

Chapter 1

THE LEGAL BODY

The Symbolic Corpse in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*

At the close of *Oedipus at Colonus* (c. 401 BC), the last extant play of Sophocles and his final treatment of the myth of Oedipus's accursed family, a strange dramatic event occurs. As the thunder of Zeus peals overhead, Oedipus's body, located somewhere offstage, disappears forever, simultaneously bestowing a remarkable power upon the site where he departs from earthly life. Perhaps stranger still, for the form of the drama, are the responses that Theseus and Antigone have to the catastrophe. According to the messenger who reports the details of Oedipus's death to the chorus (and the watching audience), the epic hero who alone among humans has permission to witness Oedipus's passing actually fails to see the singular event:

And when we had departed, after a short time we turned around, and could see that the man [Oedipus] was no longer present, and the king [Theseus] was shading his eyes, holding his hand against his head, as though some terrible, terrifying thing, unbearable to see, had been presented.

[ὡς δ' ἀπήλθομεν,
χρόνω βραχεῖ στραφέντες, ἔξαπείδομεν
τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν μὲν οὐδαμοῦ παρόντ' ἔτι,
ἄνακτα δ' αὐτὸν ὀμμάτων ἐπίσκιον,
χεῖρ' ἀντέχοντα κρατός, ὡς δεινοῦ τινος
φόβου φανέντος οὐδ' ἀνασχετοῦ βλέπειν.] (1647–52)¹

In an odd twist of dramatic performance, Sophocles represents the catastrophe² of Oedipus's death by means of a messenger who is forbidden to see the occurrence and thus must report upon what he saw of the only one who was allowed to see, Theseus—who himself fails to see because

the sight presented is too terrible for seeing. In lieu of representation, then, in the place of what cannot be staged, the audience must turn to narrative language to gain knowledge of this event.

Such a pointedly linguistic presentation seems counter to an art form located in its theatrical performance. As Aristotle indicates in the *Poetics*, tragedy, which belongs to the arts of *mimesis* or representation, remains distinct from other mimetic arts such as epic poetry, dithyramb, or music in that it utilizes actors on a stage along with verse and rhythm in order to convey its meaning. As his well-known formula describes:

Tragedy is a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements [used] separately in the [various] parts [of the play]; [represented] by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions.

[ἔστιν οὖν τραγωδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος ἐχούσης, ἠδυσμένῳ λόγῳ χωρὶς ἐκάστῳ τῶν εἰδῶν ἐν τοῖς μορίοις, δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι' ἀπαγγελίας, δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν.] (1449b24–28)³

The body of the actor corresponds to the meaning of language; gestures have the potential to be both mimetic and deictic. In tragedy, this passage suggests, the “doing” (δρώντων) of actors takes the place of the reporting (ἀπαγγελῶν) of narrative language. Tragedy represents its meaning upon a stage before an audience by means of bodily actions supplemented by spoken words.

The speech of the messenger (that is, the reporter, the ἄγγελος) quoted earlier, however, suggests a more complicated relation between *mimesis* and language in tragedy. In fact, later in the *Poetics*, it seems that poetic language, apart from the bodily gestures that correspond to it, comprises an integral part of the function of the drama. The purpose of the *performance* of speech, Aristotle suggests, would disappear if the *thought* spoken by the actor were not essential: “For what would be the task of the speaker, if the necessary elements were apparent even without speech? [τί γὰρ ἂν εἴη τοῦ λέγοντος ἔργον, εἰ φαίνοντο ἢ δέοι καὶ μὴ διὰ τὸν λόγον;]” (1456b7–8).⁴ Lucas’s commentary suggests two possible meanings: “Either A. is asking what would be the function of speech in drama if the necessary emotions could be aroused by pantomime, or, more likely, what would be the role of rhetoric in drama if the emotions could be aroused by the action.” With an emphasis on the way in which language itself conveys meaning,

Aristotle introduces a discussion of *lexis*, diction, the manner of speaking the thought of the tragedy.⁵ Diction provides, he explains, the means by which rhetoric will be effected in the drama. Derrida, in his essay “White Mythology,” likewise suggests that this passage emphasizes the function of rhetoric in tragedy: “If there were no difference between *dianoia* and *lexis*, there would be no space for tragedy [. . .] This difference is not only due to the fact that the personage must be able to say something other than what he thinks. He exists and acts within tragedy only on the condition that he speaks.”⁶ For Derrida, the need for *lexis*, the rhetorical presentation of the thought of the work, indicates a significant difference—between speech and thought—that creates the space for tragedy. In tragedy, the thought of the work can be expressed in speech that does not refer to it directly; conversely, words in tragedy may, by means of their rhetorical potential, pose a number of possible meanings. Rhetorical speech, then, is an essential aspect of tragedy; without speech, the thought of the play remains unspoken. Yet what happens when speech fails? To return to the play, in the speech of Antigone that follows the messenger’s report (quoted earlier), Sophocles presents another barrier to understanding:

Alas, alack! It is for us, it is for us to lament in all fullness for the accursed blood from our father that is in us, unhappy pair; our father for whom we endured continual pain, and at the last we shall carry away from him things beyond reason that we have seen and suffered.

[αἰαῖ, φεῦ· ἔστιν, ἔστι νῶν δὴ
οὐ τὸ μὲν, ἄλλο δὲ μή, πατρὸς ἔμφοτον
ἄλαστον αἶμα δυσμόροιον στενάζειν,
ὥτινι τὸν πολλὸν
ἄλλοτε μὲν πόνον ἔμπεδον εἶχομεν,
ἐν πυμάτῳ δ’ ἀλόγιστα παροῖσομεν,
ἰδόντε καὶ παθούσα.] (1670–6)

For Antigone and Ismene, what is left at the end of Oedipus’s life, which it is their continual curse to mourn, surpasses reason (it is ἀλόγιστος), remaining for them in the experience of sight and suffering. What eludes speech can nevertheless be seen and felt. It seems, then, that speech works in conjunction with physical performance in the tragedy; for, in drama, “discourse itself is on display.”⁷

These two responses to Oedipus’s death present two divergent hurdles to communication. On the one hand, the event of Oedipus’s death cannot be seen by any individual, even the epic hero designated to witness it.

