

# Early Modern Antigones: Receptions, Refractions, Replays

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Early modern reimaginings of Antigone's story often focus on Creon the tyrant, or fragment the tale into rhetorical or moral lessons. They often overlook Antigone herself or transform her into a pious family supporter or a doomed romantic. They begin in humanist receptions of Greek tragedy, especially the seminal works of Camerarius and Melanchthon. Latin translations of Sophocles by Gabia, Winshemius, Ratallerus and others present other variations. The reimaginings continue in various refractions by Erasmus and others, fragmentary appropriations of the Antigone mythos. And they culminate in dramatic replays, Continental and English versions of the Antigone story by Alamanni, Garnier, Watson, and May. As Antigone herself said prophetically to Ismene, *καλῶς σὺ μὲν τοῖς, τοῖς μὲν δ' ἐγὼ δόκουν φρονεῖν* (l. 557, 'Some thought you reasoned rightly, others thought I did'). Pervasive patterns of early modern deflection, recontextualization, and refiguration show that most early moderns, implicitly or explicitly, sided with Ismene.

It has, I believe, been given to only one literary text [Sophocles' *Antigone*] to express all the principal constants of conflict in the condition of man. These constants are fivefold: the confrontation of men and of women; of age and of youth; of society and of the individual; of the living and the dead; of men and of god(s). (Steiner 1984: 231)

The brilliance to which George Steiner here pays tribute has often obscured *Antigone's* participation in the larger mythopoesis of the Theban saga and the ill-fated Labdacid house. Laius, Jocasta, Oedipus, the Seven against Thebes, Creon, Antigone, Ismene, Haemon, and the Sons of the Seven appear frequently and diversely in Greek literature and iconography.<sup>1</sup> They figure in the Theban epic cycle—*Oedipodea*, *Thebaid*, and *Epigoni*—as well as in other poetry, prose, and drama. Aeschylus fashioned two tetralogies on these subjects (one including his *Seven against Thebes*); Sophocles, two other Theban plays (*Oedipus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*); and Euripides, *Phoenissae* and a largely lost *Antigone*. In Latin Seneca contributed *Phoenissae* and *Oedipus*, and Statius, his influential *Thebais*.

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<sup>1</sup> See Fraisse (1974: 5–19); Griffith (1999: 4–12); Hornblower and Spawforth (2003); *Brill's New Pauly* (2002–10), *svv.* 'Antigone', 'Creon', 'Oedipus'; and Hall (2011). I am grateful to the readers of this journal, Loyola University of Maryland's 'Scholarly Engagements' series, and David J. Jacobson for careful readings and helpful suggestions.

These versions conceived variously the conflicts that make up the Antigone story. Antigone herself is barely present in the remains of the epic cycle, and there, as elsewhere, her mother is Euryganeia not Jocasta (West 2003: 38–41). In his *Antigone* Sophocles depicts the conflict between Creon and Antigone over burial of Polynices' body, but others portray Thebes and Athens fighting over the burial of the enemy dead. Many retellings, including those of Sophocles elsewhere and Euripides, portray Antigone as the compliant, dutiful daughter of Oedipus, accompanying her blind father to his death in Colonus. Although motivated by love of family and the gods, this good daughter little resembles the angry, contemptuous rebel of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Commenting on modern stage versions, Mee and Foley (2011: 6–7) aptly observe: '*Antigone* has always been already adapted, and the current tradition of adapting, remaking, and remixing stories based on Greek myths thus corresponds to what was, even in Antiquity, understood to be a continuously evolving tradition'.

In the *Antigone* that has become central to this tradition, Mark Griffith demonstrates (8–9), Sophocles virtually reinvented the received myths, altering the conflict from national to familial, amplifying the role of the gods, adding Ismene and Eurydice, dramatizing Antigone's betrothal to Haemon, her condemnation, and her eventual suicide. The plot of Euripides' lost *Antigone* reflected or created another tradition entirely: as Aristophanes of Byzantium notes, 'she [Antigone] is detected in company with Haemon and is joined with him in marriage; and she gives birth to a child, Maeon' (Collard and Cropp 2008: 161). And in this tradition Antigone came to a very different end, at least as we infer from Hyginus (who perhaps also echoes the lost *Antigone* plays of the younger Astydamos and Accius): recognizing Maeon, Creon realizes that Haemon has not killed Antigone, as ordered, but married her; Haemon then kills Antigone and himself (*Fabulae* 72). Ion of Chios, additionally, reported Antigone's death with Ismene by burning in Hera's temple (Page 1983: 383).<sup>2</sup>

Sophocles, then, created precisely those aspects of the Antigone story which moderns like George Steiner have found so admirable and compelling: the struggle between those mighty opposites, Creon and Antigone (and all the conflicts comprehended therein), the ethical ambivalences, the paradoxical character of Antigone herself, fierce and pathetic, defiant and obedient, uncompromising protagonist and innocent victim, heroic even unto death. Precisely these aspects of the play, however, many early moderns found disturbing and objectionable. Powerful literary, moral, and cultural imperatives then demanded moral certainties and practical exempla from ancient tragedy, not ethical ambivalence, the depiction of universal human conflicts, and that complicated and threatening female lead. Consequently, many early modern commentators and translators flattened the play into an object

2 Contradicting Sophocles directly, ancient Theban legend identified the place where Antigone dragged Polynices' body, significantly left unmoved in the play (Pausanias IX. 25. 2).

lesson about the abuse of power, simply reading Creon as a tyrant who suffers condign punishment for his stubbornness and pride. Others deployed an aggressive strategy of fragmentation: they mined the play for memorable sayings, rhetorical figures, and moral bromides, all removed from context.

For such readers Antigone herself posed even greater problems. What useful lessons, after all, could they draw for patriotic, patriarchal Christian audiences about a political rebel who claims allegiance to a higher law than that of the state, a female who defies males and duly constituted family authority, and a condemned woman who hangs herself in despair? Most early modern commentators and translators betray a deep unease with Sophocles' female hero: some accord Antigone faint and qualified praise; some overlook or ignore her entirely; some domesticate her into a pious family supporter or a doomed romantic; and, finally, some simply dismiss her as a vicious sinner. As Antigone herself said prophetically to Ismene, *καλῶς σὺ μὲν τοῖς, τοῖς μὲν δ' ἐγὼ ῥόκουν φρονεῖν* (l. 557, 'Some thought you reasoned rightly, others thought I did').<sup>3</sup> Most early moderns, implicitly or explicitly, sided with Ismene.

## Receptions

*Meaning . . . is always realized at the point of reception.*

(Martindale 1993: 3)

The initial point of reception for Antigone in the early modern period is the humanist recovery of classical drama, especially Sophocles, and subsequent translation of Greek tragedy into Latin.<sup>4</sup> The Aldine press issued the *editio princeps* of Sophocles in 1502 and Turnebus' Paris edition of 1552–3 incorporated the Triclinian recension (Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990b: 1). Joachim Camerarius wrote an influential commentary on the Theban plays (1534), reprinted in Henri Estienne's 1568 edition and elsewhere. Few readers in early modern Europe had sufficient Greek to read Sophocles in the original so Latin translations flourished, including those by Gentian Hervé (1541), Giovanni Gabia (Venice, 1543), Veit Winshemius (Frankfurt, 1546), Georgius Ratallerus (Lyons, 1550), Johannes

3 I quote *Antigone* from Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990a). Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own.

4 I use the term 'reception' here to refer to these primary appropriations, early humanist publications of Greek drama and translations into Latin, though it is capable of wider application; in Lorna Hardwick's helpful formulation, reception can encompass 'the artistic or intellectual processes involved in selecting, imitating, or adapting ancient works—how the text was "received" and "refigured" by artist, writer or designer; how the later work relates to the source,' as well as 'the broader cultural processes which shape and make up those relationships' (2003: 5). See also Hardwick and Stray (2011). Grafton (1997) provides an illuminating series of case studies in early humanist readings of antiquity.

