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*ANTIGONE IN ANCIENT GREECE  
AND MODERN GEORGIA*

Sophocles' *Antigone*, in which a girl defies her uncle's command that her brother should be denied a decent burial, has attracted a variety of critical reaction (Steiner 1984). In the nineteenth century, for Hegel, the *Antigone* was 'the most accomplished of all aesthetic works of the human spirit'; Kierkegaard created an analogy between the tragedy of Antigone and his tortured personal circumstances, while Hölderlin took her to be 'a terribly impatient human being'. In the twentieth century Anouilh was inspired to show Antigone as a martyr of the French Resistance. In August 2001, the British newspaper *The Guardian* carried a review of a production at the Edinburgh Festival of Jean Anouilh's version of *Antigone* by the Marjanishvili Theatre. The reviewer called it a 'beautiful production of this tragedy of conscience and resistance in the face of absolute power' and described it as 'about as extreme an example of political theatre as you will get. It lives again here [in Edinburgh] in a restrained, heartbreaking production of extraordinary power that makes you feel as if every word uttered is part of a continuing debate about the future of Georgia. To see it played in that country, before an audience that could apply its meanings to their everyday lives and their own struggles for democracy in a world where power seems only to corrupt, must be extraordinary. To see it [in Edinburgh] is incredibly moving'. There has in fact been a tradition of productions of *Antigone* in Georgia and all, whether Tumanishvili's 1968 Rustaveli Theatre production at a time when there was anti-Soviet activity in Czechoslovakia, or Nana Janelidze's 2002 amalgamation of Sophocles and Anouilh's *Antigones* in Kutaisi produced as feeling was mounting against the activities of what have been called 'the Shevardnadze and Abashidze clans', all have been indisputedly political.

What I hope to show you in the next hour or so is that things were no different in ancient Athens. I hope to be able to persuade you that the original performance, which is the one that matters most, was every bit as political as any subsequent performance in Georgia, Poland or Ireland (which have between them seen a score or more productions of *Antigone* in the past quarter century). To look at Sophocles in this way has been taboo, ever since Wilamowitz in 1899 stated that that ‘no Sophoclean tragedy has any immediate connection with a contemporary event’. ‘no Sophoclean tragedy has any immediate connection with a contemporary event’.<sup>22</sup> This attitude, which is still prevalent today, was reinforced by E.R. Dodds’ influential dictum that ‘it is an essential critical principle that *what is not mentioned in the play does not exist*’ (italics original: Dodds 1966, 40; 1973, 68; 1983, 180). It may be a source of satisfaction to some scholars to work thus blindfolded, but I do not share their enthusiasm. When we begin to push at what are in fact open doors, many interesting things emerge.

It has been said that ‘inexhaustibility explains [the] classic status [of *Antigone*]’ (Morrison 2003), and there is no end either to the problems of interpretation within the play itself. Perhaps the most notorious is the status of Antigone’s speech just before she goes off to prison (904-20). The problem was very well expressed by Goethe in 1829, in these words:

There is a passage in *Antigone* which I always look upon as a blemish, and I would give a great deal for an apt philologist to prove that it is interpolated and spurious.

After the heroine has, in the course of the piece, explained the noble motives for her action, and displayed the elevated purity of her soul, she at last, when she is led to death, brings forward a motive which is quite unworthy, and almost borders upon the comic.

She says that, if she had been a mother, she would not have done, either for her dead children or for her dead husband, what she has done for her brother. ‘For,’ says she, ‘if my husband died I could have had another, and if my children died I could have had others by my new husband. But with my brother the case is different. I cannot have another brother; for since my mother and father are dead, there is no one to beget one.’

This is, at least, the bare sense of this passage, which in my opinion, when placed in the mouth of a heroine going to her death, disturbs the tragic tone, and appears to me very far-fetched to save her too much of dialectical calcu-

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Es ist auf das schärfste zu sagen, dass keine sophokleische Tragödie eine unmittelbare Beziehung auf ein Factum der Gegenwart enthält’: Wilamowitz 1899, 59; cf. Müller 1967, 245: ‘Grundsätzlich muss jedes zeitgeschichtliche Moment an Conception und Durchführung der sophokleischen Tragödien gelegnet werden.’

lation. As I said, I should like a philologist to show us that the passage is spurious. (Otto/Wersig 1982 [28 March 1827], trans. J. Oxenford).

Goethe was not the first to make such an observation, but his was the most influential. The lines are often deleted by editors, and paradoxically by those who want to see Antigone as the heroine, played by the most important actor. But Antigone has comparatively few lines in any case and to rob her of these is to give her even less to say. In fact, as we shall see, Sophocles has portrayed the mentality of an adolescent with exquisite accuracy, and any parent having a row with a teenager, then or now, would recognize the situation and the quality of Antigone's reasoning.