Nevertheless, the death is reported by the witness in terms of its not having been seen; the messenger's words, delivered to the audience of Theban elders and the audience of spectators, take the place of the actual event. Yet this narrative account, failing to correspond entirely to the catastrophic moment of Oedipus's death, cannot entirely convey the thought or meaning of his death. This difference arises again in the second passage. For, as Antigone laments, the meaning of Oedipus's death—that is, what the mourning of his passing and therefore of his past, would convey—stands beyond reason, it cannot be reasonably communicated to others but remains to the daughters only in what they themselves have seen and suffered because of their father's life. This failure in language returns us to the difference between speech and thought. Bridging the difference between *lexis* and *dianoia*, the tragic actor performs upon the stage not only before his audience, but *for* his audience. The terms of this performance are echoed in Antigone's troubled lament. The necessity of the mourning that Antigone finds impossible shifts the impact of Oedipus's death from his daughters' individual experience of the event to the manner in which they may (or may not) communicate his death, by means of his life, to the *polis*. The transference of mourning from an individual ritual to a communal demonstration and process raises the problem of communicating the act of mourning to a large body of people. What does the corpse of the one who has died mean for the *polis*? What is the meaning of the loss of the individual for the city?

In *Oedipus at Colonus*, the meaning of Oedipus's passing, and his past life, for the city, is embodied in his crimes: his past achieves significance in its pollution of the *polis*. For the city, the meaning of his passing must somehow indicate the nature of that pollution—that is, the extent of his transgression—in order to measure its loss or resolution in death. While the individual mourns in ritual the passing of an other individual, the meaning of mourning for the city is construed in terms of a larger ideal that reflects the position of that individual in relation to the city.⁸ In the case of Oedipus, mourning becomes an exploration of justice, in which the body becomes evidence or proof that will indicate justice effected. Thus, the individual body stands in as evidence for the meaning—the thought—of Oedipus's life. Antigone's method of communicating the meaning of his death—by means of her own body's suffering—suggests this potential of communicating, from the individual to the masses, by means of the body.

While *Oedipus at Colonus* offers a demonstration of the political fate of Oedipus's body, whose public significance has already been made horrifyingly clear,⁹ Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*, in its essential concern with burial, traces the role of the body in its shift from individual to political mourning. Describing events that occur after Oedipus's criminal investigation, self-conviction, and death in exile,¹⁰ this play demonstrates a preoccupation

with crime and judgment that reflects a fifth-century Athenian interest in the democratic mode of justice—the formal trial. As a result, the body in *Antigone* functions not only as a representation of an action, but ultimately as a potential body of evidence—the evidence of meaning—whose suffering provides the legitimacy of proof to a witnessing audience. While the corpse, in its persistence on stage,¹¹ reminds the audience of a potential meaning that it indicates, the body acquires this potency by having suffered pain. How does suffering enable the body to mean more than itself? How does the symbolic potential of the body relate to its position at the juncture of individual and *polis*? In this chapter, I will suggest that in the conjunction of tragedy and trial (both aspects of the *polis*),¹² the sense of the body as evidence expands the function of *mimesis*—through the rhetorical concepts of evidence, proof, and punishment. By first establishing the dead body as symbolic for the *polis*, *Antigone* goes on to reveal the capacity of the living body to convey meaning as well, a significance pointedly established by means of Creon’s threats of torture. Thus the body in this play functions rhetorically, surpassing the temporal and spatial limits of language to imply a connection to the divine order of justice via the tortured or suffering body.

The Unforgettable Corpse

Of Sophocles’ three Theban plays, *Antigone* (c. 442 BC) provides the clearest example of the status of the material body for the *polis* in the motivating corpse of Polynices. Taking place after a war between opposing forces led by Antigone’s two brothers, the play emerges from an army of bodies killed in battle—corpses among which those of the brothers occupy a position of marked importance, due to the political significance with which they are invested. Yet it is Polynices’ corpse, denied burial by Creon as punishment for his insurrection against Thebes and his brother Eteocles, that poses the ethical dilemma of the play. While Antigone expresses a passionate loyalty to her brother, repeatedly attempting to give Polynices a proper burial, Creon opposes her efforts with a staunch and unbending loyalty to the city-state, condemning her actions as traitorously criminal.

Polynices’ unburied corpse introduces an ethical dilemma into the play from the very first, when Antigone proposes to her sister Ismene her plan to bury it, raising the problem of Creon’s edict against such an action. What seems to strike Antigone first about the situation is the inequality with which her brothers are being treated: while Eteocles is honored with burial, Polynices is not. Yet the manner in which she relates Creon’s proclamation to Ismene reveals that the matter is not merely about a simple burial: “But

as for the unhappy corpse of Polynices, they say it has been proclaimed to the citizens that none shall conceal it in a grave or lament for it, but that they should leave it unwept for, unburied, a rich treasure house for birds as they look out for food [τὸν δ' ἀθλίως θανόντα Πολυνείκους νέκυν / ἀστοῖσιν φασιν ἐκκεκρηῦχθαι τὸ μὴ / τάφῳ καλύψαι μηδὲ κωκῦσαι τινα, / ἔάν δ' ἄκλαυτον, ἄταφον, οἰωνοῖς γλυκὺν / θησαυρὸν εἰσορώσι πρὸς χάριν βορᾶς]” (26–30). While the practice of leaving traitors unburied is not uncommon in fifth-century Greece (and therefore wouldn't be especially shocking to Sophocles' audience), Antigone's emphasis upon the results of such treatment—that the body as carrion would provide food for scavengers—emphasizes the particularly shameful quality of the corpse denied burial.¹³ In addition, Creon's edict specifies that the body not be covered in a grave (μὴ τάφῳ καλύψαι); the corpse thus remains in view, as a reminder to citizens of the fate of a traitor, but also as a nagging reminder to Antigone of the dishonor directed toward her brother. Thus the dramatic stichomythia between the sisters that opens the play revolves around the ethical dilemma posed by the presence (above ground) of the dead body: while Ismene protests that in burying Polynices Antigone would commit an act forbidden to the city (ἀπόρητον πόλει [44]), Antigone asserts that to be caught *not* burying him would be a betrayal to her brother (οὐ γὰρ δὴ προδοῦσ' ἀλώσομαι [46]), one of her own (τῶν ἐμῶν [48]). Arguing that her crime is a hallowed one (ὅσια πανουργήσασα [74]) that the gods would honor, Antigone claims that it would be especially honorable to die doing such a deed. When Ismene suggests that her sister is seeking to accomplish an impossible thing, Antigone retorts, “If you say that, you will be hated by me, and you will justly incur the hatred of the dead man [εἰ ταῦτα λέξεις, ἐχθαρῆ μὲν ἐξ ἐμοῦ, / ἐχθρὰ δὲ τῷ θανόντι προσκείσῃ δίκη]” (93–94). Thus, Antigone asserts that the honor of the gods protects her in burying Polynices, even if she should die, whereas the just hatred of the dead condemns Ismene's refusal to act. In her passionate conviction, however, Antigone urges Ismene not to maintain a protective silence about her transgression, but rather to proclaim her crime to all, a request that Ismene responds to with clear misgiving.