Lalamantius (Paris, 1557), and Thomas Naogeorgius (Basle, 1558).<sup>5</sup> These translations, according to the dictum *traduttore, traditore*, subtly and pervasively redefined the conflicts, fit the Greek text to alien political and religious hermeneutics, and presented various Antigones, as well as Creons, Haemons, Ismenes, and choruses, to their readers. Meditating on the migration of classical texts across times and cultures, Jan Parker (2011: 13) has aptly observed, ‘From the start the question was not so much a celebration of great and humane texts passed down (tradition) and re-invented in/ incorporated into other cultures (translation) but of the potentially rebarbative, politically dangerous, irritant, painful, or at least challenging nature of such texts (trauma): a painful, ongoing marking effect of such texts sometimes lost and sometimes made potent in reception’.

In his influential reception *Commentarii* (1534) Joachim Camerarius began what Michael Lurie (2012: 441) has called the ‘Aristotelization of Greek tragedy’, the interpretation of the plays according to contemporary understanding of the *Poetics*. In this view tragedy presents a good person suffering an undeserved fate that arouses in the spectators pity and fear:

At ubi uir bonus & honestatis uirtutisque amans, indignum in malum impellitur quasi fatali ui, aut peccata vel non uoluntate, vel ignoratione quoque commissa, poenas extremas sustinent, tum & metus & misericordia talibus ab exemplis homines inuadit, et lamenta horroresque excitantur. (1534: sig. B3)

But when a good man, loving honesty and virtue, is driven to an undeserved end as by the force of fate or by sins committed involuntarily or ignorantly, and these sustain extreme punishments, then both fear and pity by such examples seize men and laments and dread are aroused.

Accordingly, the pre-eminent example of Greek tragedy, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, presents a good man driven by some dark fate to extreme and undeserved suffering. Camerarius categorically rejects as tragic the sad ends of the wicked justly punished, Polyphemus, for example, who used to feed on human flesh, and the boasting Thraca, scorner of gods and of men. In such cases audiences witnessed rather the spectacle of divine retribution and vengeance (‘diuinam ultionem & vindictam’, 1534: sig. B3).

Reflecting this Aristotelian conception of Greek tragedy, Camerarius sees Antigone as the good protagonist unjustly destroyed. Rejecting Ismene early on (ll. 69ff.), she is ‘magnanima’ (1534: sig. I3, ‘great souled’), not only unmollified by her sister’s speech but made even more vehement by it. Her intention to commit a holy crime (ὄσια πανουργήσασ’, l. 74) Camerarius copiously expands in Latin paraphrases that suggest her impossible dilemma: ‘in sancto facinore’, ‘honestum furtum, piam fraudem’ (1534: sig. I3, ‘in holy wickedness’, ‘honest theft’, ‘pious fraud’). Her challenge to Ismene draws the sympathetic rhetorical question: ‘How

5 In his edition of Calvy de La Fontaine’s French translation of Antigone, Mastroianni (2000) helpfully reprints the Latin translations of Hervé, Ratallerus, and Lalamantius.

much more just is it to obey the command of the gods than that of men?’ (1534: sig. I3). But Camerarius cannot be unequivocally positive. He explains the Chorus’ strange mixture of approbation and accusation (ll. 871–4) as follows: ‘Non probat factum Antigonaе omnino Choribus, quod contrarium fuerit edicto regio’ (1534: sig. L3v, ‘The deed of Antigone is not altogether approved by the Chorus, because it was contrary to the royal edict’). Camerarius praises the elegant verses that celebrate the right of magistrates and notes the paradox: the Chorus calls Antigone *piam puellam* but denies her right to civil disobedience (1534: sig. L4).

Camerarius may have reservations about Antigone but he casts Creon as the unqualified villain. Creon changes the inhuman counsel of his mind late (‘Sero . . . mutat animi sui inhumanum consilium’, 1534: sig. I1v). Creon’s imperious dismissal of his son against the Chorus’ warning draws this censure: ‘That insane man does not respect himself nor his only son, the hope of the kingdom . . . How could the character of the raving tyrant be described more graphically?’ (‘ille insanus neque se neque unicum filium spem regni respicit. . . Quomodo potuisset magis graphice tyranni rabiosa persona describi?’), 1534: sig. L1v). Tiresias later reproves Creon’s savagery (‘saeuitiam’), warning that such stubbornness (‘pertinaciam’, 1534: sig. L7) will cause great evils.

The translation of Greek tragedy into Latin effected a pervasive domestication and dislocation that supported the Aristotelian moral reading. Greek terms that define ethical conflicts yield to Latin substitutes that evoke alien associations and referents, and thus reframe and alter the tragedy. Words deriving from *σεβ-* (*εὐσέβεια*, *εὐσέβειω*), for example, denoting ‘worship, honor, and reverence’, recur throughout the play. The semantic field, according to Griffith (1999: 39), includes honoring obligations owed to gods, but also to parents, the dead and others. The various recurrences express the contradictory claims of the principals and define their conflicts. Creon demands reverence for political authority, *οὐ γὰρ σεβεις, τιμάς γε τὰς θεῶν πατρῶν* (l. 745, ‘you show no reverence, trampling on the honors due to the gods’); he blasphemously concludes, *πόνος περισσός ἐστι τὰν Αἴδου σεβειω* (l. 780, ‘it is wasted effort to reverence things in Hades’). Antigone must reverence her family (*τοὺς ὁμοσπλάγγχονος σεβειω*, l. 511) and reverence itself (*οἶα πρὸς οἶων ἀνδρῶν πάσχω, / τὴν εὐσέβειαν σεβίσασα*, l. 943, ‘what things I suffer from what men for revering reverence’).

Antigone’s cruelly paradoxical summary of her own predicament occurs earlier as well and defines her plight, *τὴν δυσσεβειαν εὐσεβοῦσ’ ἐκτησάμην* (l. 924, ‘For acting reverently I have been convicted of irreverence’). Camerarius renders this as ‘pietate obtinui impietatis crimen’ (1534: sig. L5, ‘for piety I have acquired the charge of impiety’). So, similarly, Gabia in his Latin translation of the play: ‘impietatem pie me gerens acquisiui’ (1543: sig. N, ‘acting piously I have attained impiety’).<sup>6</sup> But the change to *pietas*, that roughly parallel Roman virtue, imaged by the offering of

6 See also Hervé (Mastroianni 2000: 266) ‘Quae cum pie feci, iam dicor impia’ (l. 942, ‘Because I have done these things piously, I am now called impious’).

sacrifice on Roman coins, diminishes the range of *σεβ-* possibilities, excluding its higher frequencies wherein Greek worship, like Antigone herself, could be emotional, infatuate, dangerous, self-enlarging, self-transcending. Inevitably evoking images of *pious* Aeneas carrying Anchises out of the burning city and his reluctant abandonment of Dido, Roman *pietas* connotes rational acceptance of responsibility, submission to duty, and suppression of self. It echoes with Christian associations of the Italian *pieta*, of the Virgin cradling her dead son, in sorrowful acceptance, not in defiant worship. And in romance languages the softer associations of derivatives—‘piety’, ‘pity’—shaped later portrayals especially Garnier’s *Antigone ou La Pieté* (1580).

