–80; cf. also 740, 756) that he will not be ruled by a woman he is activating (inside the play and for the audience) the schema 'women in charge', of the rule of women as reversed world, and is thus expressing, and communicating, his perception of the threat of disorder represented by Antigone. In the symbolic classification which structured this schema the female when opposed to the male stands for disorder. I have argued elsewhere (BW) that the Athenian audience would have perceived Antigone as a woman out of her proper place acting against what is considered proper female behaviour, as a 'bad woman', and that this expressed, and polarized even further, the perception of her behaviour as subversive and threatening. Ismene is excessively 'forgiving' towards Antigone despite the latter's aggressive and contemptuous behaviour, and thus exemplifies, as she does in her refusal to act with Antigone, the correct modality of female response.

At the end of the Prologue, before returning to her proper place inside the house (while Antigone goes outside into the plain to bury Polyneikes, thus moving further away from a woman's proper place) Ismene characterizes Antigone as *anous* (foolish, wanting in sense). This notion of Antigone's folly, first mentioned by a character who is sympathetic to her, is an important motif which recurs (cf. v. 562; cf. also *aphrosynēi* [folly] at 383). In the second stasimon,

²⁷ Cf. BW.

²⁸ On vv. 904–12 cf. BW, and esp. AAR; on privileging the husband's oikos cf. *op. cit.* and FL.

²⁹ On 'women out of control' cf. FS. On 'women in

charge': P. Vidal-Naquet, *Le chasseur noir*² (Paris 1983) 267–88; S. G. Pembroke, *JESHO* viii (1965) 217–47; *id.*, *JWCI* xxx (1967) 1–35; F. I. Zeitlin, *Arethusa* xi (1978) 153–60.

at 602, the notion of *anoia* (folly) is connected with the *atē* which is destroying the house of the Labdacids, it is caused by the *atē* and is bringing about Antigone's destruction. Thus v. 99, which marks the end of the Prologue, confirms the negative colouring of Antigone. Even in the eyes of Ismene Antigone's enterprise is the manifestation of folly. The fact that Ismene later joins in that folly does not invalidate this assessment. The *anoia* attacked this other last shoot of the house of the Labdacids.

This negative colouring is confirmed and reinforced further by the *parodos*, which throws into relief the danger that Thebes had suffered, and thus also the anti-polis bias of Antigone who, by conspiring against the *kérygma* (for the sake of the traitor who caused this danger), threatens disorder at the very moment when order was reestablished. It is sung by the chorus of Theban elders who in the eyes of fifth century Athenians represent the voice with which—in the absence of signals to the contrary—their own perceptions would above all identify. The case of the polis would be privileged by the audience because of their own preconceptions and because the play articulates it in positive colours: it was presented in the sunlight, with an emphasis on the rising sun, by elders of the city celebrating victory and the polis' salvation. The positive symbolism of the *parodos*³⁰ emphasizes the negative evaluation of, and the threat of anarchy represented by, Antigone. As is known, its opening words recall Pindar's ninth paean. In both songs the darkness is over—the darkness of the eclipse in one case, the metaphorical darkness of war and threat, symbolized by the darkness of the night in the other. But the paean mentions the fear that the eclipse may have been a *sama* of war or stasis or some other terrible thing. Thus the combination of the audience's knowledge of Antigone's plotting and the intertextual echoes—for those in whom they were activated, and certainly for Sophocles—introduced into the celebratory ode an intimation of threat and disorder. Incidentally, by presenting it from this viewpoint, the play is here also articulating Antigone's actions in negative terms. The intimation of threat and disorder is reinforced by the invocation of Dionysos, where the ninth paean had addressed a prayer to Apollo, the god of order *par excellence*. With or without the activation of the intertextual references which throw the intimations of danger into relief, the invocation of Dionysos as a civic god by the elders who invite him to lead the victory celebrations inevitably brought with it the evocation of his persona, which included the tendency to confuse boundaries, and disturb temporarily the normal articulation of the polis.