Creon's entrance, in which he takes up the thread of Ismene's argument, is directly preceded by the *parodos* describing, as Mark Griffith's commentary points out, “what Polynices had represented while he lived—a hideous threat to his whole community.”¹⁴ That a chorus made up of Theban elders, leading citizens of the city of Thebes, delivers this warning reemphasizes the political nature of the problem of Polynices' corpse. The chorus's concern with the *polis* thus sets the stage for Creon's claim, following this chorus, that he enacts his laws for the good of the city. In his first speech (162–210), Creon describes the needs of the city as his first

priority, clearly establishing that this takes precedence even over the ties of a loved one, since such dear attachments, he argues, can only be formed in the luxury of a well-run city. The greatness of Thebes, he continues, can be attributed to the effectiveness of the laws (*nomoi*, 191) of this hierarchy, laws that privilege the city over personal feelings.

Creon's emphasis upon the priority of the city over the personal makes his laws, of course, radically incommensurable with Antigone's emphatic assertion that her ties to her brother precede any other consideration, even concern for her own life. Creon proposes that his civic laws take precedence over Antigone's individual ties to her family, raising an ethical conflict that seems to present an opposition between societal structures, such as the law and the city, and the desires of the individual, such as home and family. Thus, the play has become for many commentators a paradigm of the ethical dilemma of the individual in society.¹⁵ Critics find expressed in *Antigone* a tension between a range of dialectical oppositions, including the law of the *polis* and the law of the *oikos*, the law of men and the law of the gods, civil law and natural law, *techné* and nature—with Antigone's revolt associated with family, nature, the worship of the divine. Feminist critics find in Antigone a distinctly feminine heroine, overturning the patriarchy in a passionate subversion of the order of the law; in these readings, Antigone's desires cause disruptions that can break apart the regimes of Creon, Aristotle, and all of dialectical philosophy. Yet what is this nature, this passion, this desire, that would be incorporated into a conception of ethics, specifically the ethical conflict at the heart of *Antigone*? In these ethical readings of the play, Antigone is seen to personify or enact limits that are particularly human aspects of existence in opposition to the societal construction of the *polis* and the laws that correspond to it. At the heart of these terms of conflict, however, lies the compulsion that initially provides the catalyst for their production. While the dialectical approaches noted here appropriately draw out possible terms of conflict within the play, none address the persistent and haunting figure that prompts these oppositions: the corpse of Polynices, a representation of the human at its most extremely inhuman.

Mourning and Burial

The guard who arrives to report the initial transgression of Creon's edict—the discovery that someone has buried Polynices' body—states his case nervously and briefly, afraid that he will suffer blame for delivering the bad news. Significantly, in his initial statement of the problem, he casts the burial itself in metaphorical terms: “Someone has just gone off after burying the body, sprinkling its flesh with thirsty dust and performing the necessary

rites [τὸν νεκρὸν τις ἀρτίως / θάψας βέβηκε κατὰ χρωτὶ διψίαν / κόνιν παλύνας κάφαλιστεύσας ἅ χροή]” (245–47). While the guard’s reference to the sacrificial rites of burial conveys a sense of the significant act accomplished, he expresses the physical action in terms of a metaphor: “thirsty dust [κόνιν παλύνας].” Though the correspondence of these terms seems almost clichéd,—when the ground is dry and dusty, it needs water or is “thirsty,”—Griffith suggests in his commentary that the reference to water also may indicate the burial ground’s need for the tears of lament.¹⁶ Indeed, as the description of the guard goes on to indicate, Antigone’s scattering of dust over the body, accompanied with the necessary ritual mourning rites, seems to have sufficed to protect Polynices’ body just as well as a fully underground burial would. In fact (as Carol Jacobs has pointed out), the slightness of Antigone’s interaction with the physical earth echoes the lightness of the dust on Polynices’ body: both are so light as to seem hardly existent at all. Thus, the guard marvels at how the earth about the body remains unmarked, and at how the body has vanished despite the fact that it is only covered with a light dust: like the scattering of dust, the metaphor suggests, rather than explicitly demonstrates, the burial. Significantly, also, he notes that the layer of dust has somehow protected the body from being mauled by animals or birds (a fact bearing the potential to especially irritate Creon, whose edict had emphasized such a fate for the corpse).

Antigone’s ritual burial, slight as it manifests itself physically, subverts the prohibition that Creon has placed on the body. In doing so, she follows a customary rite of mourning that mediates between the dead mortal and the gods, as Bernard Knox points out:

Antigone’s appeal is not general but specific. She is not opposing a whole set of unwritten laws to the written laws of the *polis*, nor is she pleading the force of individual conscience or universal and natural law. She is claiming that the age-old customary rites of mourning and burial for the dead, which are unwritten because they existed even before the alphabet was invented or the *polis* organized, have the force of law, unwritten but unfailing, which stems from the gods and which the gods enforce.¹⁷

Antigone herself, of course, claims that she performs the ritual of “burying” Polynices in the service of the laws of the gods. Yet the dusted corpse remains in view for the guard to discover; thus the ritual Antigone performs affects the city, as well. When the guard brings her before Creon, charging her with the burial, the chorus exclaims as she approaches, “Surely they do not lead you captive for disobedience to the king’s laws [. . .]? [οὐ δὴ που σέ γ’ ἀπιστοῦσαν / τοῖς βασιλείοις ἀπάγουσι νόμοις (. . .);]” (381–82). Pro-

viding the conclusion to their choral song that has addressed the dangerous potential of man, the choral reference to the *nomoi* that Antigone has broken as kingly [βασιλείοι νόμοι] distinguishes this set of prohibitions as another man-made thing, a product of *techné*, and thus good or bad only to the extent to which they carry out the justice of the gods (see especially lines 365–71). Antigone reiterates this distinction shortly thereafter. When Creon clarifies with astonishment that she has dared to break his law, she replies with a justification that places her squarely on the side of the gods:

Yes, for it was not Zeus who made this proclamation, nor was it Justice who lives with the gods below that established such laws among men, nor did I think your proclamations strong enough to have power to overrule, mortal as they were, the unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods.