### *Antigone as a production of 438 BC*

But the fundamental problem is the date of the *Antigone*. It is conventionally dated to one of the years 443-441 BC, but powerful arguments exist for 438 BC, when we know in any case that Sophocles won a dramatic victory. More support may be found for a date of 438 in the way the outline of the plot, involving an unburied corpse, seems to echo the events after the fall of Samos to Pericles in 439, when prisoners were crucified, clubbed and left unburied (Plut. *Per.* 28.2). These events were so shocking that Thucydides chose to pass them over in silence, and Plutarch to dismiss the reports as irresponsible Samian propaganda. Modern scholars are divided between those who go for the 'plaster saint' version of Pericles' career, according to which he could do no wrong, and those who accept that something rather nasty happened to the Samian prisoners. Assuming for a moment that Pericles did punish the captives, the law would in fact have been on his side. The Samians had been traitors, and thus did not merit burial (Lewis 1988, 47-8). The cruel punishment to which they were subjected (*apotympanismos*: whereby they were tied to boards and exposed until they died) existed, strange to say, because it absolved the perpetrators of the charge of murder in that the victims, like Antigone in the play, in effect committed suicide (Calder 1968, 400, n. 48). Nevertheless, it was held in some quarters that Pericles' action was somehow 'not cricket'. Perhaps exception was taken to Pericles' having allegedly having hit the dying men (who had already been exposed for ten days) over the head with clubs.

Some confirmation that Pericles was guilty of awful things may be found in an anecdote that has Cimon's sister Elpinice chiding Pericles for his cruelty after the commemoration of the Athenian war dead (Plut. *Per.* 28, 5-7). According to Plutarch, Pericles' Samian victories 'wonderfully flattered his vanity' (*θαναμαστόν δέ τι καὶ μέγα φρονῆσαι*); he claimed that since he had successfully besieged Samos in eighteen months his victory outranked the Greek

achievement at Troy which had taken ten years to achieve (*ibid.*). I shall presently be suggesting that Sophocles might have wanted to diminish Pericles' reputation while at the same time distancing himself from the excesses (with which he was still, however, being associated centuries later [Strab. 14.1.18]).

It is a commonplace to say that Sophocles was a personal friend of Pericles. But even a superficial reading of the relevant sources reveals that their relationship perhaps had an edge to it. One of Pericles' 'very few recorded sayings' (Plut. *Per.* 8.7) was a rebuke to the playwright (who had cast lustful looks at a young cup-bearer) that 'a general ought to keep not only his hands clean, but his eyes' (*Per.* 8.7; Cic. *de Off.* 1.40; Val. Max. 4.3. ext.1). And in the context of another homo-erotic encounter, in which he outwitted a foolish youth, Sophocles said 'I am practising strategy (μελετῶ στρατηγεῖν), gentlemen, because Pericles said that while I could write poetry, I did not know how to be a general (στρατηγεῖν)' (Ion *FGrH* 392 F 6 *ap.* Ath. 13.603e-604e). Neither of these tales (which are the sum total of the testimonia) suggest friendship; rather, they suggest the polite face of a fundamental antipathy. Pericles' personal tastes ran in a completely different direction. It will be argued later that Sophocles' position was highly unsympathetic towards Pericles; in particular on account of what Pericles is said to have done to the Samian prisoners after the war.

R.G. Lewis has shown how vulnerable is the traditional dating to 443-441 BC, and how Sophocles was probably too busy to have written three tragedies and a satyr play and seen them into production before 439.<sup>23</sup> He did not serve as general in 439/8, and perhaps then having more time for writing composed the works that won the dramatic competition for 438 (*Arg.* 2 Eur. *Alc.*; Lewis 1988, 43). This, on balance, is the likeliest date for *Antigone*.<sup>24</sup> The implications would be considerable, and, *pace* Wilamowitz, there will have been a substantial influence of contemporary issues on the plot. The audience did not go to the theatre to learn yet more of the history of the House of Laius, any more than we read *Animal Farm* to learn about the everyday lives of country folk. Rather, they went to see dramas that were simultaneously couched in myth and which might also play allusively on current events, often *via* personalities who were at the forefront of everyone's minds. One would not claim that there was a one-to-one correspondence between Sophocles' charac-

<sup>23</sup> At some time before 443 BC all but one of a board of *hellenotamiai* were executed. The event probably took place before 443 (Lewis 1988, 37) and 'was unlikely to encourage negligent in-souissance in later boards' (*ibid.*).

<sup>24</sup> The sources allow for a second generalship in either 438/7 or 437/6 BC against the Anaeans, for which the base was Samos (Lewis 1988, 40-1). This might be Sophocles' 'appointment as general on Samos' earned by 'esteem from his production of *Antigone*' (*Arg. Ant.*).

ters and historical figures, but that his rich and subtly symbolic language and plotting would have inevitably recalled situations well known in their day, some of which are preserved in the anecdotal record relating to Pericles and his extended family. The year 438 was a time of general unease at home and abroad, and there is good reason to believe that Pericles was unsure of public reaction to the Samian war which, it was popularly believed, was started at the urging of his mistress Aspasia, the woman for whom he had cast aside his wife, the mother of his sons Xanthippus and Paralus.