Translation into Latin effected other changes in the moral issues and ethical conflicts of the tragedy. After experiencing the catastrophe, the Chorus says, *οὐκ ἄλλοτρίαν / ἄτην, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸς ἁμαρτῶν*, (ll. 1259–60, ‘his ruin came not from others, but from his own error’, tr. Lloyd-Jones). Creon laments, *ὠὖ / φρενῶν δυσφρόνων ἁμαρτήματα / στερεὰ θανατόεντ’* (1261–3, ‘Woe for the errors of my mistaken mind, obstinate and fraught with death!’, tr. Lloyd-Jones). *Ἄμαρτία* or *ἁμάρτημα*, ‘fault’, can mean ‘unwitting error’, as Lloyd-Jones suggests, since the verb *ἁμαρτάνειν* sometimes signifies ‘to miss the mark’, especially of a spear throw. The blame in *στερεὰ* (‘stubborn’, ‘hard’) finds balance perhaps in the doom of the relatively rare *θανατόεντ’* (‘deadly’), self-reproach mingling with lament in the agitated dochmiacs of Creon’s cry. *Ἄμαρτία* or *ἁμάρτημα* of course, can also signify a willfully committed crime. Creon’s self-reproach and many other actions of the play vacillate between these two poles of meaning and defy translation. Ismene proclaims that she and Antigone commit an equal offense (*ἴση... ἕξ ἁμαρτία*, l. 558); Creon thinks Antigone has been guilty of crime (*ἁμαρτάνειν*, l. 914) in burying her brother. Tiresias claims that all men either make mistakes or do wrong (*τοῦξ ἁμαρτάνειν*, l. 1024), but then they must repair the damage and act wisely.

Again, translation into Latin constricts the delicate interplay of meanings in the Greek, and simplifies the rich palette of possibilities. In Gabia’s version of the climactic passage, the Chorus sees ‘non alienam / Calamitatem, sed ipse peccans’ (1543: sig. Nvii, ‘not the disaster of another but he himself sinning’). Creon, accordingly, laments, ‘Heu mentium imprudentium, / Peccata firma, / Letalia’ (1543: sig. Nvii, ‘O the hard and deadly sins of imprudent minds’). Similarly Rattallerus has the Chorus refer to Creon’s ‘culpa’ (‘fault’). Creon exclaims: ‘O menteis ter stolidas! / O peccata atrocias!’ (1570: sig. I2v, ‘O triply stupid mind! O terrible sins!’). *Ἄμαρτία* or *ἁμάρτημα* become simply ‘sin’, Creon, simply a sinner. And the mysterious power of *ἄτη* (l. 1260), ‘bewilderment, delusion, punishment, crime, ruin’, so powerfully and fearfully conjured in the second stasimon and again here, becomes simply deserved punishment. Negating the possibility of extenuation and ambivalence, these changes diminish Sophoclean awe at the dangerous incomprehensibility

Fraisse (1974: 21–2) notes precedent for ‘pious’ Antigone in Oedipus’s amazed question, ‘Aliquis est ex me pius?’ (Seneca, *Phoenissae*, l. 82, ‘Is someone born from me pious?’).

of the gods and the world, and at the plight of wretched mortals, poised precariously between fate and freedom, error and crime. Such narrowing of scope was inevitable in the Judaeo-Christian universe in which Antigone and Creon now appeared. The Vulgate had long since settled the translation of *ἁμαρτάνω* as ‘pecco’ and *ἁμαρτία* and *ἁμάρτημα* as ‘peccatum’. And the King James translation of the New Testament dutifully followed suit, rendering the fifty-three appearances of the Greek words as ‘sin’ or, in three verses, ‘trespass’<sup>7</sup>

The linguistic and cultural drift of humanist reception and Latin translation had another far-reaching consequence for Creon in early modern renderings, evident already in Camerarius’ commentary. Tiresias once refers to Creon as belonging to the breed of tyrants (*τυράννων*, l. 1056, ‘absolute rulers’). The Greek *τύραννος*, sometimes interchangeable with *βασιλεύς* (‘king’) can apply to gods, to members of the royal family, and also, as in Plato and Aristotle, to evil rulers. Tiresias certainly hints at the pejorative meaning in his reproach. Excluding the neutral or positive possibilities, however, later ages freighted the term ‘tyrant’ with political and moral opprobrium. The tyrant became diametrically opposed to the just king in European political discussions about obedience, sovereignty, the social contract, the nature and limits of state power, civil responsibility, the possibility of justifiable rebellion and even regicide. Many discussions, like the influential one of Aegidius Romanus Colonna (*De regimine principum*, Venice, 1502) itemized the contrasts between tyrant, who ruled for himself, and just king, who ruled for the good of the commonweal. ‘Tyrant’ appears as a term of reproach throughout Shakespeare’s histories and tragedies.

Camerarius’ characterization of Creon as *tyrannus* thus marks him for early modern readers as an evil ruler, though Sophocles’ Creon does show flexibility (l. 771), and much of what he argues about the ruler and the state would have been orthodox political theory in early modern Europe as well as in ancient Greece. This characterization shapes the reception of the entire play, moreover, since tragedy, according to contemporary poetic theory, taught precepts for good governance (‘de gubernanda bene Rep. praecepta’) by showing the fall of great kings (‘magnorum regum casus’) and changes in kingdoms (‘mutationes Regnorum’), as Ratallerus, explained in the prefatory epistle to his translation (1570: sig \* 3). Philip Sidney, of course, expressed these ideas in his *An Apology for Poetry* (wr. c. 1579): Tragedy ‘maketh Kinges feare to be Tyrants, and Tyrants manifest their tyrannicall humors’ (Smith 1971: 1: 177). Accordingly, Ratallerus all but ignores Antigone in his prefatory summary of the play: Sophocles shows us in this tragedy that the plague of princes and republics is *τήν ἀβουλίαν* (1570: sig. 8v, ‘ill-advisedness’, ‘thoughtlessness’). Creon rules for his pleasure (‘pro libidine’), does not yield to sound counsel (‘sano consilio’), rejects the good advice of Tiresias and suffers ruin.

7 Matt. 18. 15, Luke 17. 3, 4. For the data on translations of Greek in the Vulgate and the King James version I have used the LexiConc search tool of the Blue Letter Bible database, <<http://www.blueletterbible.org>>.

Ratallerus ends with the moral wrap-up: The man whom reason could not instruct, the outcome, “misfortune at last accepted, renders wiser” (‘malo tandem accepto sapientiore reddidit’, 1570: sig. 8v). The tragedy of Antigone becomes deflected into the tragedy of Creon.

Contemporary understanding of Aristotle’s poetics, translation into post-classical Latin, and Christian doctrine all combined to re-shape Greek tragedy in the early modern period. The Christianizing impulse reaches a culmination in Philipp Melanchthon’s *Adhortatio . . . de legendas tragoediis & comoediis* (wr. 1545), which argues that ancient tragedies do not teach kings precepts for governing the republic well, but instead teach everyone the art of living well (‘doctrina de gubernatione vitae’, 1555: sig. a3v). Falls of kings and changes in kingdoms have universal moral application, illustrating the folly of human nature, the inconstancy of fortune, the calm endings of the just and, contrarily, the grievous punishments of the wicked (1555: sig. a2). Contradicting Camerarius, who classified only undeserved suffering as tragic, Melanchthon argues that Greek tragedies depict just punishments for ‘depraved passions’ (‘pravis cupiditatibus’, 1555: sig. a2v). Considering such examples, audiences should turn their rude and wild minds toward moderation and self-control (‘ad moderationem et frenandas cupiditates’, 1555: sig. a2). He asserts that all Greek tragedy teaches one universal truth, ‘quam Vergilius reddidit: “Discite iustitiam”, monui, “et non spernere divos”’ (‘as Vergil rendered it, “Learn Justice,” I advised, “and do not scorn the gods”’ [*Aen.* 6. 620], 1555: sig. a2v). The plays reveal the guiding presence of ‘aliquam mentem eternam’ (1555: sig. a2v, ‘some eternal mind’) that always dispenses deserved punishments and rewards. In this view, the calamities that befall mortals like Oedipus, Antigone, Medea, Orestes, and Electra, the capricious and cruel acts of the gods, not to mention the mysterious force of ἄτη, like a wave rolling up from the dark depths of the sea to ruin all (*Antigone* 584–92), only proclaim the justice and providence of the almighty Christian God.

