

Antigone – Bloomsbury edition Ed Don Taylor
Pages 21-24

Antigone and Creon confront each other

CREON. Now, tell me, a simple yes or no.
Did you hear of my order forbidding the burial?
ANTIGONE. Of course I heard it. How could I not?
CREON. And yet you dared to disobey the law?
ANTIGONE. Yes, I did. Because it's your law,
Not the law of god. Natural justice,
Which is of all times and places, numinous,
Not material, a quality of Zeus,
Not of kings, recognises no such law.
You are merely a man, mortal,
Like me, and laws that you enact
Cannot overturn ancient moralities
Or common human decency.
They speak the language of eternity,
Are not written down, and never change.
They are for today, yesterday, and all time.
No one understands where they came from,
But everyone recognises their force:
And no man's arrogance or power
Can make me disobey them. I would rather
Suffer the disapproval and punishment
Of men, than dishonour such ancient truths.
I shall die, of course, some time,
Whether you make laws or not. If my death
Comes sooner rather than later, I shall welcome it.
My life has been misery - is misery now.
I shall be more than happy to leave it.
There will be no pain, and no despair
In that. But to leave my mother's son
Out there in the open, unburied,
That would have been unendurable,
I could not have borne it. Whereas this
I shall endure. By your judgement
Of course, I'm a fool. But by mine,
It's the judge, not the accused who's behaving foolishly.
CHORUS. This is her father speaking. Stubborn
Like him, she won't give way, not even
With the whole power of the State against her.
CREON. Well, we shall see. Any man can be broken,
And often the most committed and determined
Break soonest. Even iron, you know,

Left lying in the fire too long
Becomes over tempered, and will snap
As soon as a little pressure is applied.
You can break it in pieces. And the wildest horse
In the end submits to the bit and halter
Just like the rest. People without power,
Ordinary citizens, must necessarily obey
Those in authority over them.
This woman is very proud. That was obvious
In the first place when she broke the law,
And is even clearer now. She glories
In the crime she has committed, and insults me
To my face, as well as ignoring my decree.
If she is allowed to flout the law
In this way, all authority
In the State will collapse. I will not have that!
There will be no exchanging of roles here,
Me playing the woman while she plays the king!
She is my niece, my sister's child.
But I am the law. And that responsibility
Is above kinship. Were she even closer,
The closest, my own daughter, my duty
Would be plain. The law has its weapons,
And they will strike, at her,
And at her sister too - her accomplice,
I've no doubt, in this illegal act -
To the full extent of the punishment proscribed.
The other one, Ismene, bring her here.
I saw her in the corridor, talking to herself
And sobbing emotionally, like a madwoman!
Guilty consciences, you see, can never be hidden
Completely, the human face reveals
Conspiracies before they are enacted
Again and again. But there is nothing
More disgusting than the confessed criminal
Who tries to justify his actions,
As this woman has done here today.
ANTIGONE. What more do you want? Kill me, and have done with it.
CREON. Nothing more than your death. That'll be enough.
ANTIGONE. Then what are you waiting for? Nothing you say
Will be of the slightest interest to me,
And my arguments you will not listen to.
I've done what I said I'd do. I've buried my brother.
I aspire to no greater honour, and if
I am to be famous, let it be for that.
All these, these senators of yours,
They all agree with me in their hearts.

But there is no gag like terror, is there
Gentlemen? And tyrants must have their way,
Both in word and action, that's their privilege!
CREON. You are quite mistaken. None of the Thebans
Anywhere in the city, thinks as you do.
ANTIGONE. They all do! But they keep their mouths shut when
you're here!
CREON. Not at all! And you should be ashamed
Setting yourself up against the majority,
Disregarding the will of the people!
ANTIGONE. I love my brother. I honour him dead
As I loved him living. There's no shame in that.
CREON. And the one he murdered? Wasn't he your brother?
ANTIGONE. My mother bore them both, and I loved them both.
CREON. If you honour one, you insult the other.
ANTIGONE. Neither of those dead men would say that.
CREON. Eteocles would. His brother was a traitor.
Does he merit no greater respect than that?
ANTIGONE. But he was not an animal. They both died
Together. And they were both men.
CREON. Yes, and the one died defending his country
While the other traitorously attacked it!
ANTIGONE. The dead have their rights, and we have our duties
Towards them, dictated by common decency!
CREON. And if good and bad are to be honoured equally,
Where are our values? Patriotism! Civic duty!
ANTIGONE. Death is another country. Such things
May not be valued there. May even be crimes.
CREON. An enemy is still an enemy. Dead or alive.
ANTIGONE. No, I was born with love enough
To share: no hate for anyone.
CREON. Very well. Share your love by all means,
Share it with the dead. I wish them well of it.
Women must learn to obey, as well as men.
They can have no special treatment. Law is law
And will remain so while I am alive -
And no woman will get the better of me
*ISMENE is brought in under guard. She has been crying, and looks
gaunt and worn.*
CHORUS (severally). Look Senators, Ismene, weeping for her sister!

