

DRAMA FICTION POETRY

THE FACILITY  
& OTHER TEXTS  
RE-IMAGINING  
ANTIGONE

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION FOR TEACHERS

This anthology is in EMC's *Cultural Conversations* series. Each publication in the series brings together texts that relate to each other in some way, with interesting connections that demonstrate to students some key ideas about literature – for instance about traditions, genres and conventions, the way that writers draw on earlier work for inspiration, how audiences read texts over time in different ways, what makes some texts endure and the relationship between readers and writers.

The anthology is based on Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*, a play that has resonated with countless audiences through the centuries, having been translated, adapted and re-envisioned numerous times, by different writers, for different contexts. Its exploration of power and coercion, conflicts between individual, family and political interests, resistance and rebellion, youth standing out against the older generation, religious beliefs and rites versus more secular exigencies, and what it means to be female in a male-controlled society, have all offered rich possibilities for translation to different political realities and societies. Among other adaptations, *Antigone* has been re-envisioned: as a play for occupied France in World War II, with a hidden message about resisting Nazi control; as a comment on apartheid South Africa; as a reflection on race and police violence against black people in the USA; as a novel about Islamic radicalisation and the state of the British nation, along with many more.

In the anthology you will find specially commissioned new writing based on *Antigone*: poems by Valerie Bloom, Inua Ellams; a short story by Phoebe Roy, a play by Sarah Hehir and a short story and poem by me. Each writer has written a specially commissioned work, inspired by Sophocles' play, supported by a grant from the Classical Association. They have also written short reflections, both exploring what they took from the original text and commenting on their own writing, to help students engage with the issues of the play alongside

the new texts. Some of the texts can potentially be read as stand-alone works, in particular the play and the short stories, though we think that they will offer a lot more to students if, as a bare minimum, they know an outline of the original play. So we have included a short summary in the anthology. Some students may, of course, have already had the pleasure of reading and studying the whole of Sophocles' play in Drama, Classics or as part of the English curriculum. Equally, some teachers may choose to read the whole play as a prelude to reading the new works. Reading the new texts alongside each other obviously also offers rich potential for comparison of what different contemporary writers have made of the Sophocles play, in different styles and genres.

The playscript by Sarah Hehir is a brilliant one-hour play, with lots of different parts for the classroom. As a work in its own right, it is a major new drama text that we hope will fill a gap in classroom reading. Suitable for KS3 and above, it both raises important themes for discussion and debate and introduces students to some of the key elements in a playwright's repertoire – dialogue, monologue, a chorus, physical action, symbolism and recurring motifs.

We hope you enjoy the opportunity to bring a classic, ancient text into conversation with some new interpretations by contemporary writers. Visit EMC's website for information on how to get the free classroom resources to support the study of these texts as part of a long cultural conversation.

*Barbara Bleiman*

*Please note: you may feel this anthology is most appropriate for Year 9 and above. The classical play with which the texts in this anthology are in conversation explores a number of challenging and sensitive issues, for example suicide and death. The writers have also focused on some of these issues. The short story 'Being Antigone' includes one expletive on page 88.*

## INTRODUCTION FOR STUDENTS

This anthology is based on *Antigone*, a play written by the ancient Greek dramatist Sophocles, around 441 BCE. It's a play that has struck a chord with many people, in many different countries over the centuries and it has been adapted for different contexts and for new audiences. For instance, a French playwright, Jean Anouilh, wrote a version of *Antigone* during World War II, when France was occupied by the Nazis. He kept the Greek setting so it wasn't obvious to the Germans that there was a hidden message about resisting Nazi control. That message came across loud and clear though to the French audiences who saw the play! It's also been adapted by South African playwright Athol Fugard as a comment on apartheid. He set his play on Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for many years. More recently, in 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, community leaders, teachers, youth workers and drama groups put on a production called *Antigone in Ferguson*, to mark and protest about the death of a young black man, Michael Brown, at the hands of the police. Novelists, including Kamila Shamsie and Ali Smith have also written versions of *Antigone*.