Melanchthon’s ideas found specific application in the Sophocles edition produced by his student, Veit Winshemius, *Interpretatio Tragoediarum Sophoclis* (1546). The preface repeats the argument of the *Adhortatio*, again adducing the Vergilian sententia and the ‘mentem aeternam’ (1546: sig. A3v) that urges us to check passions and live justly. The preface to the play identifies its main question: ‘Whether one must obey the dictates of religion and piety even if prohibited by tyrants or magistrates’ (‘Vtrum religioni & pietati obediendum sit, etiamsi id Tyranni vel Magistratus prohibeant’, 1546: sig. O1). The tyrant asserts the necessity of obeying authority but his argument is merely a specious excuse for savagery (‘saevitiam’, 1546: sig. O1v). Like all tyrants Creon does not observe ‘modus’ (‘limit’, ‘moderation’). His punishment teaches how much evil stubbornness and savagery bring (‘quantum mali illi pertinacia & saeuicia attulerit’, 1546: sigs. O1v–O2).

The play illustrates other lessons of Christian morality. In the famous πολλά τὰ δεινά speech, Sophocles says that man advances sometimes to evil, sometimes to good (τοτὲ μὲν κακόν, ἄλλοτ’ ἐπ’ ἐσθλὸν ἔρπει, l. 367), or in Winshemius’ translation,

'aliquando ad malum, interdum ad bonum uertit' (1546: sig. P2). The substitution of 'uertit' for *ἔρπει* 'turns' for 'advances', emphasizes the individual moment of moral choice rather than our back and forth movement through time, human life shuttling inevitably between good and evil. A dour Protestant warning in the margin points the moral: 'cor hominis prauum & inscrutabile'. 'the heart of man is depraved and inscrutable'. Fallen humanity chooses sin. In this *Antigone*, moreover, the titular character fades from consideration; Creon learns a hard lesson, 'ne tyranni putent sibi impune omnia licere' (1546: sig. R2, 'Tyrants must not think that they can do all things with impunity'); and the audience sees in his fate the perils of 'pertinacia' or 'stubbornness', the sin that evokes the just punishment of God. Such interpretation leaves little scope for pity, for terror, or for tragedy, at least as Aristotle, Camerarius, and many since have conceived it.

### Refractions

Let us take a classic, any classic, in our native literature or in another. Chances are that we did not first come into contact with it in its unique, untouchable, "sacralized" form. Rather, for most (if not all) of us the classic in question quite simply was, for all intents and purposes, its refraction, or rather a series of refractions: the comic strip, the extract in school anthologies and anthologies used in universities, the film, the TV serial, the plot summary . . .

(Lefevere 1981: 73)

Lefevere here usefully expands upon his general definition of refractions as 'texts that have been processed for a certain audience (children, e.g.) or adapted to a certain poetics or a certain ideology' (1981: 72); for him, refractions of classics, as the deep root *frangere* implies, often appear as fragments—extracts, anthology pieces, summaries—dislocated from original contexts and deployed to new purposes. Early moderns appropriated ancient myth in just this piecemeal way. Winshemius, for example, commends *Antigone* for its brilliant images and descriptions, descriptions of duty, justice, and religion, its wealth of orations and wise sayings (1546: sig. O2). Ignoring theatrical and performance issues as well as context, he, like other humanists, reads the play as a series of excerptable moral instructions and rhetorical figures rather than as a unified drama. His marginalia insistently call attention to 'querelae' and 'sententiae', as well as to rhetorical modes and devices: 'narratio' (1546: sig. O3v), 'conclusio' (1546: sig. O4v), 'occupatio' (1546: sig. O6v), 'confutatio' (1546: sig. O8v), 'similitudo' (1546: sig. P8v) 'collatio & amplificatio' (1546: sig. Q4), 'exempla' (1546: sig. Q4v). Winshemius also marks commonplaces ('loci communes'), usually general reflections on human life in the choral speeches. The *πολλὰ τὰ δεινά* speech, for example, shows that the human mind tries and dares all (sig. P1v); Creon's speech to Antigone (ll. 473ff.) supplies a 'locus de pertinacia' (1546: sig. P4), an enduring example of the unreasoning stubbornness that he, as well as many fallen readers, embodies.

This entirely typical adoption of rhetoric as a guiding hermeneutic atomizes the play into a series of individual and transferable figures, lessons, and arguments.

Like other ancient texts, the plays of Sophocles furnish memorable passages for later generations, usually translated, always removed from original context. In Marliani's (1545) collection of sentences, for example, *Antigone* supplies nine pages of Latin sayings on reverencing Gods, obeying magistrates, the difficulties of aging, the evils of money, and so forth. Erasmus' monumental *Adagiorum chiliades* provides a similar set of refractions. The 1533 edition (and those thereafter) contain a series of twenty-three annotated proverbs featuring Sophocles' *Antigone*, these fragmentary encounters constituting an important early modern reading of the play.<sup>8</sup>

Erasmus clearly reads the play as Creon's tragedy. Glossing 'Prima felicitatis pars sapere' (1536: V.i.87, 'Wisdom is the chief part of happiness'), Erasmus writes, 'De Creonte dictum est, qui dum mauult animo suo quam rectis consiliis obtemperare & suos & se funditus perdidit' ('This was said of Creon who preferred to obey his own mind rather than wise counsels and destroyed utterly his family and himself'). Creon speaks with an impious mind ('impio animo', 1536: V.i.95) and is guilty of offenses against the gods ('offensis diis', 1536: V.i.97). Quoting Creon's demand for absolute obedience, καὶ μικρὰ καὶ δίκαια καὶ τάναντία (l. 667, 'in small things and in just things and their opposites'), Erasmus comments, 'Vox autem tyranni est non principis. Neque enim princeps est, qui praescribit inusta,' (1536: V.ii.5, 'This is the voice of a tyrant not a prince. For he is not a prince who orders unjust things'). Creon learns justice too late (1536: V.i.88), suffers divine vengeance for his wickedness (1536: V.i.89), and realizes ἀνάγκη δ' οὐχὶ δυσμαχέειν (l. 1106, 'one cannot fight against necessity'), or against 'fata', 'the fates', as Erasmus translates the word. He comments further, 'Nemo potest uitare quod deus nobis immittit' (1536: V.i.90, 'No one can escape what God sends to us').<sup>9</sup>

The shift from necessity to the fates to God describes the familiar Christian arc of interpretation that underlies humanist receptions of antiquity. Like Melanchthon, Erasmus reads *Antigone* as a story of deserved punishment, an object lesson against tyranny, obstinacy, and impiety. He several times explicitly evokes a Judaeo-Christian context. Summarizing Creon's fall (1536: V.i.99), Erasmus cites Proverbs 16.18, 'Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall' (KJV). Glossing τὸ μαντικὸν γὰρ πᾶν φιλάργυρον γένος (l. 1055, 'all prophets are a greedy tribe'), he takes a satirical jab at corrupt ministers in the contemporary

8 I cite the 1536 edition, the last revised by Erasmus himself, by proverb number; I cite the quoted Greek from Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990a).