The image of the god who brings disorder to the polis by leading women to abandon their homes, traditional roles and the polis and go outside in a state of 'madness' would, I submit, set up an echo leading back to the prologue and the action Antigone proposed to take, and forwards, prefiguring the accomplishment of that action. This (implicit here) image of Antigone seen (metaphorically) as a Maenad returns, and is taken further in the fourth stasimon, where, I have argued elsewhere (FS; MT) it is articulated and developed in a context that prefigures the revelation that the case for which, like the Maenads, she had abandoned her home and proper role and embraced disordered behaviour, was ultimately serving the gods. The invocation of, and prayer to, Dionysos who is asked to heal and purify Thebes in vv. 1115–54 is also correlative with his role of promoting order-creating disorder (in the play through Antigone); for this, it will emerge, is what had become necessary once the polis polluted itself by transgressing against the cosmic order. In the *parodos* the notion of order-creating disorder and women acting in a disordered and mad manner in the service of a god has been brought into play though the invocation of Dionysos; but it is doubtful whether the audience would have consciously associated it with Antigone at this point. It is an element of the play's multivocality, which will eventually partly deconstruct the negative anti-polis female rebel image of Antigone—and be deconstructed by it.

The beginning of the first episodeion throws again sharply into relief the dominant and primary theme in the *parodos*: the salvation of the polis and the restoration of order after dire

³⁰ On which, and the contrast to that of the prologue cf. also R. W. B. Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies* (Oxford 1980) 90; cf. *op. cit.* 90–5 on the *parodos* in general.

danger. Kreon's first words refer to the restoration of order; this and the statements that follow, of which vv. 175–90 were cited by Demosthenes as admirable exemplification of democratic patriotism, must undoubtedly have coloured Kreon positively in the eyes of the Athenian audience. Vv. 207–10 which conclude his speech express sentiments of which all right-thinking Athenians would approve, and stress that it is loyalty to the *polis* that Kreon values and rewards—punishing its opposite—not to himself. It thus functions as a zooming device. The chorus' response (211–14) articulates the notion that the *polis*, in this case in the person of Kreon, has the absolute authority to dispose of its citizens, alive or dead, as it wishes, according to their behaviour towards it. This notion on the one hand corresponds to the realities of democratic Athens concerning the power of the *polis*, on the other it is distanced from it, for in the world of the play the authority of the *polis* was concentrated in the hands of one man. But this distancing does not entail that the Athenian audience would perceive Kreon negatively because he had such power; the Thebes of the play was not seen as a mimetic representation of democratic Athens and judged accordingly.

As for the guard, in my view, it is not the case that the guard's fear and Kreon's threats show that Kreon was seen as a despotic tyrant. First, harsh penalties for failure were not unknown in democratic Athens (the fate of the Arginoussai generals being a prime example); second, similar behaviour also characterizes, for example, Oidipous in *OT* who is not presented as a despotic tyrant; finally, vv. 315–19 and 323 make clear that the guard was constructed, and would have been perceived, as a 'comic character', so that he (his reactions and statements [other than those involving factual reporting], and so also his expressions of fear) was made sense of also through the filter of the polarizing comic mode. The deployment of the comic mode may have diminished, and diverted attention from, the importance of an element contained in his speech: the fact that Polyneikes' dust-covered corpse had not been disturbed by animals (vv. 257–8) could be taken as a possible sign that the burial was accepted as valid by the gods; that, because (as it will ultimately turn out) the *polis* had violated the cosmic order, the rite was valid, even though it had not been sanctioned by the *polis* who had authority over the funerary discourse. But this sign was too ambiguous to be understood as a manifestation of divine will, especially when viewed through the negative perceptual filter of the awareness of Antigone's anti-*polis* subversion, even when the possibility of supernatural involvement is articulated at vv. 278–9, where the coryphaeus expresses very tentatively the possibility that Kreon may have been wrong after all, that the gods may have wanted Polyneikes buried, that the burial may have been *theēlaton* (caused by a god).³¹ Kreon's reply, that the gods are most unlikely to take care of the impious sacrileger who had intended to burn their shrines, and that they do not honour bad men, would have sounded wholly reasonable. (What Kreon—and, I suspect, the Athenian audience—failed to see is that it was not Polyneikes who was at issue, but that a disturbance of the cosmic order had taken place.)