[οὐ γὰρ τί μοι Ζεὺς ἦν ὁ κηρύξας τάδε,
οὐδ' ἢ ξύνοικος τῶν κάτω θεῶν Δίκη
τοιούσδ' ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ὤρισεν νόμους,
οὐδὲ σθένειν τοσοῦτον ὥρμην τὰ σὰ
κηρύγμαθ' ὥστ' ἄγραπτα κάσφαλῆ θεῶν
νόμμα δύνασθαι θνητά γ' ὄνθ' ὑπερδραμεῖν.] (450–55)

Excluding Creon's laws from the divinely ordained laws, Antigone aligns herself with rights proclaimed by either Zeus or divine Justice—which she significantly locates as residing with the gods below, that is, the chthonic gods, among whom Hades would be included.¹⁸ In either case, Zeus or Justice, these divinely ordained laws seem to gain their validity in her assessment because of their immortal nature: they are unwritten (*ἄγραπτα*), unlike the laws of men, which in their material (written) presence may ultimately be subject to temporal decay (thus her designation of them as mortal [θνητά]). The mourning that Antigone seeks to accomplish, then, echoes the divine laws she claims to follow, inasmuch as mourning seeks to immortalize, or make present in memory, the one who has passed away.

Yet the effects of this memorial ritual extend beyond Antigone's relation to the gods; the importance of Polynices' unburied body to the city determines that her actions must resonate in a public sense, as well. In response to Antigone's claims, Creon emphasizes again his devotion to the laws of the city, arguing their importance in terms of what lies at stake in their being obeyed or transgressed:

But there is no worse evil than insubordination! This it is that ruins cities, this it is that destroys houses, this it is that shatters

and puts to flight the warriors on its own side! But what saves the lives of most of those that go straight is obedience! In this way we have to protect discipline [. . .]

[ἀναρχίας δὲ μείζον οὐκ ἔστιν κακόν·
αὕτη πόλεις ὄλλυσιν, ἢδ' ἀναστάτους
οἴκους τίθησιν, ἢδε συμμάχου δορὸς
τροπὰς καταρρήγνυσι· τῶν δ' ὀρθουμένων
σώζει τὰ πολλὰ σώμαθ' ἢ πειθαρχία.] (672–76)

For Creon, then, the laws of the city must be obeyed because they save the citizens at all levels: in government, home and military life. In the face of such high stakes, obedience becomes unequivocal and unquestioning; he therefore categorizes any deviance from the straight path of the law as anarchy (ἀναρχίας, not subordinate to the ruler or ἄρχη). The choice here stands framed as the stark difference between disorder and order, a distinction at the heart of much of Sophocles' work.¹⁹ Creon's fear, expressed here, of a continuous threat to the fragile hold of absolute order manifests itself in his extreme treatment of Polynices' body (i.e., his emphatic desire that the body be exposed as carrion for mutilation by animals) and his later obsessive attempts to oppress Antigone. Such a fear gives a tenuous quality to his rule, as if it could be subverted by the slightest deviance, the expression of any loss of faith. Thus he declares in his decree (or so Antigone reports it) that the one burying Polynices will be subject to death by stoning. Such a death might serve as a public demonstration of the results of betraying the rule of Creon.²⁰ Even the demonstration of force and control that a public execution might provide, however, seems too weak an enforcement for Creon. In a later exchange with Antigone, he extends this desire to control not only the lives but also the deaths of those who usurp his authority. When she asks, "Do you wish for anything more than to take me and kill me? [θέλεις τι μείζον ἢ κατακτείνειν μ' ἐλών;]" (497), he replies, "Not I! When I have that, I have everything [ἐγὼ μὲν οὐδέν· τοῦτ' ἔχων ἅπαντ' ἔχω]" (498). Indeed, if he had Antigone's death, he would have everything, for being in possession of another's death would give him a quality similar to the gods who have a hand in fate. With this threat, Creon conflates his own potential with that of the gods.

Yet for Creon, as he demonstrates with the public spectacle of stoning he first proposes with his edict, his power depends upon his ability to persuade his subjects the citizens to invest him with it. This becomes clear as he begins to lose the empathy of the chorus. Once Haemon appears onstage and tries to convince his father to change his mind, the chorus seems to waver in their support of Creon's execution of Antigone, his son's fiancée.

Thus, after Haemon exits, the chorus asks Creon if he still intends to kill her; when he replies in the affirmative, they ask how he will do it, giving him the opportunity to change his method of execution from the formerly expressed public stoning to a less dramatic option of burying her alive in a tomb, out of sight of the city (775). Creon therefore struggles to maintain his present power, seeking to prevent any disorder in the city that might lead to a loss of authority, by modifying his plans.²¹

The execution he therefore proposes, death by burial alive, though less dramatic and painful (presumably) than the first option, presents its own set of worries to Antigone. From loudly proclaiming her part in mourning her brother, she turns to nagging worries about the chances that she herself will be mourned by others, if she is to die alone, hidden, and possibly forgotten in a cave: “No longer may I, poor creature, look upon the sacred eye of the shining sun; and my fate, unwept for, is lamented by no friend [οὐκέτι μοι τόδε λαμπάδος ἱερὸν / ὄμμα θέμις ὄραν ταλαίνα· / τὸν δ’ ἔμὸν πότμον ἀδάκρυτον / οὐδεὶς φίλων στενάζει]” (879–82). With this complaint, Antigone shifts her focus from the consideration of her (and her brother’s) individual relation to the gods to anxiety about her position in the public at her death; in other words, she worries that her memory, her reputation, will die with her. Creon responds to this concern by reaffirming her worries; although he rhetorically suggests at first that she will be mourned as a matter of course, he goes on to emphasize the isolated nature of her living tomb, and its complete removal from those living above ground. By removing her body from view, Creon suggests that he will veil the sign that would inspire the mourning of Antigone—her corpse.