9 Erasmus here practices what he preaches. In *De Ratione Studii* he advises just such a policy of selective reading and deflection: 'Atque ita fiet (si modo sit ingenii dextri praeceptor), vt etiam se quid inciderit quod inficere possit aetatem illam, non solum non officiat moribus, verumetiam vtilitatem aliquam adferat, videlicet animis partim ad annotationem intentis, partim ad altiores cogitationes auocatis' (1971: 139, 'And it shall come about (if the instructor has a ready wit) that if he encounter some passage that can corrupt the young, not only will it not harm their morals, but, in fact, it may confer some benefit, namely, by his turning their attentive minds partly to annotation, partly to higher reflections').

church (1536: V.i.92). And finally, he applies Creon's saying, *θεοὺς μιάινειν οὐτίς ἀνθρώπων σθένει* (l. 1044, 'no mortal has the power to pollute the gods'), to current controversies over the Incarnation. This saying, Erasmus declares, is a good response to those who think it improper that God lay in the womb of the Virgin (1536: V.i.95, 'in matrice virginis') and came into the world as a human being. The magical poetics of refraction, characterized by fragmentation, decontextualization, Christian didacticism, and an emphasis on rhetoric, enable Creon the tyrant, just for a moment, to play orthodox theologian.

As these examples illustrate, early moderns eclectically appropriated ancient texts to new ends, freely reconstructing ancient characters in the process. In England Creon frequently appears as this or that negative exemplum. Richard Harvey numbers him among 'those reproachful and shameful men' who disrespect priests (1590: sigs. V1v–V2). Writers also condemn his refusal to bury all the Argive dead, not just Polynices, and recall his deserved slaying by Theseus—neither event dramatized in Sophocles' play. In Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale' the wife of Capaneus (one of the Seven) calls him full of 'yre and of iniquite' 'To done the deed bodyes vyllanye' (1542: sig. Ci[v]) and recalls Theseus' revenge. Likewise, Thomas Cooper in his popular *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae & Brittanicae* remembers Theseus and praises Argia, Polynices' wife, who performs the burial with Antigone (1578: sig. Eeeeeee.v). Shakespeare's and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, features Creon's nephews, Palamon and Arcite, escaping the 'most unbounded tyrant, whose successes / Makes heaven unfear'd' (I.2.63–4). In his court, 'sin is justice, lust and ignorance / The virtues of the great ones' (II.2.106–7). Llodowick Lloyd sees a general lesson in Creon's death, 'The end of Tirants is to die in tyrannie' (1573: sig. Yy4). Thomas Taylor, departing from Statius who has Theseus bury Creon, observes poetic justice in an alternate ending: Theseus finally 'served him [Creon] with the same sauce', forbidding burial and leaving his carcass as prey for beasts and birds (1642: sig. Ddd2v).

Haemon also comes to new life in surprising figurations. Adducing *Antigone* 1226–34, Haemon's abortive impulse to kill Creon, Aristotle explained that this incident exemplified the fourth and least tragic type of plot, wherein someone is about to commit a crime knowingly but does not. Aristotle declares such a plot both repugnant and untragic because it lacks suffering (*Poetics* 1453b–1454a), a conclusion echoed by Castelvetro (Bongiorno 1984: 179–82) among others. Despite such ignoble casting, Haemon also became in the popular imagination a romantic lead who died for love. Though Sophocles' Antigone movingly laments the fate of dying unwed, she shows little interest in her betrothed; Euripides' Antigone breaks off the engagement and threatens to kill Haemon if forced to marry him (*Phoe.* l. 1675). Moreover, anger and frustration at his father, as much as love of his fiancée, motivate Haemon's suicide in Sophocles' play. But Thomas Watson, who translated *Antigone* into Latin, saw Haemon as a type of true lover who suffers for love in his sonnet sequence *Hekatompathia* (1582: sig. D3v). Later in the sequence Watson recalls his description of Haemon to express 'the particular miseries that befall him who

loveth'. Sonnet 79 elaborates upon these miseries, revealing in detail the passion the drives one to fall from love and all its laws, 'And gentle death is only end of woe' (1582: sig. K4). William Bosworth goes even further, rewriting the story into a full-blown amatory pastoral fiction: Haemon, 'the fairest boy / Of Thebes city' (1651: sig. C5v) loves Antigone, 'Whose face from sable night did snatch the day / And made it day' (1651: sig. C6v). Antigone dies for love of Haemon; he laments: 'ther's some mishap / Hath sure enforc't the Fatall Nymphes to crap / Their still still brittle threads' (1651: sig. D1v). After composing an elegy, he expires on her tomb, his blood becoming a columbine. Sophocles' Haemon finally gets conceived and played by Nick Bottom the weaver.

Refractions of Antigone from Sophocles' play and other representations also appear in various early modern contexts. Arguing that one should give reasons for anything that seems incredible, Aristotle quoted Antigone's troublesome assertion that she would not defy the edict for husband or son since she could replace them but, her parents being in Hades, she could not replace her brother (ll. 906–12, *Rhet.* 3.16. 1417a32–3). Though this reasoning contradicts her claim of obedience to divine law, William Vaughan praises it as an expression of fraternal love (1600: sig. A2). Archbishop of Ireland James Ussher cited the lines to clarify the nature of hell and thereby refute Roman beliefs about Purgatory (1624: sigs. Aaa1v–Aaa2). Focusing on devotion to her father in exile from other parts of the tradition, many early modern writers praise Antigone as an exemplar of filial piety. Robert Albott, includes her in a list of good children who properly rendered back benefits to their parents (1599: sig. P8). Defending women against male detractors, Alexandre de Pontaymeri recalls Antigone's constancy, 'of such merite, as all men together cannot boast anything to come neere it', and her piety: 'christianity as yet never conceived the like' (1599: sig. C).<sup>10</sup>

A few writers had more extended encounters with Antigone. In the first performance of a Greek tragedy in English, *Jocasta* at Gray's Inn (1566), Euripides' *Phoenissae* mediated through Lodovico Dolce, George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh present Antigone as a conventionally pious young girl. Antigone's kiss of her brother's corpse shows 'the fruites of true kyndly love'; her decision to accompany Oedipus, 'the duty of a childe truly perfourmed' (Cunliffe 1969: vol. 1: 320–21).<sup>11</sup> In Phineas Fletcher's complicated allegory of the human being, *The Purple Island*, Antigone appears also as an exemplar of active virtue. Listing various works of charity—feeding, clothing, sheltering the poor, and the like—Fletcher recalls Antigone as the culminating example of the last corporal work of mercy,

<sup>10</sup> Helena Faucit's portrayal of Antigone (1845–6) moved Thomas de Quincey to similar raptures, 'Holy heathen, daughter of God before God as born . . . idolatrous, yet Christian lady', as quoted by Hall and Macintosh (2005: 329–30). Hall and Macintosh show further how this performance and production embodied Victorian ideals.

<sup>11</sup> See Miola (2002). On Greek and Latin tragedy in English see Braden (2010) and Pollard (2012).

burial of the dead. Those who perform this work of charity imitate ‘that royall maid’ of Thebes, who defied ‘wilfull Creon’ and buried her brother with ‘dainty hands’ (1633: sig R3). A character in George Chapman’s *The Revenge of Bussy D’Ambois* appropriates Antigone to very different ends. There the political manipulator Baligny defends conspiracy, rebellion, and regicide, adducing first the example of Brutus, ‘Gods iust instrument’; he then recalls ‘sweet Antigone’, who valued the eternal laws of God over the laws of kings, which ‘alter euery day and houre’ (1613: sig. D2). Cynically plotting, Baligny casts Antigone as religious rebel and republican hero.