Having started with this perfectly reasonable presupposition, Kreon reaches the rational conclusion, that people opposed to him bribed the guards and had Polyneikes buried. In Athenian eyes this would have sounded an eminently reasonable hypothesis, especially since the fear of conspiracy against the *politeia* was a recurrent motif in Athenian democracy (parodied in e.g. *Ar. Lys.* 616–25)—no matter that the nature of the *politeia* is different in the two cases; it is, again, a case not of a simplistic 'other', but of a complex relationship constantly constructed and deconstructed within the play. The alternative hinted in vv. 257–8 and 278–9 deconstructed the dominant discourse in the multivocal, polyphonic construct that was the *Antigone*. Antigone never knew about this sign which, though ambiguous, may have given some support to her otherwise illegitimate claim to be a source of value in opposition to the *polis*. For the direct intervention of the gods through prophecy and other sign-revelation is the ultimate religious authority, the only source of religious authority transcending the *polis* discourse. Antigone's

³¹ On this passage cf. also H. D. F. Kitto, *Form and meaning in drama* (London 1956) 153–5, who has not understood how limited the scope of divine approval was here; cf. Burton (n. 30) 87.

ignorance of the sign corresponds to the fact that, given the complex and ambivalent modalities of Greek mythological mentality, the fact that the result of Antigone's subversive action was pleasing to the gods would not necessarily imply the gods' approval of the action itself, let alone of the person who performed it; it is the textual element determined by, and expressing, the notion, that Antigone herself and her subversion of the polis did not have divine approval.

Vv. 450–60 are a piece of brilliant rhetoric. Antigone answers Kreon's reproof that she has dared to transgress the laws by placing his decree in an hierarchy of oppositions in which it, and all such laws, appear undeniably subordinate. On the one hand she places the eternal ἀγραπτα κάσφαλή θεῶν νόμιμα (the unwritten and immovable customs of the gods) guaranteed and policed by the gods, and on the other, not only Kreon's *kérygmata*, but implicitly all laws made by the polis, which, compared to the *theōn nomina* are time-bound, relative, and man-made. This seems entirely reasonable, but the reaction of the Athenian audience, shaped by the perception that the polis had the right to deny burial to certain categories of people, and that all religious discourse was articulated by, and operated under the authority of the polis, would have been 'yes, there are indeed unwritten *nomima* of the gods which no man can overrule, but what makes her think that she knows what they are better than the polis, and what gives her the authority to claim that Kreon's edict contravenes them?' The central question which is elided in Antigone's speech is that she had no authority to claim that Kreon's decree contravened the unwritten customs of the gods.³² A necessary condition for this would have been the existence of a *nomimon* that everyone was entitled to proper burial—which was plainly not the case, since in Athens certain malefactors of the polis were not. There is no evidence in the mythical and other textual discourse predating the *Antigone* for the view that total denial of burial offends against the gods. In *Ajax* 1129–33 it seems to be acknowledged that it is legitimate not to bury one's enemy; what Teukros is challenging is the view that Ajax was Menelaos' *polemios* (cf. also vv. 1391–3 and 1342–5). As for Eur. *Suppl.* 301–12, 377–8, 524–7, 531–46, 558–9, by then it had become intertextually established, through the *Antigone*, that the gods are offended when corpses lie unburied. In a religion with no dogma, in which unknowability is a central category, tragedy contributed to the (tentative) articulation of the divine world and the correct system of behaviour towards it. It did not challenge the religious discourse of the polis, it explored its interstices and helped it articulate itself.