With this gesture, Creon plans a similar fate for Antigone as he has designated for her brother: by consigning her to a death removed (effectively) from the city, he buries the disorder of her anarchy along with her—just as he excludes the body of Polynices, who has brought disorder into the city as a result of his uprising.²² In each case, Creon physically removes the disorder from the sphere of city life or action. By burying Antigone alive, Creon also hopes to remove the pollution of further disorder by avoiding the guilt of having killed her directly. Yet, in doing so, he subjects Antigone to suffer a fate in death also similar to Polynices’: an unmourned death. However, in eliding the space for burial, Creon continues the cycle of disorder, thus failing to impose the order he seeks.²³

The potential for disorder inherent in Creon’s treatment of corpses is realized in Teiresias’s warning of a plague on the city resulting from Creon’s treatment of Polynices: “And it is your will that has put this plague upon the city; for our altars and our braziers, one and all, are filled with carrion brought by birds and dogs from the unhappy son of Oedipus who fell [καὶ ταῦτα τῆς σῆς ἐκ φρενὸς νοσεῖ πόλις· / βωμοὶ γὰρ ἡμῖν ἐσχάρα]

τε παντελείς / πλήρεις ὑπ' οἰωνῶν τε καὶ κυνῶν βορᾶς / τοῦ δυσμόρου πεπτῶτος Οἰδίου γόνου]" (1015–18). In this case, the pollution of the plague on the city manifests a symptom of the problem that Creon is causing: the disruption of a custom in which women mourned for the dead, recalling their life as a memory that allowed the passing of the dead. It is this “law,” of course, to which Antigone refers in her claims to be doing the just thing in burying Polynices.

Prohibiting the memorializing ritual of mourning that Antigone would perform, Creon causes a disruption that then manifests itself on the living body, in the form of a plague. In his rage at Antigone’s subversion, Creon disrupts the divine order of things, which leads to a disturbance in the order of the *polis*, as well. The chorus addresses the problem of such violent anger in their fourth song, which revolves around a discussion of the dangerous threat to order that passion poses:

You [*Eros*, passion] wrench just men’s minds aside from justice, doing them violence; it is you who have stirred up this quarrel between men of the same blood. Victory goes to the visible desire that comes from the eyes of the beautiful bride, desire that has its throne in sovereignty beside those of the mighty laws [. . .]

[σὺν καὶ δικαίων ἀδίκους
φρένας παρασπᾶς ἐπὶ λάβῃ·
σὺν καὶ τόδε νεῖκος ἀνδρῶν
ξύναιμον ἔχεις ταράξας·
νικᾷ δ' ἐναργῆς βλεφάρων
ἕμερος εὐλέκτρον
νύμφας, τῶν μεγάλων πάρεδρος ἐν ἀρχαῖς
θεσμῶν·] (791–99)

Avoiding a direct condemnation of either Creon’s or Antigone’s violence, the chorus uses the violent conflict between Polynices and Eteocles as an example of the damage that passion can cause, diverting men from justice to injustice. As an example of right action, however, they provide the image of the desire emanating from the eyes of a bride, who in occupying the customary position for the female in society therefore follows the “mighty laws” (θεσμῶν), that is, those that are established. Having confirmed this precept, the chorus can then accuse Antigone on the grounds of the hubristic folly to which her passion has led her, as well as for the established laws that her father broke before her: “Advancing to the extreme of daring, you stumbled against the lofty altar of Justice, my child! And you are paying some torment [inherited] from your father [προβάσ' ἐπ' ἔσχατον θράσους

/ ὑψηλὸν ἐς Δίκας βάρθρον / προσέπεσες, ὦ τέκνον, ποδί· / πατρῶον δ' ἐκτίνεις τιν' ἄθλον]" (853–56).²⁴ Not only has Antigone gone too far in pursuit of her own desires, the chorus argues, but she also suffers in repayment, as a payoff or vengeance, for her father's crime. The chorus here accuses Antigone of acting against divine justice, as a result of her own passion and her father's incest. Antigone takes up only the second of the accusations against her (one of which, ironically, her father might also be accused), seeing her own predicament as punishment for the fate cursed upon her by Oedipus:

You have touched on a thought most painful for me, the fate of my father, thrice renewed, and the whole of our destiny, that of the famous Labdacids. Ah, the disaster of marriage with his mother, and my father's incestuous couplings with his ill-fated mother! From what parents was I born, miserable one! To them I go, to live with them, accursed, unmarried! Ah, brother who made a disastrous marriage, in your death you have destroyed my life!

[ἔψαυσας ἀλγει-
νοτάτας ἐμοὶ μερίμνας,
πατρὸς τριπολίστου οἴτου
τοῦ τε πρόπαντος
ἀμετέρου πότμου
κλεινοῖς Λαβδακίδαισιν.
ἰὼ ματρῶναι λέκτρων ἄ-
ται κοιμήματά τ' αὐτογέν-
νητ' ἐμῷ πατρὶ δυσμόρου ματρός·
οἴων ἐγὼ ποθ' ἄ ταλαίφρων ἔφυν·
πρὸς οὐδ' ἀραῖος ἄγαμος ἄδ'
ἐγὼ μέτοικος ἔρχομαι·
ἰὼ δυσπότμων κασί-
γνητε γάμων κυρήσας,
θανῶν ἔτ' οὐσαν κατήναρές με.] (857–71)