### Replays

*What childe is there that, comming to a Play and seeing Thebes  
written in great Letters vpon an olde doore, doth beleue that it is Thebes?*  
(Sidney, ed. Smith 1971: 1: 185)

All poetry including drama, Philip Sidney explains, presents not historical truth but patent fiction, ‘imaginatiue groundplot of a profitable inuention’. The poet ranges freely within the zodiac of his wit to bring forth for his readers ‘things either better then Nature bringeth forth, or, quite a newe, formes such as neuer were in Nature’ (1: 156). Following Sidney’s prescription, early modern playwrights enjoyed full freedom to ‘invent’ (from *invenire*) ancient myths, i.e. ‘to discover’ and ‘to create’ them anew, to ‘replay’ them in new contexts to new audiences. Playwrights variously reimagined Thebes and Sophocles’ *Antigone* to serve various poetic, political, and moral purposes.

Luigi Alamanni’s *Tragedia di Antigone* (1532), for example, an early translation into Italian, adapts the play to prevailing poetic fashions. Alamanni expands the third stasimon, an 18-line choral song on the power of eros, into a 45-line love lyric.<sup>12</sup> In Sophocles’ song Eros, whom neither mortals nor immortals can escape (ll. 787–90), drives all mad, wrenches men’s minds from justice, and causes the quarrel between Creon and Haemon. Alamanni refigures this dark, destructive power as Petrarchan *amor*: ‘Oh qual perpetuo amaro, / Oh qual giogo aspro e duro / Sente colui che te dentro riceve!’ (Spera 1997: ll. 1018–20, ‘Oh what perpetual bitterness, what a harsh and hard yoke, feels the one who receives you within’). Even the fishes in the sea feel the burning fire (‘ardente foco’, Spera 1997: l. 1007) of love. This is the love Alamanni sings about in his sonnet sequence, the love that places the lover between ‘dolcezza’ and ‘dolore’, ‘tra speranza & timor, tra riso & pianto’ (1532: 188, ‘sweetness and sorrow, between hope and fear, between laughter and weeping’). Alamanni’s aged chorus does not sing of the strange power

12 On Alamanni’s adaptation see Mastrocola (1996: 49–67) and Spera (1997: 87–121). Other early modern Italian versions include plays by Guido Guidi (n.d.) and Luigi Trapolini (1581).

that disrupts human life but gives avuncular advice about a familiar malady in conventional lyrical terms.

Antigone herself undergoes idealization and transformation. Alamanni expands and elaborates her terse rejoinder to Ismene, *πέισομαι γὰρ οὐν / τοσοῦτον οὐδεν ὄσπε μὴ οὐ καλῶς θανεῖν* (ll. 96–7, ‘I shall certainly suffer nothing so terrible as to prevent me from dying beautifully’).

Bench’io non credo mai ch’altro tormento

Possa sentir più greve un cor gentile

Che non morir con fama eterna e lode. (Spera 1997: ll. 142–4)

Although I do not believe that a gentle heart can suffer any torment more grave than to die without eternal fame and praise.

Antigone here has the *cor gentil* of the *dolce stil novo*, first sung by Guido Guinizelli, ‘Al cor gentil reppaira sempre amore’ (Edwards 1987: 20, ‘Love repairs always to a gentle heart’) and by Dante and Petrarch thereafter. In this poetic tradition the *cor gentil* signifies nobility, virtue, and purity of love. Emone correspondingly says that there was never a girl so graceful (*leggiadra*, Spera 1997: l. 892) and valorous to be ‘*pietosa*’ (Spera 1997: l. 894, ‘compassionate’, ‘devoted’) unto death. Antigone finally achieves apotheosis: in the dark tomb she becomes transformed: ‘*l’angelica figura / Da questa tomba oscura*’ (Spera 1997: ll. 1045–6). The conventional inaccessibility of the beloved *donna angelica* here takes the form of tragic death.

Garnier’s replay, *Antigone ou La Pieté* (1580), a combination of Seneca, Statius, and Sophocles, sets Antigone’s story in the context of French politics rather than Italian poetics.<sup>13</sup> It begins with blind Oedipus and Antigone, proceeds to the war between Eteocles and Polynices, and concludes with the action of Sophocles’ *Antigone* in Acts 4 and 5. As Jondorf (1969) and others have shown, the woeful history of Thebes and the Labdacid house reflects the strife in contemporary France, suffering dynastic and religious civil wars, the prospect of tyrannical rule and foreign invasion, and the bloody ruin of its noble families—Guise, Valois, Bourbon. In 1580, the year of the play, Henri III opposed Henri of Navarre in the seventh war of religion; the prince of Condé traveled to Germany to raise an army. Jocasta’s plea to Polynices depicts the local landscapes transformed by civil strife:

Vostre patrie a veu ses nourricieres plaines,

De chevaux, de harnois, et de gendarmes pleines:

Elle a veu ses coustaux reluire, comme esclairs,

13 For the political context discussed below see Jondorf (1969), Mueller (1980: 17–32), and Beaudin (1997: 7–18); for the literary context of Cinquecento France see Mastroianni (2004). Other early modern French versions include plays by Calvy de Fontaine (1542), Jean-Antoine de Baïf (1572), and Jean de Rotrou (1639).

D'armets estincelans, de targues, de bouclers  
 Ses champs herissonner de picques menassantes .

(Beaudin 1997: ll. 794–8)

Your country has seen her nourishing plains full of horses, arms, and soldiers; she has seen her hills shine like lightning with gleaming armor and shields, her fields bristling with menacing pikes.

Jocasta's evocation of war and its bloody furors had an immediate and emotional relevance for its first audiences.

Garnier's *Antigone* certainly plays the familiar figure of *piété*, as the subtitle promises, but she also reasons powerfully and speaks eloquently. Attempting to dissuade her father from suicide, she answers his self-accusations in rhyming stichomythia:

EDIPE: J'ay ma mere espousée, et massacré mon pere.

ANTIGONE: Mais vous n'en sçaviez rien, vous ne le pensiez faire.

EDIPE: C'est une foraicture, un prodige, une horreur.

ANTIGONE: Ce n'est que fortune, un hazard, une erreur.

(Beaudin 1997: ll. 129–32)

OEDIPUS: I married my mother, and slew my father.

ANTIGONE: But you knew nothing, you did not intend to do it.

OEDIPUS: It is a crime, a monstrosity, an abomination.

ANTIGONE: It is only a misfortune, an accident, an error.

Insisting on full knowledge and consent of the will as prerequisites for sin, *Antigone* entirely rejects the Greek assignation of guilt to the *ἀτόχηρ*, 'the one whose hand did the deed', as well as the Greek notion of *μίαισμα*, the inherited 'pollution' that moves down the generations. She here also echoes traditional Catholic teaching and the arguments against Protestants over predestination and the freedom of the will. *Antigone* later lectures Creon on the limits of royal power and on the subordination of human to divine law:

CREON: Qui vous a doncques fait enfreindre cette loy?

ANTIGONE: L'ordonnance de Dieu, qui est nostre grand Roy.

CREON: Dieu ne commande pas qu'aux loix on n'obeisse.

ANTIGONE: Si fait, quand elles sont si pleines d'injustice.

Le grand Dieu, qui le Ciel et la Terre a formé,  
 Des homes a les loix aux siennes conformé.

(Beaudin 1997: ll. 1806–11)

CREON: Who then made you disobey this law?

ANTIGONE: The command of God, who is our great King.

CREON: God does not command that one disobey the laws.

ANTIGONE: He does, when they are full of injustice.

The great God, who formed heaven and earth,  
 To his laws men's laws must accord.