In this masterpiece of rhetorical skill that are vv. 450–60 the centre of the discourse is displaced away from the real issue, to a dichotomy between man-made laws and the unwritten customs of the gods. The assumption that Kreon's decree is in conflict with the *theōn nomima* is taken for granted and becomes the premise of the argument; but this begs the most fundamental question. Antigone detracts attention from this by swerving away and arguing emphatically a point whose validity no one would deny, that the customs established and guaranteed by the gods should have priority over everything else, thus disguising the fact that this is not at issue here, that what is at issue is whether it is right for an individual to set herself up as a source of religious value without any authority, and assume that the polis is in conflict with the *theōn nomima*, and on the basis of this personal judgement defy the polis and bring about disorder and the threat of anarchy.³³ Vv. 471–2 show that the chorus is not impressed by Antigone's case—

³² As a corrective to the modern culturally determined positive ideology surrounding this notion of obeying laws higher than those of man we may remember that Oliver North's secretary Fawn Hall stated that they broke the law because they saw no reason to obey man-made, 'written' laws. Of course, this example is ambivalent, since some people see the Irangate affair as patriotic acts serving a higher cause. Fawn Hall was inspired (immediately or ultimately) by *Antigone*; it would help us scrape off the ideological accretions of centuries to try to see this play as near through fifth century eyes as possible, if Antigone were

to be seen also through the perceptual filter 'Fawn Hall'.

³³ In the framework of Greek religion in the 440s there was no legitimate locus from which an individual could challenge on religious grounds the authority and validity of the religious discourse of the polis, let alone justify subversive action on it. There was no established notion of an individual religious conscience that could operate in opposition to the polis discourse, and it is very difficult to see how such a notion could have existed in the framework of contemporary religious discourse. For the concept of religious individualism (cf. S. Lukes, *Individualism* [Oxford 1973] 94–8) involves an

the invalidity of which is correlative with the fact that she herself later undermines her argument that she acted in obedience to the gods' *nomima* when in vv. 904 ff. she presents herself as having acted for personal reasons. Nevertheless, it will ultimately be revealed that she was right to claim that her actions served the unwritten customs of the gods, but this was far from being self-evident before Teiresias' revelations.

Haimon's discourse has been privileged by modern readers and assumed to be expressing 'the truth', because he is on Antigone's (the winning) side and he appears to speak the language of reason which we privilege. Thus his statement that the citizens object to Kreon's actions (echoing Antigone's claim at 504 ff.) has been taken unquestioningly at face value. We have seen that such readings involve methodological fallacies which produce meanings very different from those of the fifth century Athenians. We shall also see that Antigone's 'vindication' was ambivalent and cannot therefore support such assumptions. Whether or not we are meant to believe that 'the Thebans' supported Antigone's stand is left entirely open by the text. The only Thebans whose view we actually hear, the chorus, disapprove of her action. Antigone herself at 907 perceives herself as having buried Polyneikes *biai politon*. Haimon can be seen to be speaking less than the truth when he claims that he only cares for Kreon and the gods, and not for Antigone (see esp. v. 741).

Let us consider the confrontation with Kreon. In vv. 640–7 Kreon says that a son has the duty above all to obey his father; such views on a son's duty were part of the ideology and practice of Athenian society,³⁴ and the same is true of his views about women (647–52) and of the notion (659 ff.) that it would be wrong to treat his own kin, his niece and his son's betrothed, differently from anyone else, since πόλεως ἀπιστήσασσαν ἐκ πάσης μόνην (she alone of all the city was disobedient); it is also, and most importantly, true of his views (663 ff.) that one must obey the authority of the polis on things just and unjust, since the alternative would be anarchy which destroys poleis. The notion that citizens have an absolute obligation to obey the laws, even if they are unjust, appears to have been part of the generally accepted assumptions of Athenian democracy.³⁵ Jebb noticed that v. 671 contained an echo of the ephobic oath and that therefore 'for an Athenian audience this verse would be effective'; Siewert noted that the echoes of the oath are in fact even stronger, and they crop up over several lines, 663–71.³⁶ The ephobic oath was a comprehensive undertaking to civil obedience, patriotism and piety sworn by all Athenians at eighteen. Thus, its strong echoes here are significant, they function as a zooming device, pushing the audience at this crucial point, after the confrontation with Antigone and before the confrontation with Haimon, into relating the world of the play with theirs, and Kreon with the authority of the fifth century Athenian polis. It thus framed emphatically the confrontations and conflicts within the ideology of democratic Athens and activated the cultural assumption that disobedience of the laws and disturbance of the polis order is to be condemned, and to be seen also as an act of impiety against the gods who guarantee the oath. This zooming device also reinforced the perception that Kreon is indeed the spokesman for the polis, and it is the authority of the polis that is being flouted.³⁷

unmediated personal, personally conducted and personally determined, relationship between man and god, which is not the case in mainstream Athenian religion at this time. In classical Athens there was a tendency towards identification of the patriotic, the law-abiding and the pious, and convergence of social and political morality with religion (cf. Dover [n. 15] 252–3; cf. also 157–8).