### The tragedy of Creon

In the play, by far the biggest part is that of Creon. He has most lines to deliver and, unlike Antigone, is on stage for most of the action. There are powerful arguments for his having been the protagonist, and for the role having been played by the leading actor (Frey, 1878; Calder 1968, 390). It has often been noted that Creon's insistence that the interests of the state should always come before those of family (182-90) resemble the views that Thucydides puts into Pericles' mouth (at 2.38-46 and especially 2.60). But there is more to say on this particular point, for just as Creon's first speech (162-210) contains obtrusive references to himself and his personal opinions ('*ἐγώ, ἐμός, κ.τ.λ.* occur nine times ... often in emphatic positions,' Griffith 1999, 156), the same is true of Pericles' second Thucydidean speech, where *ἐγώ, ἐμόν, ἐμοί* occur twelve times between them (*ἐγώ* 2.60.2, 2.61.2 [*καὶ ἐγὼ μὲν ὁ αὐτός εἶμι ...*], 2.62.1, 2.62.2; *ἐμέ* 2.60.4, 2.60.4, 2.64.1 [twice]; *ἐμοί* 2.60.2, 2.60.5, 2.64.2; *ἐμόν* 2.61.2). If Demosthenes could quote a passage of *Antigone* at length (194-214: Dem. *de fals. leg.* 247), we can be sure that Thucydides knew the play well enough to study it in order to gain an impression of Periclean style, if that is indeed what it enabled him to do.

According to Aristotle, Pericles' oratory was characterized by the frequent use of striking metaphor. He left no writings (Plut. *Per.* 8.7) and while extant examples of his sayings are few, they are impressive: the Samians were 'like children who have been given food, but cry nevertheless' and the Boeotians 'like holm-oaks that batter their limbs against one another' (Arist. *Rhet.* 1407a). Aristotle, in analyzing the different kinds of metaphor begins with 'those by analogy, such as when Pericles said that the youth fallen in battle was like the spring taken from the year' (*Rhet.* 1411a). A recent account of Creon's language is identical: Creon 'habitually starts out and ends his speeches with generalizations, and relies heavily on analogies and abstractions, often in the form of simile, metaphor or *γνώμη*. His use of harsh metaphors drawn from coinage and metalworking, from military organization and warfare, from the commanding and steering of a ship, and from the breaking

and yoking of animals, lends an especially rigid and domineering tone to his utterances' (Griffith 1999, 36). This is borne out by Plutarch who cites Ion of Chios, who knew Pericles and was less than impressed with his lack of social graces: 'Pericles was overbearing and insolent in conversation, and his pride had in it a great deal of contempt for others' (Plut. *Per.* 5.3), which corresponds closely to the Creon of *Antigone*.

More Periclean evocations in Creon's language include the frequent use of the words *φρονεῖν* ('to be resolute'), *νοῦς* ('mind'), *δίκη* ('justice') and their cognates. These are all significant words closely associated with Pericles: the relevant testimonia are replete with references to his *φρόνημα* (his 'resolve', e.g. Plut. *Per.* 5.1; 8.1; 10.7; 17.4; 31.1; 36.8; 39.1; Stadter 1989, 75); *Νοῦς* ('Mind') was central to the thought of Pericles' favourite philosopher, Anaxagoras (Plut. *Them.* 2.5); and Pericles' constant concern was for *δικαιοσύνη* ('honesty' or 'incorruptibility': Plut. *Per.* 2.5), given that 'he had so much opportunity for gain' (Stadter 1989, 193). Another frequent word in *Antigone* is *μηχανή* and cognates and compounds (79, 90, 92, 175, 349, 363, 364); if Pericles is in the frame, they would be allusions to his novel skill with siege-engines (*μηχαναί*) recently seen to good effect at Samos (Plut. *Per.* 27.3).

Another linguistic peculiarity of Pericles' own diction was, judging by speeches in Thucydides, the use of expressions such as *περί βραχέως* ('for a small matter'), *διὰ μικρόν* ('for a trifle'), *ἐπι βραχείᾳ ... προφάσει* ('on [no] small plea'), *τὸ ... βραχύ* ('the small matter') – all within a few lines of each other in the *Histories* (1.140.4- 141.1). Creon seems to use something of the sort, in urging brevity on Antigone at 446: *σὺ δ' εἶπέ μοι μὴ μῆκος, ἀλλὰ συντόμως* ('Tell me, not at length, but briefly') and in his reference to 'a little curb' (*σικκρῶ χαλινῶ*: 477) with which recalcitrant horses might be broken. In addition, the observation of the Chorus at 1327 *βράχιστα γὰρ κράτιστα τὸν ποσὶν κακά* ('Briefest is best when trouble is in the way') perhaps marks them out, polymorphically as extensions in some way of the Periclean characterization: perhaps to indicate the more reasonable side of Pericles' character. If so, this reinforces the view that the play is principally an evocation of Pericles and that Creon is the main character in it. But perhaps I should say a word or two in passing about 'polymorphic characterisation': it is a device whereby different dramatic characters might represent different facets of an historical individual's personality, and I have argued elsewhere that it was widely used by ancient dramatists (*PoS passim*). In modern times, the technique was used by the psychotherapist and playwright Nikolai Nikolaivich Evreinov (Carnicke 1991), and the Irish poet W.B. Yeats (Kiberd 1996, \*\*\*).