What makes this play so powerful that it's been adapted so often? Well, it deals with really big themes that can apply in different societies and cultures – powerful strict rulers and what happens to those who resist their laws, what it's like to be female in a world where men rule the roost, conflicts between individual, family and political interests, youth standing up to age, religion and beliefs about death, burial and the afterlife, and much more.

In this anthology you will find specially commissioned new writing, based on *Antigone*, by poets Valerie Bloom and Inua Ellams, short story writers, Phoebe Roy and myself, and playwright, Sarah Hehir. Each writer has written a new text (or in the case of Valerie Bloom and myself, two), inspired by Sophocles' play. They have also written short commentaries, to help you engage with the issues of the original play and think about what each writer has done to adapt it and why.

These are texts in conversation with each other and we hope that you'll have great conversations about them too. Maybe you'll also want to write your own version of *Antigone* when you've read some of the ones in this anthology? If you decide to do that, you'll be contributing to a long tradition and keeping it alive!

*Barbara Bleiman*

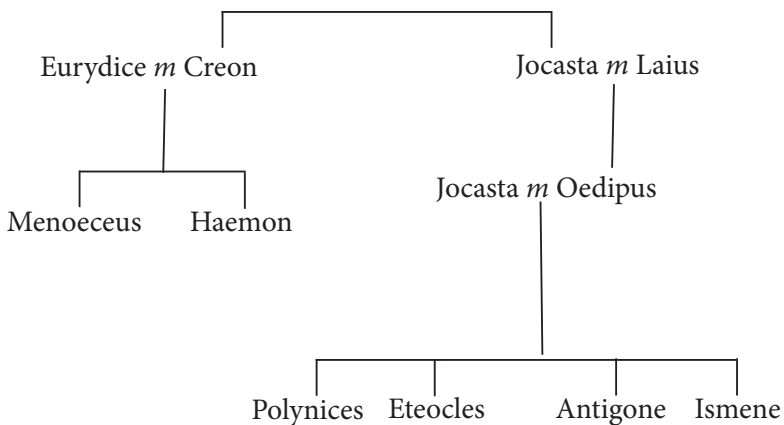
## The Story of Antigone

### The back story – Antigone’s family

The back story to *Antigone*, a Greek play, is deeply troubling and packed with family drama.

The story starts with Oedipus, a figure from Greek myth and one-time king of Thebes, a city in Greece. At birth Oedipus became separated from his parents, Laius and Jocasta, King and Queen of Thebes. This meant he grew up with no knowledge of either of them, a situation with bizarre and horrifying consequences. First, Oedipus unwittingly killed Laius; second, he married Jocasta. Let’s put that another way: he killed his own father and married his own mother.

Family Tree



Oedipus and his mother, Jocasta, produced four children from their incestuous marriage: two boys, Polynices and Eteocles, and two girls, Antigone and Ismene. When Jocasta finally learned that she had married her own son, she was horrified and killed herself.

Oedipus was expelled from Thebes and his sons, Polynices and Eteocles, were put in charge instead. The plan was for them to take turns ruling the city. Each would hold power for a year before handing over control to the other. A good solution, you might think, but destined to end in tragedy thanks to a curse placed on the brothers by



# **The Facility**

**A play by Sarah Hehir**

*I raise up my voice, not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard.*

Malala Yousafzai

*Let not any one pacify his conscience by the delusion that he can do no harm if he takes no part, and forms no opinion. Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing.*

John Stuart Mill

**The setting:**

The Facility – a detention centre for young miscreants. The time is an indeterminate future in an undefined land, The Realm, where citizens are ruled by The Society: a rich and powerful political elite.

**Characters:**

ANTIGONE	A miscreant
ISMENE	A miscreant, mother and Antigone's sister
POLYNICE*	A miscreant who speaks from beyond the grave
CREON	Prison governor and Haemon's father
HAEMON	Head of Education. Creon's son
GUARD 1	
GUARD 2	
MISCREANTS	Young inmates of The Facility
CROW	Creon's conscience
CHORUS	The community, faith leaders, animals, media, citizens, bureaucracy, the voice of reason, dancing men

**A note on the staging:**

When staging the play, you may decide that the characters and chorus remain on stage at all times and the focus is shifted through lighting or action.