³⁴ Cf. e.g. A. R. W. Harrison, *The law of Athens. The family and property* (Oxford 1968) 139; Dover (n. 15) 273–5; Parker (n. 20) 196–7 cf. 192. Cf. also n. 14.

³⁵ Cf. Thuc. iii 37.3–4; Demosth. xxi 34; Aesch. i 6. Cf. also Dover (n. 15) 307–8; 309; 119; S. C. Humphreys, *Anthropology and the Greeks* (London 1978) 233. Socrates in Xen. *Mem.* iv 4.12–25 identifies *dikaion* with *nomimon*.

³⁶ Jebb (n. 4) 127 ad 670 f.; P. Siewert, *JHS* xcvi (1977) 105–7.

³⁷ Siewert (n. 36) wrongly claims that Kreon's formulation distorts the civic duties which are defined in the oath; first, Kreon's view that a citizen must obey polis authority in things just and unjust was official polis discourse; second, Siewert's view rests on a particular interpretation of the oath (cf. discussion in Siewert 103); third, even on Siewert's own thesis, no licence would be accorded to individual disobedience if a law was unjust: 'obedience to magistrates and future laws is required by the oath until the Areopagus declares them unreasonable' (Siewert 104). In other words, obedience is required for as long as the laws remain valid.

The chorus agrees with the sentiments expressed by Kreon. Haimon's speech which follows is constructed with rhetorical skill; he does not reply to Kreon's case, but displaces the argument by first claiming that the Thebans support Antigone and say that she is worthy of honour not death, and then delivering an eloquent plea in favour of being flexible and changing one's mind. He convinces the chorus that he, as well as Kreon, has spoken well; but the main question whether or not Kreon's decision was right is elided, for Haimon has not answered Kreon's main points about the implications of disobeying the law and the danger of anarchy. Kreon's impatient reply, which speaks contemptuously of Haimon's age appears unreasonable. But for the Athenian audience his drawing attention to his son's youth and to the reversal of roles that being taught by his son would imply, would have triggered off the schema 'son against his father', which must have first been activated at v. 633 when Kreon asked Haimon whether he has come *patri lyssainōn* (raging against your father), and reinforced throughout the scene, when its theme develops into a father-son confrontation. All versions of the basic schema 'son against father', or 'father-son conflict' end in one or other form of disaster—expressing the perception that the father-son relationship is most important in Greek society, and that a son's duty is to privilege it above all else.³⁸

The two main versions of this schema are patricide and 'father-son hostility'. The latter is articulated as follows: (i) the initial hostile act was committed—or was falsely assumed by the father to have been committed—by the son (while in patricide it was committed by the father against the son); and (ii) it centres on the father's wife who is sometimes also the son's mother. (iii) The father retaliates with an act of hostility against the son. (iv) The son is banished by the father or exiles himself voluntarily. (v) In some versions the son dies as a consequence of the conflict and of his father's actions (while in patricide the son kills the father). In all the father is damaged by the loss of his heir. The relationship between Kreon and Haimon as it is articulated in the *Antigone* is structured by a schema very closely related to, a variant of, that of 'father-son hostility'. There are differences. Here the woman at the centre of the conflict is not the son's mother, or the father's second wife, but the son's wife-to-be; the father's retaliation takes the mild form of verbal abuse (for the death of Antigone had already been decided); most importantly, the son, before he commits suicide, attacks and tries to kill, his father (1231–7).