Repetition was another well known feature of Pericles' way of speaking. Thucydides made his Pericles say: 'Face your enemies not just with φρονήματι ('confidence') but with καταφρονήματι ('a sense of superiority')'(2.62.3) and Creon is especially prone to repetition after successive disasters have fallen upon him: *ὁὐ φρενῶν δυσφρόνων ἀμαρτήματα* ('woe for the sins of a dispirited spirit': 1261, on seeing the body of his son) neatly combines Periclean φρόνημα with repetition, while *φεῖδ φεῖδ, ἰὼ πόνοι βροτῶν δύσπονοι* ('woe, woe for the toilsome toils of men': 1276) combines both repetition and allusions to πόνος ('toil') that were apparently such a prominent feature of Pericles' oratory that Thucydides artfully packs his last speech with a series of references to πόνος (2.62.1, 2.62.3, 2.63.1, 2.64.3, 2.64.6; cf. Boegehold 1982, 154-5).

The encounters between Creon and the guard, the 'low class citizen soldier' (Griffith 1999, 165), perhaps reveal Sophocles' view of Periclean democracy, in that the guard stands as a representative of the kind of people who formed Pericles' constituency. It is ironic that the guard outwits Creon, but significant that he lives in fear of him. The threat of being crucified alive (*ζῶντες κρεμαστοί*: 309) must have been a real one if the tales of the recent Samian excesses were true. If the role of Creon somehow, however allusively, resonates with recent actions of Pericles, then the historical statesman's power clearly rested on something more than statesmanship, and Haemon's thoughts at 688-99, on how the citizens were afraid of Creon's very frown again illustrate the likely role of fear during Pericles' ascendancy.

Pericles was moreover extremely careful with his money. His family 'complained at his exact regulation of his daily expenses, which allowed none of the superfluities common in great and wealthy households, but which made debit and credit exactly balance each other' (Plut. *Per.* 16.5; 36.2.). He was also very much aware of the pitfalls of corruption, and for the most part managed to avoid them (Plut. *Per.* 15.3-16.9). This probably lies somewhere behind Sophocles' portrayal of Creon as mean-minded and as one who naturally assumes, on several occasions, that his interlocutors are venal and only interested in monetary gain (221-2, 310-2, 1045-7, 1327) – which gives a slightly perverse, but perhaps accurate, spin on Pericles' incorruptibility. Then, Creon's 'coldness' has been remarked upon (Brown 1987, 146); we might well compare what has been called the 'bleakness' with which Thucydides' Pericles consoled the relatives of the dead in the Funeral Speech (Gomme in *HCT* 2.143 [on Thuc. 2.45.2]).

Creon's language 'sometimes reminds one of sophistic debates' (Long 1968, 53), and 'the *Antigone* reflects contemporary political and intellectual language more obviously than any other Sophoclean play' (ibid.). All very true, but the 'intellectual fussiness' (Brown 1987, 147) is easily accountable for in terms of recent philosophical debate at Athens. Long has a revealing passage:

The Guard, ever eager to show his sophistication, tries to locate the source of Creon's anger, asking if it is his ears or his ψυχή which are distressed (317). When Creon angrily retorts, *τί δὲ ῥυθμίσεις τὴν ἐμὴν λύπην ὄπον*, the Guard calmly distinguishes the anger which he causes in Creon's ears from the anger Creon's *φρένες* feel towards the perpetrator of the crime (319) (1968, 53).

This is all too reminiscent of the kind of distinction made when 'some athlete accidentally killed Epitimius of Pharsalus with a javelin ... and Pericles spent the whole day arguing with Protagoras whether in strict accuracy the javelin, or the man who threw it, or the stewards of the games, ought to be considered the authors of the accident' (Plut. *Per.* 36.5). Pericles is again somehow in the frame, and the plotting resonates with allusions to his discussions with philosophers that were common gossip if only because his fractious son Xanthippus had publicly ridiculed them (Plut. *Per.* 36.5-6).

Next there is what is 'perhaps the coarsest line in Greek tragedy' (Brown 1987, 168) at 569: when Creon tells Ismene who is pleading for Antigone's life 'Others have furrows that can be ploughed'. If Creon does somehow 'come forward' as Pericles, this is a highly appropriate, for it aptly, if somewhat invidiously, resonates with the character of one who was 'was much given to *aphrodisia*' (Clearch, *FHG* 2.314 *ap.* Ath. 13.589d), and who was called 'King of the Satyrs' on the stage (Hermippus *PCG* 47.1 *ap.* Plut. *Per.* 33.8). We noted earlier that there might have been some kind of tension between Sophocles and Pericles arising from the former's pederastic tastes. Pericles' inclinations lay in another direction, and Sophocles in effect says 'there are plenty more where she came from' (Griffith 1999, 216) thus indirectly drawing cruel and crude attention to the string of women whose company Pericles enjoyed (for a list [of at least 10], see *PoS* 135).