\* In Sophocles' play, the character was a man called Polynices. Here Polynice is female.

## *The Facility and Other Texts – Re-imagining Antigone*

### **Prologue**

ANTIGONE      Ismene listen. Wake up! They aren't telling us anything.

ISMENE        They told us that Polynice is dead.

ANTIGONE      But that's not enough. What about the how and why and when and where she died?

ISMENE        In her cell. Last night.

ANTIGONE      But how and why?

ISMENE        Shush. A guard is coming.

GUARD 2        (*SHOUTS*) Lockdown.

ANTIGONE      (*SHOUTS*) Oy! You have to let us out.

GUARD 2        Not today. Exercise is cancelled.

GUARD 1        Education is cancelled.

ANTIGONE      (*SHOUTS*) Let us out. Our friend is dead.

GUARD 2        Food will be brought to you. Work will be posted under your doors.

ISMENE        Please let us out. We need to talk about Polynice. We need to remember her.

GUARD 1        We should give them time to grieve together.

GUARD 2        (*SHOUTS*) Lockdown.

ANTIGONE (SHOUTS) What happened to Polynice?

GUARD 2 (SHOUTS) Lockdown.

ANTIGONE (SHOUTS) You have to tell us!

GUARD 2 (SHOUTS) Lockdown.

~

CHORUS  
A tragedy  
An unfortunate incident  
Ill-fated  
Unavoidable  
Incomprehensible

~

ANTIGONE You give us no explanation. You take no blame. You say no sorry.

GUARD 2 Polynice. Outsider.

GUARD 1 Polynice. Good at chess. Better than me.

GUARD 2 Lockdown.

~

CHORUS  
Taunts and prods and pokes  
Graffiti scrawled across her wall  
A rat, dead in her bed  
Go home, whispered through her door

~

## *The Facility and Other Texts – Re-imagining Antigone*

ISMENE            We will start small and gain momentum. A manifesto of miscreants: the lost and forgotten. If we're respectful and careful, we'll make an impression.

ANTIGONE        I pity you both. Your misplaced hope is more dangerous than ignorance. I will speak my mind to Creon.

ISMENE            He's angry. He won't listen to you.

ANTIGONE        I'll make him listen.

HAEMON          He'll throw you into isolation.

ANTIGONE        He can stick my head on a stake for all I care.

HAEMON          Antigone, if you confront him, he will not be merciful.

ANTIGONE        No-one with even a pinch of power has ever been merciful to me. I won't be silenced. Your insipid protests, scribbled on paper, won't work! You will never be heard.

~

CHORUS          Imploring  
Pleading  
Beseeching  
Begging  
Down on your knees in supplication  
Will you gobble the hopeful scraps

# Being Antigone

A story by Barbara Bleiman

It hadn't been a good year. In fact, it had been a terrible one. It was as if the gods were looking at us with angry faces, bearing weapons of war, raining down thunderbolts and lightning from their comfy, cushioned seats up in the heavens. First my nan died. She had a freak accident, a little fall in her kitchen that seemed like nothing. A week later, she was rushed to hospital and never came out. It had been a blood clot in her leg that travelled up to her heart and killed her. My older brothers Pauly and Ethan and my little sister Izzy and I all went to the funeral and put flowers on the coffin. It was tough to see our nan buried but tougher still for mum, who'd relied so much on her. Mum went a bit absent, as if she'd forgotten all of us. She was there but not there, if you see what I mean – there in her body, but not in her mind. Usually, she'd notice the slightest thing. Sometimes it was annoying, sometimes not. 'Not got any homework, Alicia?', 'Looking a bit glum – something up?', 'How's things with that nasty girl in your class, the queen bee?'. But now, she barely seemed aware of anything. The food was on the table, the washing done, the groceries in the cupboard but mum wasn't really with us. She didn't see what else was happening.