That the schema 'father-son conflict' was a significant perceptual filter through which Sophocles organized, and his audience saw, and reacted to, the conflict between Kreon and Haimon is confirmed by two textual elements. First, Kreon at 752 takes Haimon to be threatening patricide; for an Athenian audience watching a play involving the family of the patricide *par excellence*, this helped validate (not necessarily at the conscious level) the deployment of the 'father-son conflict' schema, of which patricide is the extreme example. The second textual element which confirms that this schema was a significant structuring force in the play is the fact that in the end (1232–4) Haimon does try to kill his father. The deployment of this schema (in a non-inverted way) indicates that this selection fitted the terms in which Sophocles was thinking of Haimon. The fact that confrontation between Kreon and Haimon would have been perceived through this schema has implications concerning the colouring of the characters in the Athenians' eyes—and the latter's expectations about developments. In interaction with the ideology concerning father-son relationships which structures these schemata, and which had been explicitly called up by Kreon's words at 640 ff., it would have coloured Haimon negatively in the eyes of the fifth century Athenians in ways that cannot be grasped intuitively, and must therefore be systematically and schematically reconstructed, by modern readers who do not share these assumptions and who privilege the 'reasonable' mode of argument used by Haimon. The divergences from the established schema, such as the fact that his conflict with his father was for the sake of a threatening 'woman in charge', increase Haimon's negative colouring.

³⁸ Cf. *supra* n. 14.

Haimon's claim that Antigone did not behave reprehensibly because the Theban people unanimously say so (732–3) is an unsubstantiated assertion. Even if his claim of support were taken to be true, it would not have been unambiguously perceived by the fifth century Athenians to annul Antigone's subversion of the polis. The text is here making a complex play between democratic Athens and its assumptions and the constructed realities of the ancient kingdom of Thebes. On the one hand the notion of the whole polis opposing the decision of one man would have aroused resentment at the latter; on the other even in democratic Athens (and the audience, we saw, did not see mythical Thebes as a mimetic representation of democratic Athens) when a law was passed all were expected to obey it, and law-breakers were punished; and Polyneikes is a traitor, and the polis has a perfect right to deny the traitor burial. Haimon's claim and this complex interplay it set up provides the framework in which a distancing device is articulated. Kreon, under the (in Athenian eyes) extreme provocation of his son's rebellion against him, makes statements which would have been perceived by the Athenians as tyrannical and would have had the effect of alienating the audience, colouring Kreon negatively and thus distancing the polis authority of the play's Thebes from that of fifth century Athens. This distancing of Kreon's error and of the ensuing catastrophe allowed the exploration of a frightening possibility (that, due to the ultimate unknowability of the will of the gods, a polis may get its religious discourse wrong)—at a distance, in a way that does not immediately apply to, and so threaten, the audience's every day reality.

With regard to vv. 904–20, which I take to be Sophoclean, I argue elsewhere (BW; AAR) that they are a high point in the negative colouring of Antigone, who is there privileging her brother over her (hypothetical) husband and son, a choice which in fifth century eyes was subversive, and a perversion of the choice associated with the Persian 'other' in Hdt. iii 119, a perversion which does not make sense. This perversion was correlative with the perverted relationship (perverted siblinghood) that she privileged wrongly and in excess. In the fourth stasimon Lykourgos' opposition to Dionysos, presented as the result of *mania* equated with false seeing, leads to a punishment milder than in other versions, at the end of which he was healed and came to understand that what seemed reasonable, to oppose the peculiar stranger and his retinue of disorderly women, was wrong; the disorder which seemed wrong was inspired by the god and served a higher order. The metaphorical connection between Kreon and Lykourgos adumbrates the possibility that Kreon has also made a mistake and offended the gods, by exposing Polyneikes' corpse—which 'rationally' only seemed an extension of 'acceptable' bad death—and in opposing the disorderly behaviour of a woman which, like the Maenads', turned out to be order-creating.³⁹ It will indeed emerge that Kreon, like Lykourgos, erred because of the unknowability of transcendental reality and the correct behaviour towards it.