If Creon is on the stage for most of the play, there will be long periods when he is silent. He is thus a 'silent, menacing presence' at 582-625 (Brown 1987), and it is likely that he remains silent on stage after the argument with Haemon while the Chorus sing their hymn to Eros and Aphrodite (Griffith 1999, 255). Creon actually states 'I would not be silent (*σιωπήσαιμι*) if I saw ruin rather than safety (*σωτηρία*) coming to the citizens' (185-6). This is an-



other way in which the characterisation of Creon will have set up resonances with the public image of Pericles, for whom silence in public was apparently a typical feature: Pericles quietly endured criticism (*πράως καὶ σιωπῆ*) and obloquy (*σιωπῆ*). The description of Creon as *στρατηγός* in line 8 is moreover in keeping with a Periclean characterization, for Pericles had held the position more frequently than any other Athenian (indeed in most years since 448/7 (Develin 1989, 81-93); Creon's entry from the field at 155, probably in armour (Calder 1968, 393), will have presented the opportunity to show him helmeted in the manner familiar from Pericles' portraits (Richter 1965, 1.102-4, figs 429-43).

### The Chorus

It was suggested above that the Chorus might be viewed as a polymorphic extension of the Periclean symbolism with which the figure of Creon is imbued, introduced perhaps to give a more nuanced picture of the protagonist. If this is indeed the case (and it would certainly bear out Aristotle's observation that the Chorus should be 'part of the whole and take a share in the action ... as in Sophocles' [*Po.* 1456a]), it will account for the rationalism and humanism of what has been called the 'highly problematic' (Brown 1987) First Stasimon (332-75). If it relates 'to the intellectual climate in which Sophocles and his audience lived' (Burton 1980, 101), it will be one largely engendered by Protagoras who taught in Athens between 454 and 444 BC (Morrison 1941; Guthrie 1969, 3.63-8). This is doubtless why Pericles 'shared the secular views of his teachers and friends. He was free of the common superstitions of his time, and he sought natural, rational explanations for the phenomena he observed in the world around him' (Kagan 1990, 178). The theme of *ἄτη* that pervades the Second Stasimon (582-625) and which can afflict a family over generations well corresponds to the Alcmaeonid curse with which Pericles' family was troubled (Thuc. 1.126-7), and will inevitably have brought it to mind. The bold imagery of the language ('earthquake; sea-storm; a plant harvested as it strains towards the light; the glittering residence of never-sleeping Zeus; a foot stepping on hot embers' Griffith 1999, 219) has much in common with Pericles' frequent use of striking metaphor we have discussed already, not to mention his practice of 'adorning his oratory with apt illustrations drawn from physical science' (Plut. *Per.* 8.1-2), and will again have created suggestive echoes. The Chorus' hymn to Eros and Aphrodite in the Third Stasimon (781-800) is appropriate if oblique allusion is made to a Pericles who 'was much given to *aphrodisia*', and if Creon remains silently on stage during the song it is indeed likely that 'its tenor and significance may be cru-

cially affected' (Griffith 1999, 255). The fates that befall Danae, Lycurgus and Cleopatra and her children in the Fourth Stasimon in a crescendo of cruelty (944-87) may well have a 'far from obvious' bearing on Antigone's situation (*ibid.* 283), but they are highly pertinent in the context of a tragedy that probably took as its starting point the stories told about Pericles having taken 'the trierarchs and marines of the Samians to the agora at Miletus, bound them to planks, and after they had been left for ten days and were in a miserable state, knocked them on the head with clubs and cast out their bodies without burial' (Plut. *Per.* 28.2).

### Haemon

So much for Creon. What about the other characters – Haemon, Creon's son; Eurydice, his wife; and above all Antigone and Ismene? Does their characterization resonate with any historical individuals? If it does, and if Creon 'comes forward' as Pericles, we might well guess that the allusions are to other members of Pericles' extended family. That this sort of investigation is supposed to be off-limits to scholars only adds to the interest of the exercise.

To take Haemon first. It is clear that Creon's relationship with his son is not a happy one. Their encounter on stage is an early example of a debate 'across the generation gap' (Strauss 1993, 48-7, 134-6; cf. Handley 1993; *PoS* 42-58). Their discussion begins politely enough, with Haemon saying appropriately placatory things in the hope of gaining his father's goodwill. But Creon's refusal to allow Haemon even to consider marrying Antigone after what she has done is met with increasing frustration on the young man's side. Their disagreement culminates with Haemon declaring that his father will never set eyes on him again, and suggesting that he should 'Rave, living with those of your loved ones who are willing <to put up with you>' (Griffith 1999, 252). All this closely parallels Pericles' rather public quarrels with his eldest son Xanthippus, who was at least nineteen in 438, and quite possibly older (Stadter 1989, 326), and as a young man had quarrelled bitterly with his father. Their differences were essentially over money, but Xanthippus also spread rumours that Pericles had had an intrigue with his daughter-in-law, Xanthippus' wife. Their quarrel was to be unresolved down to the time of Xanthippus' death in the plague of 430/29 BC (Plut. *Per.* 36.3). Xanthippus' wife was 'young and spendthrift', and he initially fell out with his father over the latter's stinginess. We hear of Xanthippus being so angry with Pericles over one financial issue that he 'was enraged and abused his father, sneering at his way of life and his discussions with the sophists' (Plut. *Per.* 36.4). Plutarch actually tells us who one of the 'sophists' was, namely Protagoras

(36.5), which serves as a possible chronological marker, inasmuch as Protagoras was in Athens until 444 (Plut. *Per.* 11.5; Diog. Laert. 9.50).

When Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema was composing his *Phidias and the frieze of the Parthenon*, Athens now in Birmingham City Art Gallery, he read his Plutarch very carefully, and having noted that Pericles' suffered from a congenital malformation of the skull, gave Xanthippus a similarly shaped head (Vickers, forthcoming). We do not have any direct information concerning the way Xanthippus spoke, but if Haemon's language resembles that of Creon (as it seems to), then allusions may be there which intensify any possible Periclean reference. The metaphors at 712-18, about yielding and unyielding trees are precisely the sort of thing we hear about in the minute corpus of authentic Periclean utterances; at least 'holm-oaks battering their limbs against one another' (cf. Arist. *Rhet.* 1407a) belong to the same register. Then Haemon's pleonasm at 763-4, where he says 'Never will you see, looking with your eyes, my face again', is the kind of Periclean utterance that we have just seen Sophocles exploiting. Then the scandalous stories about Pericles' carrying-on with his daughter-in-law may ultimately lie behind Creon's statement at 571 to the effect that he would not like 'evil wives for [his] sons', and Ismene's enquiry at 574, as to whether Creon 'will rob [his] son of this woman', is perhaps similarly based on the public image of the Periclean ménage.

### Aspasia

But there is probably yet another woman lurking behind what Sophocles makes Creon and Haemon say to each other. Creon warns his son not to 'dethrone [his] reason for pleasure's sake' and end up with 'an evil woman to share [his] bed and home' (648-51). This sounds very much like an oblique allusion not so much to Xanthippus' domestic arrangements as to Pericles' own, all the more effective in the mouth of a Creon. For it was said of Pericles that 'it was thought that he began the war with the Samians in order to please Aspasia (Plut. *Per.* 24.1-2; cf. 25.1). Similarly, Creon's criticism of his son taking second place to a woman (746) and the charge that his son is 'a slave to a woman' (756) are probably intended to put a hypocritical spin on the accusations.

If Creon does 'comes forward' as a metaphor of Pericles, his wife Eurydice will somehow have evoked Aspasia. Eurydice is not on stage for long, but the way in which she describes her dallying by the doorway of her house at 1185-1188 looks like an oblique allusion to Pericles's practice of never to have gone in or out of his house without embracing and kissing Aspasia pas-

sionately (*Per.* 24.9; cf. *Ath.* 13.589*e*); and if we know this, we can be sure that Sophocles did. We may even charge Sophocles with his own act of cruelty in making Eurydice die a gruesome death; but the curse on Creon that Eurydice utters with her dying breath (1304-5) will have been even crueller, in that it was perhaps the most powerful way – all the stronger for being allusive – in which Sophocles could truly hurt the main target of his criticism who valued his relationship with Aspasia above all else.

Creon has recently been called ‘an ordinary, self-centred, unimaginative man, invested with more responsibility than he can carry’ (Brown 1987, 7): an immense contrast, but probably a deliberate one, with the hero of Samos who had carried, but left unburied, all before him. To make a character on the stage reproduce Pericles’ stock phrases and peculiarities of speech, and to make him interact with recognisable members of his household was a clever, but hardly unparalleled, means of criticism. The mythological veneer enabled the playwright to be if anything more direct in his criticism, while at the same time distancing himself. Or rather, he does not distance himself, but engages in an analysis of what happened that is richer and more evocative (and safer) than any explicit account of Pericles’ cruelty might have been. The dramatic stage was very much part of Athenian political life, and once it is realised that a dramatic festival was the occasion for the pouring of libations by the generals, for the display of the annual tribute, for the praise of civic benefactors, and the parade in armour of war orphans (Goldhill 1987), then we can easily understand how plays might have a political resonance, and how the stage – whether tragic or comic – might be the place where things could be said that were impossible to say in other contexts.

### Alcibiades

But there are other family members to consider. Ever since 447 BC, Pericles had been joint guardian of Alcibiades and Cleinias, the son of the war hero Cleinias who had died at Coronea.<sup>25</sup> Both boys were a handful. The single reference we have to Cleinias tells us a lot about both. Pericles was afraid ‘that Cleinias would be corrupted by Alcibiades, took him away, and placed him in the house of Ariphron – his fellow guardian – to be educated; but before six months had elapsed, Ariphron sent him back, not knowing what to do with him’ (*Pl. Prot.* 320.a). Relations between Pericles and his delinquent wards can never have been easy. Stories were told about the infant Alcibiades’ wilfulness and obduracy: of his having held up a cart driven by a

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<sup>25</sup> An unpublished inscription (described by Develin 1989, 429) has Alcibiades proposing legislation in 422/21 BC, which implies that he was already thirty years old, and thus born in 452/51 BC.

peasant that threatened to disturb a game of knucklebones by lying down in front of it and refusing to budge (Plut. *Alc.* 2.3-4); of his having as a boy (*παῖς ὦν*) run away from home to the house of an admirer; of his having taken a mistress when under age, ‘suffering terrible things, but performing worse’, and – most significant, this – boasting that ‘dressed in women’s clothes ... he attended symposia undetected’ [Lib. *fr.* 50.2.12-13].