So Nan dying was the first bad thing, and then Pauly and Ethan moved out. It'd been coming for quite a while. Mum had stopped arguing with them because of being so sad about Nan, but Dad just took over, now she was out of action. He sort of adopted her role, as if he felt he had to keep up the side, nagging them about their mess, the time they spent on their computers, those layabout friends of theirs who kept coming around, why they weren't working harder to bring in a bit more money, whether the courier company they both worked for would put up with them for much longer given how unreliable they were, and so on and so on. It drove Ethan and Pauly mad – and me too. In his day, he said, young men had more respect. In his day, he said, they put in the hours. In his day, children were less rude to their parents. It was true, Dad had always worked really hard.



He's a plumber, and he gets called out on weekends and even in the middle of the night sometimes. And he'd been really nice to Nan, no matter what, even though she wasn't his own mum, just his mother-in-law. And great about Mum too, trying to support her. Dad was steady. He was strong. Someone to look up to. I could vouch for all that. But he could be very annoying too. Pauly and Ethan rolled their eyes, when he got going on one of his 'In my day...' lectures, or just walked out the room.

After Pauly and Ethan left they didn't come around much – Ethan hardly ever, Pauly a bit more. It was lovely to see him, when he did suddenly turn up, unannounced, give me a big hug and go straight to the fridge to raid it for a piece of cold chicken or whatever else he could find. But it wasn't so often and then it always ended in a row with Dad, so the visits tailed off. A few months later, we heard that Ethan had lost his job. 'What's he living on?' Dad asked. 'How's he paying his rent?' No-one answered. Izzy and I just looked at each other. We kind of knew but didn't want to actually say it out loud. I think Mum and Dad probably knew too, but no-one wanted to admit it, definitely not to each other, maybe not even to ourselves.

And then Carla, one of Mum's friends, came around and said she'd heard something about Ethan having been in trouble with the police. He'd been charged with something or other, she wasn't sure what. That was it, for Mum. The final straw. She disappeared up into her bedroom, crawled under the duvet and stayed there. When I say stayed there, I mean stayed there. Just trips to the loo. Nothing else. Dad took up trays of food and a few hours later brought them back down again. I couldn't help but see how little she'd eaten. It was as if a little bird had been pecking at the food, or a not very hungry mouse nibbling away at the edges.

I went in and sat on the edge of her bed sometimes and held her hand. She squeezed mine and tried to smile, then closed her eyes, or turned away from me.

# **The Dragon and the Girl A Time**

**Two poems by Valerie Bloom**

## **The Dragon and the Girl**

1.

### **The Girl**

The dragon has roared, he has crawled from his lair,  
And the heat of his breath has scorched the pure air.  
He has crowned himself God and has made his decree,  
Let others bow and cower, I will not bend a knee.

Death is the punishment he means to inflict,  
On those who would dare to defy his edict.  
But there are laws which are higher; ones I must obey,  
For the price of defiance is too high to pay.

Should I leave my dear brother to rot in the street?  
To be food for the dogs and the scavenger's meat?  
Our good name in the dirt, our honour in ruin?  
What of my duty to my God and my kin?

I'm compelled to ignore a law so unjust,  
I'll not give in to coercion, I'll die if I must,  
And go to my grave with a conscience that's clear,  
There was never a law like this passed anywhere!

# **Rage Against the Machine**

**A poem by Inua Ellams**

## **Rage Against the Machine**

### **Portrait of Antigone and the city**

This is my freckled forehead  
These are its deep lines  
This is the faint meeting of eyebrows  
These are my tired eyes  
These are its dark waters  
These are its grey bags and weighted worries  
This is my narrow neck and its heavy duty  
This is my throat  
This is its forming song  
These are my quiet shoulders and simple arms  
This its trembling work

Those are the courts of the city  
Those are its laws glinting  
Those are its chambers combusting  
Those judges grease its work  
Those leaders fuel its fire  
Those officers churn its pistons  
Those journalists belch its voice  
Those activists spin its raging wheels  
This is its fixed course

**I Heard One Cry  
in the Night**  
A story by Phoebe Roy

## **Month 1: Bukátios**

January is the worst month. It was last January when the fight happened, when that girl said I'd attacked her, and her mother went to the police. It wasn't true, of course it wasn't. What had happened was this: it wasn't something I'd started – I was trying to help someone else, another girl I know who was being bothered. All I'd said was that I would handle it, and I thought I could do it quietly. I'd never planned much more than having a word, but then more and more people showed up, and it escalated. If I don't sound clear it's because I really don't remember – just that I was in the middle of it all, all sounds blurred out into one muffled roar, the bridge of the girl's nose blossoming briefly, beautifully red under my fist. Time slowed down and sped up again, and for one short second I stepped outside of my body and saw my limbs wheeling and dancing down there on the ground.