Just after the end of this stasimon, in vv. 998–1032, Teiresias reveals that the polis is polluted and the gods are offended, and that Kreon had made a mistake; all men make mistakes, Teiresias advised, but they must not persist in them; he should allow Polyneikes to be buried. What Kreon's mistake was the seer explains in vv. 1067–73, where he delivers the verdict of the gods, in correspondence to the role of prophecy as ultimate authority directing and legitimating the polis religious discourse. He states that Kreon did two impious things, each the mirror image of the other. The first, mentioned almost *en passant*, is that he buried a living person. The second, which is stressed, is that he kept in the upper world someone who belonged to the nether gods, a corpse, unburied and unhallowed. (The characterization of *nekyn* [corpse] as *amoiron*, *akteriston* and *anosion* [basically, 'deprived of the customary ritual care' and (therefore) 'unhallowed'] signifies that this corpse was left in the upper world and it had not started the transition towards the lower which is effected through the tripartite death ritual; it says nothing about Polyneikes' entitlement to proper burial with offerings.) By keeping a corpse in the upper world Kreon deprived the nether gods of their due and disturbed the cosmic order, the proper articulation of

³⁹ I have argued all this in MT and FS.

the world, which included a proper division between life and death, thus offending against all the gods who were its guarantors.⁴⁰

The play is not saying that Polyneikes should have received proper burial; Teiresias' verdict stresses the disturbance of the cosmic order resulting from keeping a corpse in the upper world. Kreon's mistake lies in the form that he chose to give to Polyneikes' bad death, leaving his corpse exposed. The notion that Polyneikes is entitled to a proper burial is Antigone's position, not the play's. The fact that Polyneikes does get a proper burial does not entail that he was entitled to it at the beginning, and that Antigone's whole position is vindicated. For his achievement of proper burial at this point appears as a corrective excess; Kreon, to repair the wrong done to the gods and the polis, annuls the classification of Polyneikes as traitor and buries him properly, atoning through a complete reversal: from the dishonour and reduction of the corpse to raw food for animals, to a proper optimum burial by, and within, the polis. The standard Athenian modes of ascribing 'bad death' to a corpse did not involve leaving in the world above that which belongs to the gods below. Traitors and temple robbers were denied burial in Attica, optimum burial in and by their community, but were not, in practice, denied burial outside it. When a corpse was thrown out of Attica the presumption was that in reality it would be buried, either by its relatives or by the people of the place who would want to avoid pollution. As for the practice of throwing corpses and/or people as a mode of execution into a pit or a gorge and presumably leaving the corpses there (as, in other states, throwing bodies over a cliff) this would, first, remove the corpses from the areas of human habitation so that pollution was avoided; and second, it would be perceived as symbolically handing them over, down, to the realm of the nether gods. The downwards symbolism would be particularly strong when the bodies (dead or alive) were thrown into pits and gorges. As for those which were thrown into the sea, their mode of disposal reproduced that of many other corpses, of people who had drowned and whose bodies had not been recovered, and this would have made this disposal a symbolically valid mode of handing over the bodies to the nether gods. It is not a matter of 'true' logic, but of symbolic and ritual logic.

On my reading, it is the fact that Kreon kept Polyneikes' corpse in the upper world by not disposing of it at all, *not even symbolically*, that was offensive to the gods, for it blurred the realms of life and death and thus threatened the cosmic order.⁴¹ Sophocles is here exploring the limits of the polis religious discourse, by presenting one particular articulation of his perception of these limits in one particular area, the disposal of the dead. He locates his exploration in the mythical polis which *par excellence* represents the 'other' in Attic tragedy, and he in turn zooms the exploration towards, and distances it from, Athenian reality, which allows him to articulate the possibility that the polis' religious discourse can unknowingly transgress and offend the gods. The notion that in the *Antigone* Sophocles may be challenging the polis' discourse would be in conflict with what we know both about the reception of *Antigone* and about Sophocles. Sophocles' attitudes helped shape his selections, and are also relevant to the ways in which the fifth century Athenians made sense of the play. Athenian reactions to Sophocles help us see how they understood the play. Far from being perceived as a subversive, a challenger of the values of the polis, Sophocles was a solid citizen who held some important polis offices and was very popular with the judges of the tragedies who awarded him many victories.⁴² The story (*cf.* n. 3)

⁴⁰ I discuss the death ritual, of which burial was the final part, in Sourvinou-Inwood 1983 (n. 18) 37–42; for the fact that the proper division between life and death is an important part of the cosmic order *cf.* *BICS* xxxiii (1986) 52.