Recalling arguments of the jurist and political philosopher Jean Bodin, Antigone the intellectual joins the current debate on the nature of sovereignty, the duties of monarchs, and the rights of citizens. In this debate, Mueller observes, Garnier displays ‘one of the root causes of tragedy in his own age: the conflicting claims of secular and religious authority.’ And later ‘Antigone uses “la loy de nature et des Dieux” (1876) with the precision of an expert on constitutional theory’ (Mueller 1980: 28, 30). The clash of political ideas in Garnier’s *Antigone*, long, diffuse, full of exposition and narration, constitutes the dramatic conflict.

In England Thomas Watson’s *Antigone* (1581) recalls humanist receptions in its translation into Latin and didacticism (Camerarius even appears in a note, 1581: sig. G1), but reaches new conclusions by new methods—Pomps (allegorical processions that illustrate morals) and Themes (short choral essays).<sup>14</sup> Together these comprise a masque-like afterpiece that morally anatomizes the four principal characters and the action. Creon again appears as the stubborn tyrant as the First Pomp depicts his folly in the form of a morality play: Justice ignores Equity, succumbs to Rigor, Obstinacy, and Impiety, and then suffers the Scourge and Late Repentance. The Theme attributes Creon’s downfall to ‘caecam philautian’ (1581: sig. H4, ‘blind self-love’). As in earlier refractions, Haemon appears as the Lover, swept away in the Third Pomp by Cupid to Temerity, Impudence, Violent Impulse and Death. The corresponding Theme draws a dour moral: ‘amare simul & sapere vix cuiquam dari, interitus Haemonis docet’ (1581: sig. I2v, ‘Haemon’s death teaches that it is scarcely granted to any man to love and be wise at the same time’). Remarkably Ismene emerges as the hero of the play: she follows Reason to Piety, Obedience, Security, and Happiness. The Theme celebrates the quiet life, and says that her example teaches ‘quae corrigere non possumus, ea attenare ne velimus’ (1581: sig. I1v, ‘that we should not want to alter those things we cannot’).

Watson’s *Antigone* receives open condemnation. A loquacious Nature prefaced the play with this judgment: ‘Sed misera nondum cernit, affectum rudem / Debere patriae legibus locum dare’ (1581: sig. B4, ‘But the wretched woman does not see that raw passion should give way to the laws of a country’). The many conflicts of the Greek play here get reduced to a clash between ‘rudem affectum’ and civil law. Divine mandate does not motivate Antigone in this version but ‘livis affectus’ (1581: sig. H, ‘light emotion’), as the Second Pomp, puts it. This ‘affectus’ leads the Lofty Spirit to Transgression, Contumacy, Hatred, and Punishment. The Theme states the moral verdict succinctly: ‘Quam sit malum publico magistratus edicto non parere, Antigoniae exemplum docet’ (1581: sig. H4v, ‘The example of Antigone teaches what an evil thing it is to disobey a public magistrate’s edict’). Watson Poeta perfectly articulates Sidney’s claims about the poet’s freedom to create ‘groundplot of a profitable invention’ for moral ends: ‘Conficta vitae debitum

14 See Smith (1988: 224–31), and the excellent edition of Sutton (1997); Alhiyari’s unpublished translation (Alhiyari 2006) is unreliable.

nostrae docet. / Persona cursum; quid decet, quid non sequi' (1581: sig. G3v, 'The fictional character teaches the proper course of life, what is fitting, what not to pursue'). This *Antigone* carries the moralizing impulses of humanist reception to their furthest logical conclusion: unvoiced discontent turns to outright denunciation.

Thomas May's *The Tragedy of Antigone, The Theban Princesse* (1631) replays the Sophoclean paradigm to Caroline audiences for new poetic, political, and moral ends. May chooses as his literary model the *Antigone* of Robert Garnier, an author popular with the French Queen, Henrietta Maria. He transforms Haemon and Antigone into courtly, pastoral lovers who meet in the woods, where Aemon confesses his 'flame / Which never can be hid; a better fire / More chaste, more true, and full of constancy / (I dare maintain it) warmes no breast on earth' (1581, sig. B3v). The exalted sentiment and chaste passion, Britland observes (141–2), echo the idiom of Neo-Platonist romances then fashionable in court—Honorat de Bueil's *Les Bergeries*, Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido*, Montemayor's *Diana*, and Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée*. Sophocles affords no precedent for such glazed admiration nor for Antigone's saccharine response after a 'chaste kiss':

Yee powers of loue, bee all auspicious now.  
 Hymen, redeeme the wrongs thou hast done  
 Our house already; had I neuer seene  
 Young Aemon's face, nere knowne his matchlesse worth,  
 No other man or minde had ere had power  
 To warm Antigones cold breast with loue. (1631: sig. B4)

The love affair culminates in a tomb scene that melodramatically mimics the end of *Romeo and Juliet*. Like Juliet, Antigone drinks a vial of poison; before it takes effect, she speaks, 'I would, my dearest Aemon, / Be gone with thee rather then liue; but fate / Too cruel, fate preuents it' (1631: sig. E3v). Aemon then reprises Romeo to Paris ('tempt not a desperate man', V.3.59), 'Doe not in vaine torment a desperate man' (1631: sig. E4). He too resolves to join his beloved 'in the other world / To wedd thee there' (1631: sig. E4v), the poison again followed by the blade.<sup>15</sup> The expansion of Haemon and the invention of the love affair re-channel Antigone's submerged and unsettling eroticism into conventional literary categories. The bride

15 Steiner observes similar romanticization in operatic adaptations from the eighteenth-century onwards: 'Antigone and Haemon, whom Sophoclean tragic economy keeps strictly apart, are joined in cantilenas and duets of desolate ecstasy, false hopes, and adieu.' In H. S. Chamberlain's play *Der Tod der Antigone* (1892), 'Antigone embraces a Wagnerian *Liebestod*, a death in and through Eros. Her cadence, her words almost, are Isolde's: "Who has lived like Antigone, cannot live longer; / Who has loved like Antigone, cannot love again"' (1984: 155).

of Acheron, the sister who resolves to lie with her brother, dwindles into the pathetic lead in familiar love stories.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas May inherits from Garnier political concerns also relevant to Caroline England—the nature and limits of monarchical rule, the origins of sovereignty, the role of citizens and constitutional authority. Though May enjoyed royal and courtly patronage, both Norbrook (1993) and Pocock (1999) have characterized him as a thoughtful, essentially republican respondent to the many political shifts of his age. Britland (2006) more specifically demonstrates that May's *Antigone* articulates the political concerns of the late 1620s and 1630s, especially the fear of foreign invasion along with the duty of foreign aid, the problem of unheard speech, and the necessity of good counsel. The play reflects deeply on monarchy, opposing the tyrant Creon to the just ruler Theseus. After defeating Creon, Theseus significantly refuses the Theban scepter and turns the city over to its people. 'No; still let Thebes be govern'd by her owne; / Twas not our warres intention to enthrall / Your land, but free it from a tyrants yoake' (1581: sig. E5v). Here May 'investigates the concept of monarchical autonomy at a time when Charles was in the process of recalling what would be the last of his early parliaments' (Britland 2006: 142–3). Below all is another king, Pluto, 'whose baleful Monarchy / The still repaired ruines of mankinde / Through euery age encrease' (1581: sig. D2). And above all kings is "the will of heaven, the rule of nature" (1581: sig. D5v).

May's desire to point a moral leads not to Watson's extra-textual condemnation of Antigone but to a pervasive refashioning of action and character. The play begins with Antigone guiding Oedipus, then dramatizes the war against Thebes and Antigone's defiance, and finally ends with her death and Theseus' revenge on Creon. In addition to recuperating Antigone into conventional romantic narratives, May denies to his 'Theban princess' two essential characteristics of the Greek prototype: allegiance to chthonic deities and a fiercely independent capacity for action. Diminishing Antigone's role in the burial, this replay renders her harmlessly, even cloyingly, 'pious'.