It was only with the greatest reluctance that I admitted even to myself that there may somehow be an evocation of Alcibiades in the figure of Antigone. But odd as it sounds at first, the idea not only works, but enables us – as we shall presently see – to explain away the major difficulty with the play, namely the bizarre speech to which Goethe took such exception. Rather than being thoroughly un-Sophoclean, it is part of Sophocles’ skilful character-building. The willful, headstrong, Antigone has much in common with Alcibiades, who will have been fourteen in 438 and presumably already boasting about dressing as a woman.

Just as the character of Creon might be held to incorporate invidious echoes of Pericles, that of Antigone embodies many personality traits peculiar to Alcibiades. For all that he was very young, these will have been well known to the audience. Even as a child he was one of the richest individuals in Athens, was the object of widespread attention from would-be admirers (Plut. *Alc.* 4-6), and was an influential arbiter of taste. For example, while still a schoolboy he caused the playing of the *aulos* to go entirely out of fashion (Plut. *Alc.* 2.5-7). It is not that Alcibiades had a bad teacher; he was taught by the famous Pronomus (Ath. 4. 184d; cf. Paus. 9.12.5). Significantly, this information comes in a book entitled *Euripides and Sophocles*, and it is difficult to explain why such a question should have been discussed there unless a tragedy was in question. ‘Let the children of the Thebans’, Alcibiades used to say, ‘play the *aulos*, for they know not how to speak’. This is where I think Sophocles was extremely clever, to evoke the cross-dressing Alcibiades in the person of Antigone, who was very much a ‘child of Thebes’.

Alcibiades’ notorious childhood seems to be alluded to early in the play, for Antigone’s third sentence may be translated as ‘What is this proclamation (*κήρυγμα*) they say the general (*τὸν στρατηγόν*) has just published to the whole city?’ This can be read as an oblique allusion to a story told about Alcibiades’ boyhood described by his contemporary Antiphon (*fr.* 66 Bl. *ap.* Plut. *Per.* 3.2) in these words:

Alcibiades as a boy (*παῖς ὦν*) ran away from home to the house of one of his admirers Democrates. When Ariphron proposed to have [his disappearance] proclaimed (*ἐπικηρύττειν*), Pericles [the *στρατηγός par excellence*] forbade it, saying that if he was dead, he would only be

found one day sooner because of the proclamation (*διὰ τὸ κήρυγμα*), while if he was safe, he would be disgraced for the rest of his life.

And Plutarch, as so often, purports not to believe the story ‘which [was] written by an enemy with the avowed purpose of defaming his character’. But if Sophocles did somehow have Alcibiades in mind in composing *Antigone*, he was not in the business of putting his youthful escapades in an especially favourable light. ‘As a boy’ would make Alcibiades very young here: probably younger than fourteen, and if so, the event will have been prior to a performance of *Antigone* in 438 BC. The notion of ‘proclamation’ is repeated in Plutarch’s account of Alcibiades’ shameful escapade; the same image is repeated in Antigone’s description of how Creon has made a proclamation (*κηρύξαντ*: 32; cf. *προκηρύζοντα*: 34) directed at ‘you and me – me, mark you,’ she adds with what has been called ‘fierce pride’ (Brown 1987, 139).

Antigone’s essential irrationality has been generally overlooked (Collinge 1962 is a notable exception), as has Alcibiades’ psychological make-up. This last-mentioned gap in scholarship is now being filled; Dr Daphne Briggs, a child psychotherapist, and I gave a paper to the Oxford History of Childhood Seminar in the autumn of 2004 in which between us we investigated the psychological make-up of the infant and pubescent Alcibiades (Vickers and Briggs forthcoming). I well remember Dr Briggs’ reaction, when I first told her some of the anecdotes concerning Alcibiades’ childhood; ‘There’s an insecure little person’, she said. His problems will have begun in the first year of his life. He was an insecure baby who very early discovered self-coping mechanisms. His wild oscillations in behaviour suggest that he had a disturbed history of attachment, and had problems holding the world together, problems that will have been the more acute when he was a teenager.

This perhaps helps us understand the full force of the exasperated Chorus’ verdict on Antigone at 875: ‘Your self-willed anger (*αὐτόγνωτος ... ὄργα*) has brought about your ruin’, which is a strikingly vivid definition of an impassioned adolescent state of mind. Antigone’s unflinching obduracy was probably based on Alcibiades’ ‘constant need to win and come first’ (*τὸ φιλόνηκον ἰσχυρότατον ... καὶ τὸ φιλόπρωτον*: Plut. *Per.* 2.1). Plutarch gives a fine example of this when he tells of the infant Alcibiades refusing to give way to a wagon (Plut. *Alc.* 2.3-4), and another of Alcibiades’ eccentric sense of personal rectitude when he knocked on a schoolmaster’s door and when he discovered that he did not possess a copy of Homer, beat him up (*ibid.* 7.1-3); yet another in the anecdote of how Alcibiades once bought a very fine hound for a very large sum, and proceeded to cut its tail off, to universal disapproval. When his friends told him how sorry everyone was for the dog, Alci-

biades replied ‘Then what I want has come about. I want the Athenians to talk about this, rather than that they should say something worse about me’ (*ibid.* 9).