⁴¹ Kreon's religious loyalty was not partial. It included both upper and nether gods and undervalued neither. His offence was against the whole divine order. It was Antigone's which was partial. She challenged the polis' authority over funerary matters and elevated her own view of what was due to the dead to centre of all value. This is the meaning of Kreon's words in 777–80.

He is not sneering at the rights of Hades, but referring to the fact that she subverted the polis because she privileged her own perception of what is due to the dead and Hades above all else—because her interests which were in conflict with the polis had concerned that particular part of the polis discourse.

⁴² *Cf.* M. H. Jameson, *Historia* xx (1971) 541–2 and *passim*; Woodbury 1970, *passim*; B. Knox in *Fondation Hardt pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique. Entretiens xxix. Sophocle*. Geneva (1983) 4–5; M. R. Lefkowitz, *Studi italiani di filologia classica* v:2 (1987) 151 and n. 11.

that he was elected general thanks to the success of the *Antigone*, whether or not it had any historical basis, indicates that this play was not perceived as subversive, and that it was felt to be containing the correct attitudes towards the polis.⁴³

Like Kreon, the chorus of elders (who, unlike the chorus of so many tragedies are members of the polis' central group, male citizens) are part of the polis discourse; they agree with Kreon. They are more hesitant in some places, mention the possibility that the burial was *theēlaton* (which, in fact, it was not) and accept Teiresias' verdict a step ahead of Kreon; this is part of the construction of the distancing device which allows Kreon to be eventually presented as a 'bad' ruler, and the problem to be explored at a distance. In my view, the chorus helped direct the Athenians' reaction, theirs was the point of view that the audience would have mostly adopted. On my reading, the fourth stasimon adumbrated the possibility that Kreon had made a mistake, but also that, like Lykourgos in this version, he would learn the error of his ways. It is thus significant that the play ends with the chorus' comments concerning learning through past mistakes in vv. 1350–3. *Edidaxan* (teach [literally 'taught', gnomic aorist]) is the last word of the play.⁴⁴ As for Antigone, her action was self-willed, disordered and disordering. But her behaviour can also be seen as part of the disorder unleashed into the city as a result of the offence against the gods and the cosmic order. Another manifestation of this disorder is that forces such as Eros, with a dangerous destructive side, which were normally controlled within the order of the polis, now become unrestrainedly destructive.

Kreon was in the wrong, and he was punished. Antigone's cause was right and it was vindicated. Her action was at the same time right and wrong; right, because it reversed the offence against the cosmic order; wrong, because she subverted the order of the polis in fundamental ways. She herself as a character, having set herself up as a source of value in opposition to the established order, was in the wrong, and was punished accordingly. Not just with death, but with a type of death that included several facets of what was considered in Greek mentality to be 'bad death'. She was buried alive, and then committed suicide; she died unmarried, and thus unfulfilled as a woman, a point she herself insists on; she dies unmourned and alone. Even the play excludes her at the end.

Thus in this play the exploration of the limits to the polis discourse is enriched by the almost entirely negative colouring of the instruments of the revelation of the polis' error—though there are also textual elements which suggest that things may be more complex than they appear, and look forward to the actual resolution. On my reading, the tragedy places on the one side the polis, with all its positive connotations in the eyes of the Athenians of the late 440s, and on the other a woman, acting out of place and subverting the polis order in defence of the cause of a traitor and aspiring sacrileger—both being the offspring of the terrible incestuous union of a patricide with his mother, and the children of a doomed house. Despite all this, the play is saying, that cause was right, and the polis was in the wrong. Understanding the will of the gods is not easy.

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⁴³ Cf. Knox 1979 (n. 7) 167.

⁴⁴ On this cf. MT; FS. Commentators usually take Kreon's words at the end, especially from v. 1284 onwards, at face value and believe his fate was as bad, or

worse than, death, But his words are simply a conventional articulation of extreme distress and grief (cf. FS n. 57).