Providing the fullest reference in the play to her father's crime, Antigone specifically describes Oedipus's transgressions of established law: not only did he marry his own mother, but he had children from this incestuous coupling. By leaving out the other aspect of Oedipus's crime, his murder of his father (i.e., the shedding of kindred blood that Creon is trying to avoid by burying Antigone alive), Antigone's speech depicts Oedipus's crime as one of pollution: by committing incest and bearing children who

are also his siblings, Oedipus has prevented, in a sense, the passage of time, the movement forward of generations. Thus Oedipus's offense against the laws of the gods and society is here raised in terms of temporal disorder—a corruption of time, a failure to pass on, that makes the memorializing of mourning impossible.²⁵ These are the transgressions for which the gods will make Antigone suffer, as both the chorus and Antigone suggest, providing a demonstration of Antigone's suffering as a lesson about breaking established laws and creating divine disorder (or stumbling against the altar of Justice), just as Creon sought to make a demonstration of his own order by means of his punishment of both Polynices' and Antigone's bodies. Such a reading is corroborated by the language the chorus uses in the previous passage to refer to the debt of suffering that Antigone owes: coupled with the idea of paying a penalty,²⁶ ἄθλος acquires the sense of not only a struggle or contest, but even a torment or ordeal. Through suffering some torment or punishment, the chorus and Antigone's response imply, the debt owed for causing such disorder might be paid and order be restored. The punishment of Antigone will provide a meaning or value for Oedipus's past life, a painful labor that takes the place of meaning.

Punishment and Spectacle

Elaborating upon the idea of suffering punishments, the fifth song of the chorus (944–87) describes a series of punishments: the tomblike imprisonment of Danae,²⁷ the rocky imprisonment of Lycurgus,²⁸ and the blinding of the sons of Phineus.²⁹ Avoiding a consideration of responsibility or guilt, the chorus focuses on the process of suffering punishment, concluding with the notion that inescapable Fate manifests itself in each of these examples. In this sense, the punishments stand as evidence of both the ineluctable nature of the difficulties Fate imposes, but also of the power of Fate, in its ability to punish without mercy.

In a more immediate sense, Teiresias prophecies a similar case of the punishing payment of vengeance when he warns Creon of the exchange of corpses that his hubristic actions will provoke:

Then know well that you shall not accomplish many racing courses of the sun, and in that lapse of time you shall give in exchange for corpses the corpse of one from your own loins, in return for having hurled below one of those above, blasphemously lodging a living person in a tomb, and you have kept here something belonging to the gods below, a corpse deprived, unburied, unholy. Neither you nor the gods above have any part

in this, but you have inflicted it upon them! On account of this there lie in wait for you the doers of outrage who in the end destroy, the Erinyes of Hades and the gods, so that you will be caught up in these same evils.

[ἀλλ' εὖ γέ τοι κάτισθι μὴ πολλοὺς ἔτι
 τρόχους ἀμιλλητήρας ἡλίου τελῶν,
 ἐν οἷσι τῶν σῶν αὐτὸς ἐκ σπλάγγων ἕνα
 νέκυν νεκρῶν ἀμοιβὸν ἀντιδοῦς ἔση,
 ἀνθ' ὧν ἔχεις μὲν τῶν ἄνω βαλῶν κάτω,
 ψυχὴν γ' ἀτίμως ἐν τάφῳ καοικίσας,
 ἔχεις δὲ τῶν κάτωθεν ἐνθάδ' αὖ θεῶν
 ἄμοιρον, ἀκτέριστον, ἀνόσιον νέκυν.
 ὧν οὔτε σοὶ μέτεστιν οὔτε τοῖς ἄνω
 θεοῖσιν, ἀλλ' ἐκ σοῦ βιάζονται τάδε·
 τούτων σε λωβητήρες ὑστεροφθόροι
 λοχῶσιν Ἄιδου καὶ θεῶν Ἐρινύες,
 ἐν τοῖσιν αὐτοῖς τοῖσδε ληφθῆναι κακοῖς.] (1064–76)

Teiresias's warning raises the future curse of Creon in terms of antidote (from the verb ἀντιδίδομι [1067] derives the noun ἀντίδοτος, something given in remedy, an antidote): the corpse that the gods will demand from Creon will be given in payment for the disorder he has created by the mismanagement of corpses (not only has he refused to bury a dead body, but he also gives a living body burial). In this way, then, Creon will provide an antidote to the plague caused by unburied corpses from which the city suffers. Referring to this plague on the city again on lines 1081–83, Teiresias emphasizes how the cosmic disorder that Creon has caused resulted in a disorder manifested in the city. With this, Creon assumes the position in which he has placed Antigone, the cause of disorder in the *polis*; the spectacle of punishment with which he has threatened her hence becomes a spectacle of punishment under which he must suffer.

Creon finally responds to this final warning of Teiresias, and exits the stage intending to bury the corpse and then release Antigone. Nevertheless, less than one hundred lines later, a messenger arrives to announce the payment of the antidote, the death of Creon's only son Haemon, who, he announces, has died by his own hand, "in anger against his father for the murder he committed [αὐτὸς πρὸς αὐτοῦ, πατρὶ μῆνίσας φόνου·]" (1177). He describes to the chorus how he, along with several of Creon's other attendants, heard a cry issue from the cave as they followed Creon toward it, intending to release Antigone. Worried at its portent, Creon urged his attendants forward to see whether he feared correctly that the voice issued

from his son Haemon. At their master's orders, the messenger describes, he and his peers looked in on a tragic scene of loss: Antigone hanging by the neck and Haemon clinging to her waist, lamenting her death caused by his father. When Creon finally approached, the messenger continues, Haemon lunged at him with the sword, missed and then drove it into himself, finally achieving a sort of union with Antigone in his death throes:

Still living, he clasped the maiden in the bend of his feeble arm,
and pouring forth a sharp jet of blood, he stained her white cheek.
He lay, a corpse holding a corpse, having achieved his marriage
rites, poor fellow, in the house of Hades, having shown by how
much the worst evil among mortals is bad counsel.