We have already had occasion to note Goethe’s reservations about lines 904-20; how they were a blemish only waiting for an apt philologist to demonstrate that they are spurious; how Antigone, on the point of death, ‘brings forward a motive which is quite unworthy, and almost borders upon the comic.’ Goethe had in fact been anticipated by A.L.W. Jacob (1821, 351-68), but other ‘apt philologists’ were not slow to respond, and the lines in question are often deleted (especially by those who wish to see Antigone as heroine and protagonist; e.g Müller 1967). They are more frequently defended, however, but often with tortuous logic (Hester 1971, 55-8, for a long bibliography; Brown 1987, 199-200; Griffith 1999, 277-9). But if Alcibiades does somehow lie behind Antigone, the audience will have expected ‘unworthy motives,’ and have known that ‘the comic’ was Alcibiades’ special forte: *βωμολοχία* (‘horseplay’) was a charge justly laid against him in Plutarch’s summary of his career (*Alc.* 40.3).

Antigone’s narrative bears a close relation to a tale told by Herodotus (3.119) who was given a large sum of money by the Athenians for his readings, perhaps in 445 (Plut. *Mor.* 862b; Eus. *Vers. Arm. Ol.* 8<sub>3</sub><sup>3</sup>), when Alcibiades was seven. What we get in Antigone’s speech is in part a childish recollection of lectures that Alcibiades had either heard or heard about, and in part an attempt by Sophocles to replicate Alcibiades’ manner of speech as well as his thought processes. Even later in life, Alcibiades ‘stroved to find not only the proper thing to say, but also the proper words and phrases in which to say it; and since in this last regard he was not a man of large resources he would often stumble in the midst of his speech, come to a stop, and pause a while, a particular phrase eluding him. Then he would resume, and proceed with all the caution in the world.’ This perhaps accounts for what has been described as the ‘self-consciously rhetorical’ quality of the speech (Brown 1987, 200).

It has been said that ‘the logic’ of speeches in tragedy ‘can be far-fetched, but it ... cannot ... be absent altogether’ (*ibid.*); but this does not allow for the possibility that Sophocles was making Antigone speak like an impassioned teenager. What the Chorus call her ‘folly in speech and frenzy at the heart’ (603: *λόγου τ’ ἄνοιακαὶ φρενῶν ἐρινύς*) has been taken as a sign of one who might be mentally unbalanced (Collinge 1962, 51), but it could equally well be understood as a brilliant evocation of normal, impassioned adolescent reasoning. For those who had ears to hear (and given the build-up to the characterization), Alcibiades might have come to mind, not to mention their own

offspring. Any perceived mental imbalance, however, can be put down to Alcibiades' character that was described by Plutarch (who had access to far more sources than we do) as full of 'many strange inconsistencies and contradictions' (*ἀνομοιότητα πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ μεταβολάς*: *Alc.* 2.1). Mikheil Tumanishvili recognised this aspect of Antigone's character when he described his 1968 production as 'a confrontation of two standpoints, two opposing beliefs; two vehicles driving fast along the highway. One of them is clear about the destination it heads for, the second disturbs everything by weird zigzagging, creating a threat of a crash'.<sup>26</sup>

If this interpretation is correct, one immediate consequence is that an Antigone based on a disturbed teenager notorious for his irregular way of life will scarcely have moved an Athenian audience to pity. The sight of a Creon broken as the result of his insistence on a zero-tolerance attitude towards the law will, however, have been moving and instructive, not least for the principal *κωμωδούμενος* (or whatever the precise term might be for tragedy). Pericles' inhuman activity on Samos had been held up to public scrutiny and was attacked for its cruelty. The results of his indifferent guardianship of Alcibiades (whose education was entrusted to a Thracian slave: *Pl. Alc.* 1.122b2) are also laid at his door. We can only assume that some of this criticism was effective and that Pericles' policies were less harsh in the future. Sophocles' strictures had less influence on either Alcibiades or the audience, for events of the last quarter of the fifth century BC were rendered even more chaotic and unpredictable by Alcibiades' fickle and unstable character, and by the ready reception his crazy schemes were given by the Athenian public.

This reading, which I believe to have been close to what Sophocles had in mind, bears closely on the extremely personalised politics of Periclean Athens. It was but a few years since Thucydides son of Milesias had attempted to rally opposition to Pericles, but once Thucydides had been forced into exile, that opposition had mostly withered away. Some of it appears to have survived, however, in Sophocles' critical play. But the important thing to note is that Sophocles' method is in principle exactly the same as that of countless modern playwrights, in Georgia and elsewhere, who have used the story of Creon and Antigone as a vehicle for criticising overweening authority.

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<sup>26</sup> Rustaveli Theatre Archive; information from Nato Tvalchrelidze.



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