I wonder if that's what the ghosts who haunt me now saw, or if they've ever felt like I've felt, somewhere between a god looking down on a battlefield and someone with no power at all, always torn between two rights or two wrongs. Before I knew it, the police were talking to my parents. When they showed up at the door, my dad immediately assumed it was for one of my brothers. Both my brothers are quiet, but the older one is so silent everyone thinks he must be running a whole criminal empire from his bedroom. The girl who I thought I was helping asked me not to say anything, and so I took it all, the doctors, the temporary exclusion from school, the flicked glances in my direction, the hushed tone I knew they used to speak about me, disgusted but with a kind of awe. Only my dad knew the whole story, and he tweaked my nose and said he was proud of me despite everything – concerned, of course, but a bit proud too. He told me I knew about duty, and that I was brave, even though I never thought I was. I'd told him the truth because I knew how

worried he was, and didn't want him to think it was their fault, or that they'd gone wrong somewhere. I know I didn't calm him entirely, but I did a bit, and my father's pride is something I can hold on to, something I can fix my gaze on. But even so, January is still the worst of the months.

This January, I've dreamt about war every night for two weeks and the noise in my dreams, from men, horses and weapons crashing together, flattened into a single endless shriek, although I don't know which war it is. There are no clean wounds. People say now that I'm a violent girl, but apart from that one time my savagery is contained in the set of my shoulders and my refusal to smile in photographs. I try to follow the rules, but sometimes there are two rules that fight with each other, and so I fight with them. Sometimes right and wrong is decided afterwards. Sometimes the rules bend and don't make sense – if rules made sense, then ghosts wouldn't exist, but I know they do, because I've got three of them with me all the time, a girl and two boys, and they accompany me everywhere. I don't know why they chose to follow me. One of them, the girl, said once that it's because I understand both violence and rules, but I don't think that I do, only that I think that anger is a more honest thing than always giving in.

January, the worst month, the time the chill enters my bones and stays there, leaves rotting underfoot beneath ashtray-grey skies, a coward sun never daring to climb high enough in the sky to warm me. Everyone feels it; you can see it in the eyes downcast on the bus or sliding resolutely away from me, in faces lit only by glowing screens, ugly and green in untrue light. Every morning in January, even after nights when my dreams are less confused and cooler in feel, I get up when it is still dark and I go to the woods near our house to lay my face against cool bark. I see myself like a merciless giant compared to the mosses and creatures running their own miniature universe under the trees, only interested in me if I threaten them. I picture them building



# **A Letter from Antigone**

**A poem by Barbara Bleiman**

## **A Letter from Antigone**

1943, Germany

Dear Sophie,

You were eleven when you and your friends  
joined the League of German Girls,  
while your brother, Hans, signed up for the Hitler Youth.  
Sickened with what it was and what it said,  
you almost didn't finish school.

Eleven years later, the guillotine fell  
for treason against the state.

You'd joined the White Rose,  
to argue against hate,  
with words and papers fluttering down  
like petals on the wind.

The scent of the white flower lingers still,  
masking the crimson stench of your blood.



1955, Alabama

Dear Claudette,  
You're fifteen and on your way home,  
bussed to a school for students like you.  
The seats at the front for white folks are full  
but you stay sitting, with a woman, black like you,  
bearing a child in her belly, black like you.  
The police arrest you  
and later you say,  
'History kept me stuck to my seat.'  
History is still glued to its seat  
but people like you are trying to unstick it  
to keep on sitting,  
ask the reasons why  
then stand up and make a better world.