[ἔς δ' ὕγρὸν
ἀγκῶν' ἔτ' ἔμφρων παρθένῳ προσπτύσσεται·
καὶ φυσιῶν ὄξειαν ἐκβάλλει ροὴν
λευκῆ παρειᾷ φοινίου σταλάγματος·
κεῖται δὲ νεκρὸς περὶ νεκρῷ, τὰ νυμφικὰ
τέλη λαχὼν δειλαιοὺς ἔν γ' Ἄιδου δόμοις,
δείξας ἐν ἀνθρώποισι τὴν ἀβουλίαν
ὅσῳ μέγιστον ἀνδρὶ πρόσκειται κακόν·] (1236–43)

In death, Haemon and Antigone rejoin society through their achievement of the marriage rites (τὰ νυμφικὰ τέλη λαχὼν), resolving the passion-induced mistakes described by the chorus in lines 791–94 (and, even in dying, realigning their desire within socially and divinely approved parameters, as does the bride described by the chorus in lines 795–99, quoted in the previous section). In addition, though, the scene of Haemon's dying provides a lesson, as well: it "shows" or displays (δείκνυμι) to the witnessing phalanx of guards (and, via the witness's report, the chorus of Theban citizens and the audience, too) the extent to which "bad council" is the worst of human evils.

The paradigmatic and gruesome suffering of Haemon's death throes resonates in his dead body when Creon appears later, bearing it onstage. The chorus responds to his entrance: "Here comes the king himself, bearing in his arms a conspicuous memorial; if we may say so, his ruin came not from others, but from his own failing [καὶ μὴν ὄδ' ἀναξ αὐτὸς ἐφήκει / μνήμ' ἐπίσημον διὰ χειρὸς ἔχων, / εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν, οὐκ ἄλλοτριαν / ἄτην, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἀμαρτῶν]" (1257–60).³⁰ Thus, the chorus provides a narrative description of Creon's appearance on stage, explaining the deictic significance of Haemon's corpse: it functions as a distinguishing mark (ἐπίσημος), a mimetic sign or reminder (μνήμη) of being guilty (ἀμαρτῶν). Not

only does the body Creon carries bear a lesson for himself, however; the reminder, displayed in his arms onstage (in front of the palace doors that would have been depicted at the back of the *skene*³¹), speaks to the city as well, as Segal explains, “The term ‘conspicuous memorial’ [. . .] refers specifically to the commemorative ceremonies of the public funeral and the entombment of warriors who have fallen in behalf of the city.”³² Thus, the corpse of Haemon, exhibited in the arms of his father the king, bears along with it the meaning of his life in death: the mourning prohibited by Creon’s edict returned to the city in a *public* mark of mourning.

Creon’s antidote has yet to take effect, however: the exchange of corpses continues only a few lines later, with the messenger’s announcement of the suicide of the queen, Eurydice.³³ Enhancing the exhibition of Haemon’s body in Creon’s arms, the corpse of Eurydice also appears displayed prominently on the stage, as the chorus indicates in their exclamation, “You can see it! It is no longer hidden indoors [ὄραν πάρεστιν· οὐ γὰρ ἐν μυχοῖς ἔτι]” (1293). Most commentators agree that this scene would have been staged with Eurydice’s body then appearing onstage on the *ekkuklema*, a mechanized wheeled platform that would have been pushed onto the center of the stage, probably through the opening of the palace doors at the back.³⁴ The corpse thus presents a dramatic spectacle over which the messenger describes the manner of her death as Creon laments his fate.

As in the case of Haemon, the messenger describes the details of Eurydice’s death: hurling curses upon her husband, the killer of her son, Eurydice copied the method of Haemon’s death, “so that she experienced the suffering of her son [ὅπως / παιδὸς τόδ’ ἦσθετ’ ὄξυκώκυτον πάθος.]” (1315-6). With this double death, Creon finally recognizes his culpability in the downfall of his family, his ineluctable guilt: “Ah me, this can never be transferred to any other mortal, acquitting me! For it was I that killed you, unhappy one, I, I speak the truth! [ὡμοι μοι, τὰδ’ οὐκ ἐπ’ ἄλλον βροτῶν / ἐμᾶς ἀρμόσει ποτ’ ἐξ αἰτίας. / ἐγὼ γάρ σ’ , ἐγὼ σ’ ἔκανον, ὦ μέλεος, / ἐγὼ, φάμ’ ἔτυμον.]” (1317-20). Creon’s formulation of this lament in terms of an accusation or charge (αἰτία) that he can never escape echoes the accusation that the messenger utters upon announcing the death of Eurydice: “You were reproached by the dead as guilty of those deaths and these [ὡς αἰτίαν γε τῶνδε κάκεινων ἔχων / πρὸς τῆς θανούσης τῆσδ’ ἐπεσκήπτου μόρων.]” (1312-13). Thus, the description that follows of Eurydice’s death, coupled with the display of her corpse alongside Haemon’s on stage, calls an accusation upon Creon. It is this guilt that Creon then assumes when he recognizes his actions as the cause of Eurydice’s and Haemon’s deaths.

Creon reemphasizes the losses he has suffered as he leaves the stage at the end of the play, though his words begin to turn responsibility for his suffering off of himself and onto fate. While his speech marks the presence

of the corpses next to him, his lament also indicates that there is something more that is unrecognizable to him:

Lead me out of the way, useless man that I am, who killed you, my son, not by my own will, and you here too, ah, miserable one; I do not know which to look on, which way to lean; for all that is in my hands has gone awry, and fate hard to deal with has leapt upon my head.

[ἄγοιτ' ἄν μάταιον ἄνδρ' ἐκποδῶν
ὅς, ὦ παῖ, σέ τ' οὐχ ἐκὼν κατέκανον
σέ τ' αὖ τάνδ', ὅμοι μέλεος, οὐδ' ἔχω
πρὸς πότερον ἴδω, πῶ κλιθῶ· πάντα γὰρ
λέχτρια τὰν χεροῖν, τὰ δ' ἐπὶ κρατὶ μοι
πότμος δυσκόμιστος εἰσήλατο.] (1339–46)

As Griffith points out, Creon's speech suggests a contrast between what is visible (the dead bodies of Haemon and Eurydice) and what is invisible (the mysterious but inescapable hand of fate). Creon's struggle with seeing such a spectacle also puts an emphasis upon his pain in witnessing the results of his folly; thus Creon assumes the position of witness that the guards, chorus, and audience have previously occupied (and continue to perform in this scene). The spectacle of dead bodies before him forces him to bear witness to what they represent—in this case, his complicity in their death. The accusation against Creon, then, is something that he witnesses alongside the others: embodied in the corpses of Haemon and Eurydice are the signs of his guilt.