Sophocles' Antigone professes her allegiance to Zeus and to Justice who lives with the gods below (ἡ ξύνοικος τῶν κάτω θεῶν Δίκη, l. 451). Unforgettably, she visualizes her death as a wedding: ἀλλά μ' ὁ παγ- / κοίτας Αἰδας ξῶσαν ἄγει / τὰν Ἀχέρωντος / ἀκτάν (ll. 810–13, 'Hades who puts all to bed is taking me living to the shore of Acheron'). Ἀχέρωντι νυμφεύσω (l. 816, 'I shall be the bride of Acheron'). The tomb is her bridal chamber (ᾧ τύμβος, ᾧ νυμφεῖον, l. 891). May, contrarily, associates his princess with heaven: Aemon says she bears 'a heauen aboue / A heauen of vertue, that is prooffe against / The furies rage, and fortunes vtmost spite: / You are aboue them all' (1631: sigs. B3v–B4). 'Diuine Antigone' speaks with a 'heauenly voyce' (1631: sig. B4). The glance is upwards to the Christian afterlife where Haemon hopes her goodness will lift him as well, 'higher than the

16 Steiner (1984: 160–62) well notes hints of the incest theme in Jean de Rotrou's *La Thébaïde* (1639).

power of fate can reach' (1631: sig. B4). To enforce the difference between the two Antigones, May transfers chthonic worship to witches (imported from *Macbeth*), 'blacke interpreters / Of Stygian counsell's' (1631: sig. C8) who pray to the gods below. On stage they speak a charm to 'affright / All pious loue from hence' (1631: sig. C8v), invoke Tartarus, Avernus, black night, and the horrors of Hades, and, instead of putting a corpse to rest, use 'damned arts' (1631: sig. D3) to make a carcass speak. The redefinition of the supernatural and the redirection of the allegiances cancels Antigone's subversive devotion to chthonic deities and flattens her into a Christian paradigm, 'a lasting patterne / Of piety to all succeeding times' (1631: sig. B4v). The much repeated epithet 'pious' acts like a talisman to ward off the danger that Sophocles' Antigone poses to established political, social, and religious order.

That Antigone acted with defiant independence. Opposing her foil Ismene and haughtily rejecting her belated offer of complicity (ll. 546–7), she embodies the isolated splendor of the Sophoclean tragic hero.<sup>17</sup> May, however, deletes Ismene from the story and introduces Argia, Polynices' wife, who appears with other Argive wives (Ornitus, Deiphile), and petitions Theseus for redress against the tyrant Creon. A chorus of Argive women lament their unburied husbands and pray for justice (1631: sigs. D3v–D5). Argia, not Antigone, resolves courageously to perform the burial ritual for Polynices: 'No longer time, no danger shall withstand / That act, which loue, and my chast fires command' (1631: sig. C). After Argia appears on stage with her husband's body, Antigone joins her (1631: sig. C5v), relegated to a distinctly subordinate role in the civil disobedience and in the religious ritual. Giving precedence to the wife over the sister, the play ratifies rather than challenges traditional gender roles and affirms rather than subverts the traditional institution of marriage.<sup>18</sup>

## Conclusion

The earliest literary response to Sophocles' *Antigone* may be the last scene of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, probably a post-classical addition after 386 BCE (Hutchinson 1985: 211).<sup>19</sup> There Antigone's resolution to defy the edict splits the chorus into two opposing halves: the first, grouped around her and Polynices'

17 On contrasting Sophoclean notions of heroism see the classic treatment of Knox (1964: 1–116).

18 Racine's *Iphigénie* (1674) likewise revises Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Aulis* to fit contemporary moral categories: there the invented character Eriphile dies in Iphigeneia's place. Thus Racine avoids what he regarded as the implausible substitution of the stag, punishes Eriphile for jealous rivalry, and reward Iphigeneia's virtue (Michelakis 2006: 221–2).

19 Like other scholars, Edith Hall (2011: 59) believes that a compressed version of Sophocles' play 'seems also to have been grafted onto the end of Euripides' *Phoenician Women* (409 BCE). But Mastronarde (1994: 509ff.) has argued well for the authenticity of the ending.

corpse, sympathize with Antigone's view; the second, grouped around Eteocles' corpse, fears conflict. The halves exit separately.

The divided response forecasts the deep tension underlying early modern receptions, refractions, and replays of the Antigone story. Admirers like Camerarius may believe Antigone a noble figure, punished unjustly, but they cannot approve the civil disobedience. Instead, they consistently focus attention on Creon the tyrant, a simpler, safer target for humanist moral readings. The relative silence of both Erasmus and Melanchthon on Antigone remains telling. Though both resist the temptation to portray her as a negative exemplar, neither can trumpet her virtue or much lament her fate.

Such deflection signals the deep and pervasive unease lurking beneath early modern readings of *Antigone*, generating new emphases, new fragmentations, and new adaptations ever increasingly distant from the Sophoclean prototype. Many simply mine the play for memorable sayings, rhetorical figures, or moral lessons. Others give Sophocles' Antigone a new identity altogether: Alamanni makes her a *donna angelica*, Garnier, an intellectual figure of *piété*, Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh, the good daughter and sister. Thomas Watson finally condemns Antigone outright. Thomas May follows with a refashioning so radical as to repudiate entirely the Sophoclean heroine. These two apparently eccentric variations actually culminate the long tradition of discontent, apparent in the deflection, recontextualization, and refiguration that underlies humanist receptions, later refractions, and theatrical replays.

Other threatening heroines from Greek tragedy undergo similar refiguration and reappropriation. 'The English Renaissance', writes Purkiss (2000: 33), 'was not particularly interested in, even alienated by, the Medea of Euripides and Seneca'. Repulsed by the child-killing, most early moderns focus instead on Ovid's adolescent Medea, who struggles with sexual desire and sinfully commits fratricide. Others more pruriently recall her magical potion and the sexual rejuvenation of Aeson. Another transgressive female, Sophocles' Electra also experiences similar transformation (Hall 1999). John Pikeryng's *Horestes* (perf. 1567) excludes Electra from the story of her brother's revenge, and both John Heywood's *The Second Part of the Iron Age* (1632) and Thomas Goffe's *The Tragedy of Orestes* (perf. 1609–19) reduce her to insignificance. Inga-Stina Ewbank has remarked that Goffe's 'play does not so much "reuiue" Euripides, or Seneca, as turn the 'tale' of the House of Atreus into a kind of palimpsest of Jacobean popular drama, with an emphasis on Clytemnestra's concupiscence' (2005: 47). Translating Sophocles' *Electra* in 1649 Christopher Wase makes the play a royalist allegory, with the executed Charles I as Agamemnon, Cromwell as Aegisthus, Prince Charles as Orestes, and Charles' imprisoned daughter Elizabeth as a helpless Electra. Surveying Sophoclean Electras in Britain up to the present, Edith Hall (1999: 264) concludes, 'Electra herself, rather than Orestes, only began to be fully appreciated with the rise of the woman's movement' in the late nineteenth century. Earlier, through the eighteenth century, playwrights turned avoided adapting *Electra* partly because of 'its unshrinking

presentation of feminine aggression. Contemporary audiences had similar difficulties with Euripides' *Medea*, who was totally unacceptable unless the crime of infanticide was either deleted altogether, or ameliorated by an exculpatory fit of madness, as in Richard Glover's adaptation of 1767' (1999: 271).

Such works, along with the receptions, refractions, and replays of *Antigone*, reveal the paradoxical dynamic evident in all early modern representations of antiquity: acts of appropriation always involve, to a greater or lesser degree, acts of denial.

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