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The Chorus in Dialogue with Antigone

The doors open and ANTIGONE enters, heavily guarded. She is dressed in a plain white gown.

CHORUS. Yet how can we talk of justice
And the needs of the State
While we stand and watch this
Unendurable sight?
My eyes will have their way and weep,
Seeing Antigone, like a young bride
Going to her bedchamber, to marry the dead
And share their everlasting sleep.

ANTIGONE. In all my wanderings, gentlemen, this place
Has been my home. I was born in this city:
And now I begin my last journey.
look up at the sun in its familiar sky
And feel its warmth on my face
Only to say goodbye.
In the daytime of my life, in mid-breath,
This security policeman, death,
Arrests me, as he arrests everyone, young and old
At home, or in the street. To the cold
Waters of darkness we come, never
To return across that silent river.
No wedding for me,
No music, no guests in the room:
My wedding gift is eternity
In a stone tomb,
My dowry, for ever not-to-be,
Death my bridegroom.

CHORUS. But your action is famous,
In every street
Mouths whisper 'Antigone'.
You go down to the dead
With the promise of glory ringing in your head
And nothing to devalue your beauty.
No sword has scarred you, plague visited:
Unmarked, untouched, you pass
From the dangerous light
Into the safety of eternal night,

Alive, alone, and free.

ANTIGONE. Do you remember the sad story
Of Tantalus' daughter? She was a stranger
From Phrygia, unmarried, like me, in danger
Like mine. She was sentenced to die on the rock
Of Sipylus, and there was no glory
For her, only the endless shock
Of the elements, and the terrible place
Where she was imprisoned: the mountain's embrace
Like fingers of ivy tying her down,
Enclosing, entombing her, and she all alone
While the snows blinded her, and the freezing rain
Whipped her to rags, and exposed her pain
To the naked sky.
What bitter tears she shed
As she slowly turned to stone, and the grey
Rock petrified her by inches, and she died.
Her story is mine. Today
I shall share her rocky bed.

CHORUS. But she was a goddess
Not born for death
Like the children of men
Whose desperate mortality
Is their only certainty.
Will it soothe your pain
To share her destiny,
Or soften your distress
As alive in the earth
You draw your last breath,
To live on in legend and stone?

ANTIGONE. This is a mockery! By everything
The city of our fathers has ever held sacred,
You landowners, you elder statesmen,
You rulers of Thebes, my dying
Is no joke! Am I a figure of fun
To be treated like a child, insulted and humiliated
As I leave you for ever?
Then, forests and meadows, and our Theban river,
Glittering pathway, ceaselessly flowing
From Dice's death till now, flat lands
Thundering beneath our chariots, you
Must be my witnesses, my only friends
And mourners, as, victimised by an unjust law, I go
To my last home

In the living tomb,
To wait, while the slow darkness descends,
Cold and starving on my stony bed
Halfway between the living and the dead.

CHORUS. No one has ever dared
To go so far before
As you have dared to go.
Now you have stumbled, and stubbed your toe
And will shortly shed your blood
On the marble staircase of the law.
You carry your father's crimes
Like a millstone on your back:
Small wonder, in such times,
If the bones bend, or break.

ANTIGONE. Nothing more painful than that, the remembrance
Of my father's long agony, and the curse
On my suffering family from the beginning.
So much grief from the unlucky chance
Of the son finding the mother's bed, and worse
Than anything, the benighted offspring
Of that unspeakable marriage: and I,
With the others, share that terrible destiny.
Conceived in incest, no repentance
Can soften the punishment: the years
Pass, the agonies increase
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And there is no pity for our tears.
No marriage for me, for certain. I shall close
That book for ever,
As I meet my father
And mother in the shades. The weddings will cease.
Marriage to the woman of Argos finished my brother
And finished me too. One death breeds another.

CHORUS. To pay respect to the dead
Is praiseworthy, an act of love,
And religion must have its due:
But no civilised State can eschew
Authority. Laws must be obeyed,
Whether we approve or disapprove.
If you refuse to sanction
The power of the State
By indulging your obsession
You connive at your own fate.

ANTIGONE. Spare me your sympathy,
Weep no false tears,
I know the path that I must follow,
To the sunless country of eternal sorrow,
The bleak waters of eternity,
The unimaginable years.
No grief where none is felt. I shall go alone
And in silence to my house of stone.

Enter CREON, with his guards.

CREON. If death could be prevented by singing arias
About it, or other self-indulgent displays
Of grief, this performance would go on for ever,
I've no doubt. But I've had enough of it.
Take her away, lock her up
In her stone vault, with half a mountain
For a roof, then brick up the door! Let her die
There if she chooses. [...]