Yet, as Antigone points out previously in the play, a dead body, being dead, cannot bear witness (“The dead body will not bear witness to that [οὐ μαρτυρήσει ταῦθ' ὁ κατθανὼν νέκυς]” [515]). How, then, can a corpse deliver an accusation of guilt against another? For the corpse of Antigone, as well as that of Haemon, Eurydice, and Polynices, it is the narrative surrounding the corpse that communicates the meaning of it. In other words, the corpse alone doesn't convey the meaning, but something more embodied in it. While the sight of the dead body makes present a past life, the fate of that life remains unknown while life remains. Ruing the fate of Creon, the messenger refers to this temporal distinction just before announcing Haemon's death: “there is no state of human life that I would praise or blame as though it had come to a stop; for fortune makes straight and fortune brings down the fortunate or the unfortunate man at all times [οὐκ ἔσθ' ὁποῖον στάντ' ἄν ἀνθρώπου βίον / οὔτ' αἰνέσοιμι’

ἄν οὔτε μεμψαίμην ποτέ. / τύχη γὰρ ὀρθοῖ καὶ τύχη καταρρέπει / τὸν εὐτυχοῦντα τὸν τε δυστυχοῦντ' αἰετῖ]" (1156–59). The meaning of a life unravels as it passes; the only unchanging life is a dead one. Thus the synthesis of the passing events of life can only be made after death: for example, in the interpretation of mourning—or, likewise, in the narrative accounts of the messenger.

The messenger's speech suggests that a difference between mortal and immortal is in the subjection of mortals to a mysterious fate that always surprises man with fortune or failure—that works upon man's life, in other words, outside of his control. For this reason, the only way to escape change or fate in life is death. Once death has occurred, mourning or a narrative might take up the death, and the past life that it marks, and give it meaning. In seeking to control the deaths of others, Creon might thus impose his own meaning upon them. The effective potential in the display or spectacle of corpses has already been suggested in connection with Creon's treatment of the corpse of Polynices. Creon raises the possibility that such a display could be directed against another person when he angrily threatens his son with witnessing the death of his fiancée: "Bring the hateful creature, so that she may die at once close at hand, in the sight of her bridegroom! [ἄγετε τὸ μῖσος, ὡς κατ' ὄμματ' ἀντίκα / παρόντι θνήσκη πλησία τῷ νυμφίῳ]" (760–61). Perceiving that he has lost the support of even his own son, Creon furiously proposes to punish him for his betrayal by murdering his beloved right in front of his eyes. This seems to be a case, then, in which a corpse is meant to provide retribution; by means of his ability to take life away, Creon will suggest the necessity of supporting the authority of the king, "paying back" Haemon for his hint of insubordination.

Thus, Creon's threat to Haemon involves more than the simple presentation of Antigone's dead corpse for him to witness: it also includes the action of her being killed in front of him. It is in the *process* of being deprived of life that Antigone's death will gain meaning for Haemon—a punishing meaning, Creon hopes. In this sense, the tormented struggle in payment for justice of which the chorus warns Antigone (in the previously quoted lines 853–56) becomes the meaning of her death.

Torture, Punishment, and Control

This threat of torture echoes a more sweeping warning that Creon delivers before the guard and the chorus of elderly Theban citizens only a few lines before this exchange. Convinced that the criminal burial of Polynices manifests a money-driven conspiracy against him, Creon asserts his authority

by issuing a general threat of punishment to all present. Since, in this case, Creon expresses the terms of the conspiracy as monetary, the sense of this imminent punishment as “payment” appears clearly: “But those who to earn their fee have contrived to do this thing have ensured that in time they will pay the penalty [ἄσοι δὲ μισθαρνοῦντες ἤνυσαν τάδε, / χρόνω ποτ’ ἐξέπραξαν ὡς δοῦναι δίκην]” (302–03). In this exchange, Creon suggests that justice will necessarily be effected upon the conspirators; the threat of punishment that immediately follows links this retribution directly to the torture that those will suffer who choose the profits of conspiracy over bending to the king’s authority. As he exclaims in threatening fury to the citizen chorus and guard, “If you do not find the author of this burial and reveal him to my eyes, a single Hades shall not suffice for you, before all have been strung up alive to expose this insolence [. . .] [εἰ μὴ τὸν αὐτόχειρα τοῦδε τοῦ τάφου / εὐρόντες ἐκφανεῖτ’ ἐς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐμούς, / οὐχ ὑμῖν Αἴδης μῶνος ἀρκέσει, πρὶν ἂν / ζῶντες κρεμαστοὶ τήνδε δηλώσηθ’ ὕβριν (. . .)]” (306–09). Here, not only does Creon threaten his subjects with torture,³⁵ but he marks the method of torture as a public display of their crimes. Those not complying with his edict will manifest or exhibit (δηλώω) the extent of their hubris (i.e., the folly of usurping Creon’s authority) by means of their public torture (being hung out alive [ζῶντες κρεμαστοί] and, presumably, suffering the corresponding punishments). Thus, Creon proposes to bring before the *polis* a visual reminder of the results of breaking his laws.

In addition to the public spectacle of torture as retribution for subverting his authority, Creon also implies with this threat that he will control the manner of their dying (i.e., they will not merely suffer a simple trip to Hades). With this claim, Creon assumes a position that supersedes the limits of the mortal; for, as the chorus that follows this scene indicates in its “ode to man,” death presents the most clearly insurpassable limit to mankind, despite all of his skill in thought and *techné*: “only from Hades shall he apply no means of flight [Ἄιδα μόνον / φεύξιν οὐκ ἐπάξεται]” (361–62). This limitation of mortals occurs in the midst of a song glorifying man’s great potential of creation. Thus, the subjection to death appears as a limit point for mankind; despite their cleverness with laws and technology, mortals remain inescapably subject to death. Creon’s suggestion that he might control the working of death upon others through subjecting men to his laws—in the most extreme sense, by means of punishing torture and a tormented death—raises him beyond the bounds of mortals, toward the immortals.

The divinities, in their eternal existence, remain exempt from the death that stands at the limit of mortal life. The third choral song emphasizes this immortal timelessness, in regard to Zeus and his laws: