

# Dead and Unburied

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An analysis of issues of power in  
three burial conflicts in Greek tragedy

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# Introduction

Burying the dead is an age-old human custom and in some cases, an age-old human problem. Recent history shows us that even in the twenty-first century serious disputes about the right to a funeral can arise when the deceased is someone who has placed himself outside of society by his actions. Almost two weeks after his death, the body of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the oldest brother suspected of the Boston Marathon bombings, remained unburied. Several cemeteries had refused to take the corpse and protesters staked out the funeral home that temporarily held the remains with signs bearing messages such as “Bury this terrorist on US soil and we will unbury him”.<sup>1</sup> Some of these opponents objected to the location of the grave in the city or even the country where the victims of the bombings died (“This guy doesn’t belong here”), others believed that Tsarnaev had lost the right to any kind of regular funeral on account of his crimes (“Just burn him and throw him in the sewer”).<sup>2</sup> The matter quickly became political and even the Cambridge city manager asserted that the burial should not be granted in the Boston area, because it would not be in the best interest of “peace within the city”.<sup>3</sup> The body of Tsarnaev is not the only corpse to be at the heart of a burial conflict in this past decade or so. Family members of victims of 9/11 have attempted for years to identify and separate the remains of their loved ones from those of the nineteen terrorists responsible for the attacks to prevent them from being buried together.<sup>4</sup> For now, the parts that have been identified as belonging to the hijackers remain stored in a vault of the FBI, because no countries or people have come forward to claim them. More recently, the Nazi war criminal Erich Priebke was denied burial in Rome by the Vatican and the mayor of the city after furious demonstrations by the citizens.<sup>5</sup> Argentina and Germany both refused to take the body. In the end, Priebke was secretly buried in an anonymous grave inside the walls of an

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<sup>1</sup> Seelye, K.Q., Bidgood, J. ‘Marathon Suspect’s Body Is Ready for Burial. The Question Remains: Where?’, *The New York Times*, 07/05/13 via <<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/07/us/prosecutors-say-phillippos-should-be-freed-until-trial.html>>, accessed on 03/06/14.

<sup>2</sup> Lowery, W. ‘As Tamerlan Tsarnaev’s body awaits burial at Worcester funeral home, some protest’, *Boston.com*, 04/05/14 via <<http://www.boston.com/metrodesk/2013/05/04/tamerlan-tsarnaev-body-awaits-burial-worcester-funeral-home-some-protest/NniJNuYhAirQuh8u2YojN/story.html>>, accessed on 03/06/14.

<sup>3</sup> For the similarities between Sophocles’ *Antigone* and the events surrounding the burial of Tsarnaev, see Mendelsohn, D. ‘Unburied: Tamerlan Tsarnaev and the Lessons of Greek Tragedy’, *The New Yorker*, 14/05/14 via <<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2013/05/unburied-tamerlan-tsarnaev-and-the-lessons-of-greek-tragedy.html>>, accessed on 03/06/14.

<sup>4</sup> Conant, E. ‘Terror: The Remains of 9/11 Hijackers’, *Newsweek*, 01/02/09 via <<http://www.newsweek.com/terror-remains-911-hijackers-78327>>, accessed on 03/06/14.

<sup>5</sup> Kington, T. ‘Funeral of Nazi war criminal Erich Priebke is called off after clashes’, *The Guardian*, 16/10/13 via <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/16/erich-priebke-funeral-cancelled-nazi-italy>>, accessed on 03/06/14.

abandoned prison complex in Italy, where the public would not find him.<sup>6</sup>

These contemporary issues concerning the burial of enemies or criminals were equally relevant in Ancient Greece, as evidenced by their elaborate treatment in several Greek tragedies. While in our century a protester suggested that the body of Tsarnaev should be “fed to the sharks”,<sup>7</sup> Creon punishes the traitor Polyneices in Sophocles’ *Antigone* by leaving him “unburied and a sight of shame, eaten by both birds and dogs”<sup>8</sup>. Many of the ethical, religious, political and personal motives for wanting to outlaw a burial found in the modern examples of burial conflicts can also be recognized in the literature of antiquity. One of the main differences, however, is that in Greek tragedy the choice to leave a corpse unburied is often made by a single ruler, while nowadays it is usually a group of protestors that are opposed to the burial who occasionally manage to sway a mayor or a representative to side with them. These protestors use their influence to get a person in authority to involve himself in the burial conflict. The tyrannical rulers we find in tragedy, on the other hand, do not consult the people before making their decision. They are motivated by the desire to punish their enemies, even after death, and use their position of power to do so. Any opposition by individuals such as Sophocles’ Antigone or his Teucer is often construed as a direct challenge to their rule.

The burial conflict in antiquity is particularly suited to study in terms of power. Not only is the conflict almost always caused by the decision of a single ruler, it also takes place during a time of crisis, either directly after a war or following a serious crime. During such a period, it would be in the interest of a ruler to consolidate his power and exposing the corpses of enemies is a very visible punishment to discourage future dissenters. The dead individual can no longer protect himself, is dishonoured by the mutilation of his body and the sight of his shame would further distress his family members or sympathizers.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the absence of a tomb or an

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<sup>6</sup> Pullella, P. ‘Erich Priebke, Nazi War Criminal, Buried in Secret in Italy Prison Cemetery’, *The World Post*, 17/11/13 via <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/07/erich-priebke-buried-italy\\_n\\_4231900.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/07/erich-priebke-buried-italy_n_4231900.html)>, accessed on 03/06/14.

<sup>7</sup> Abraham, Y. ‘To bury, not to praise’, *The Boston Globe*, 09/05/13 via <<http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/05/08/bury-not-praise/ujKFywTfYemil6qgCCwkwK/story.html>>, accessed on 03/06/14.

<sup>8</sup> ... ἄθαπτον καὶ πρὸς οἰωνῶν δέμας / καὶ πρὸς κυνῶν ἐδεστὸν αἰκισθέν τ’ ἰδεῖν. (205-206). The Greek text of the *Antigone* is taken from Griffith, M. ed. (1999), *Sophocles: Antigone*, New York. Unlike Griffith, I print the iota subscript instead of adscript to preserve the continuity with the Greek texts of the *Ajax* and *The Suppliant Women* in later chapters. The translation of the Greek throughout this thesis is mine.

<sup>9</sup> For the connection between dishonour and the mutilation of bodies in Greek literature, see Rosivach, V.J. (1983), ‘On Creon, “Antigone” and not Burying the Dead’, *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 126, 196-199.

honourable burial could prevent the dead person from being remembered by future generations.<sup>10</sup> Both his reputation and his honour would be lost, thus providing the ultimate victory for the ruler. Although those individuals opposed to the exposure of the corpse initially appear to be in a powerless position, their resistance can eventually become a serious threat. By openly disregarding the wishes of the ruler or voicing religious objections, they can undermine his authority and weaken his position in the *polis*.

In this thesis, I plan to analyse how the burial conflict turns into a power struggle in Sophocles' *Antigone*, Sophocles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *The Suppliant Women*, which are the three tragedies that deal most intimately with the subject. Each of these tragedies and particularly the debates between rulers and dissenters about the burial will be the focus of a chapter to answer the question why the conflict arises in the first place and what role power plays in its resolution or escalation. By systematically looking at the motives and justifications provided by those opposed and those in favour of burial, I hope to demonstrate how issues of power shape the debates between the characters and influence the outcome of the narrative. There is still controversy among scholars over whether Creon's or Antigone's position would have found the most supporters among an Athenian audience, whether Teucer shows himself to be a champion worthy of Ajax or fails to adequately rehabilitate his brother to the Atreidae and whether Theseus is the prime example of a good, selfless and even democratic leader for his intervention on behalf of the Argive dead or whether he suffers from the same flaws as the tyrants in other narratives. Perhaps an analysis with power struggles as its focal point may aid in revealing why it seems impossible to reach a consensus on the interpretations of these burial conflicts.

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<sup>10</sup> See Finglass for the use of the words *μνήμα* and *μνημεῖον* to denote a tomb and for Ajax's tomb becoming a *ἀείμνηστος τάφος* in Sophocles' *Ajax* (Finglass, P.J. (2011), *Sophocles: Ajax*, New York, 465-466).

## Chapter 1: *Antigone*

Sophocles' *Antigone* has often been discussed in terms of a conflict between Creon and Antigone about the burial of Polyneices in which one of them is right and the other one is wrong. Some see Creon as a tyrannical leader who violates the laws of the gods, while they perceive Antigone as an upstanding and courageous citizen, prepared to die to see justice done for her deceased brother.<sup>11</sup> Others, however, have argued that Antigone transgresses social norms and conducts herself in a manner inappropriate for a woman, while Creon champions ideals (such as loyalty and obedience to the state) that were important to the contemporary Greek audience of the play.<sup>12</sup> Alternative interpretations are more nuanced, recognizing flaws and inconsistencies on both sides of the debate.<sup>13</sup> Creon can be both tyrannical and oppressive in his leadership, while Antigone can still be wrong to challenge his power the way she does. The answer to the question of whether forbidding the burial of Polyneices was permissible or not no longer determines whether we should side with Antigone or Creon. Although the ending of the play validates Antigone's position that the gods want Polyneices to be buried, she does not leave the stage victorious. Her actions and arguments are not necessarily proven correct. Her conflict with Creon has gone beyond the issue of the burial and though some of her assertions might have been right, her defiance of authority led to her death. The Chorus recognizes this when it tells Antigone:

σέβειν μὲν εὐσέβειά τις,  
κράτος δ', ὅτφ κράτος μέλει,

παραβατὸν οὐδαμᾶ πέλει,  
σὲ δ' αὐτόγνωτος ὤλεσ' ὀργά.

(872-875)

It is a kind of reverence to be pious,  
but an offence against power, in the eyes of him who has  
power in his keeping,  
can in no way be allowed.  
As for you, your self-willed temper has destroyed you.

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<sup>11</sup> Hester, D.A. (1971), 'Sophocles the Unphilosophical: A Study in the 'Antigone'', *Mnemosyne* 24, 11-59. Hester has created a list of those who see Antigone as representing a "good principle" versus Creon's "evil principle": Appendix A, 48-52. More recent proponents of this view are Bennett and Tyrrell (1990) and Harris (2004).

<sup>12</sup> Hester has also created a list of scholars who assign some flaw (however small) to Antigone: see Appendix B, 52-54. More vehement in assigning blame to Antigone rather than Creon are Calder (1968) and Sourvinou-Inwood (1990).

<sup>13</sup> One of the most influential of these was by G.W.F. Hegel, who asserted that both Creon and Antigone are right in principle and initially occupy a defensible position, but refuse to acknowledge the value of the position of the other, which destroys them both (Griffith (1999) 49).

How and why the conflict about the burial of Polyneices evolved into a struggle of asserting and defying power that has no clear victor is the subject of this chapter. I plan to analyse the different justifications and motivations of Antigone and Creon throughout the play to see how these change and influence the decisions they make, while specifically looking at the role power plays in their dialogue with each other and other characters.

Antigone's first reaction to Creon's decree and her plans to defy it take shape in the prologue, where she discusses her situation with her sister Ismene. Although Bennett and Tyrrell claim that Sophocles is in the *Antigone* "not enacting the story of an individual, but an ideology",<sup>14</sup> it is interesting to note how Antigone from the very start emphasizes that Creon's decree is most damaging to her especially. After describing its contents, she states:

<p>τοιαῦτά φασι τὸν ἀγαθὸν Κρέοντα σοὶ -  κἀμοί, λέγω γὰρ κἀμέ - κηρύξαντ' ἔχειν,<sup>15</sup></p> <p>(31-32)</p>	<p>They say that such things the good Creon has proclaimed,  you know, - and to me as well, yes, to me!</p>
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The κἀμοί, λέγω γὰρ κἀμέ<sup>16</sup> seems to imply that Antigone feels as if Creon had no authority to forbid her in particular from burying her brother. Although she is trying to solicit Ismene's help, her incredulity centres around the fact that she, of all people, is hindered by Creon's edict. This early on in the play she already singles herself out as the individual that will have to take action and continues to do so by making references to how she will carry out her task alone and without aid from others.<sup>17</sup> The ideology Bennett and Tyrrell refer to, has not taken shape yet. Antigone is not referring to the unwritten laws of the gods at this point, which will be a central point later on in her discussion with Creon.<sup>18</sup> Right now, she is mainly concerned with two motivations to

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<sup>14</sup> Bennett, L.J., Blake Tyrrell, Wm. (1990), 'Sophocles' Antigone and Funeral Oratory', *The American Journal of Philology* 111, 442.

<sup>15</sup> See Griffith (1999) 128 for Antigone's emphasis on herself. Griffith reads σοὶ as an ethic dative that triggers κἀμοί as a dative of interest and suggests translating σοὶ as "you know" or "That's Creon's decree for you". As such, Antigone's response conveys that Creon's decree is an affront to her especially. Jebb considers such a transition between the use of datives "hardly possibly" and reads σοί accented, which would emphasize that Creon's edict was aimed first and foremost at Antigone and Ismene ("Creon has proclaimed these things to you and me"), because they were the relatives of the dead (Jebb, R.C. (1928), *Sophocles: the play and fragments III: The Antigone*, Cambridge, 15). Antigone's affront at being included in the decree seems more likely than Creon's concern with specifically forbidding the sisters to bury Polyneices, so I side with Griffith's interpretation in this case.

<sup>16</sup> According to Jebb, a construction like λέγω γὰρ κἀμέ instead of λέγω γὰρ κἀμοί is most frequent when the accusative is a proper name, although its use in cases without a proper name is not unparalleled (Jebb (1928) 15).

<sup>17</sup> Bennett and Tyrrell (1990) 446.

<sup>18</sup> Antigone will not mention the ἀγραπτα κάσφαλιθ θεῶν νόμιμα until 454-455, when encountering Creon.





ἀλλ' οὐδὲν αὐτῷ τῶν ἐμῶν μ' εἶργειν μέτα. In no way does he have the right to keep me from my own.

(48)

She does not specify whether Creon lacks a legal or a moral right and why this is the case. Her mention of the gods is equally brief. They are only referred to after Antigone has already explained the importance of burying Polyneices in order not to become his enemy:

σοὶ δ', εἰ δοκεῖ, But, if it seems right to you,  
τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἔντιμ' ἀτιμάσασ' ἔχε. keep dishonouring what the gods hold in honour .

(76-77)

What exactly the τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἔντιμ' entail in this case, Antigone does not explain. Whether it is burial practices or divine laws requiring burial is unclear. Interesting is that Antigone attempts to frighten Ismene by mentioning the wrath of the gods only after she has used incurring the enmity of Polyneices as her main argument. Staying true to *philia* – a word that she frequently uses in different forms in her speech<sup>22</sup> – and dying a good death are currently more important than the divine laws that will take centre stage later in the play. The fact that Ismene is her only audience right now will also have affected her choice of arguments. Perhaps Antigone purposefully uses the more personal reason – pleasing Polyneices as brother and *philos* –, because she hopes this will have the greatest effect on Ismene, who is a sister to Polyneices like she is and therefore might have the same feelings in this case.

Visibility is another aspect that is important to Antigone. Burying her brother would only be an honourable and pious action if it was witnessed and acknowledged as such. Likewise, not being seen would not lead to the good death Antigone envisions. While Ismene urges her to hide her plan, Antigone counters:

οἶμοι, καταύδα· πολλὸν ἐχθίων ἔση Oh, denounce it: you will be much more hated  
σιγῶσ', ἐὰν μὴ πᾶσι κηρύξῃς τάδε. for having kept silent, if you do not announce these  
things to everyone.

(86-87)

She wants the citizens and Creon to know of her actions, even though she is, in Ismene's words, acting βίᾳ πολιτῶν (79). Accomplishing the burial alone is not good enough. Antigone needs the

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<sup>22</sup> Blundell, M.W. (1989), *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: a Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics*, Cambridge, 108.

credit as well. This will fulfil all her goals: she will be able to keep Polyneices as a *philos*, she can die a good death, she will show Creon that he has no right to keep her from her friends and that his attempt to do so has failed, and she will also be able to honour the gods with the burial.

Creon's opening speech is authoritative, statesmanlike and focussed on the wellbeing of the city. Although he derives his power from his familial connections (173-174), it is logical that he does not focus on the sordid history of his kin, but instead chooses to legitimize himself as a good ruler, deserving of his position regardless of his family. The first part of the speech contains several elements that would be familiar and understandable to the Athenian audience, such as acknowledging the responsibility of the gods for the current situation (162-163), the importance of keeping the state safe (184-186) and of its citizens being loyal (188-190).<sup>23</sup> Demosthenes uses part of Creon's speech (175-190) in his oration *On the False Embassy* and presents it as containing admirable sentiments that his adversary Aeschines failed to live up to.<sup>24</sup> The ending of Creon's speech and his reasons for issuing the edict are more controversial. Creon's definition of *philia*, which involves the notion that being good to the state is more important than personal friendships, is what gives rise to his primary argument for not burying Polyneices. Polyneices was an enemy that marched upon his own city. Worse:

... γῆν πατρώαν καὶ θεοὺς τοὺς ἐγγενεῖς	... having returned from exile he wanted to burn the city
φυγὰς κατελθῶν ἠθέλησε μὲν πυρὶ	of his fathers and the gods of his family down
πρῆσαι κατ' ἄκρας, ἠθέλησε δ' αἵματος	to the ground and he wanted to consume the
κοινοῦ πάσασθαι, τοὺς δὲ δουλώσας ἄγειν,	blood of his kin and lead the rest into slavery ...
(199-202)	

Polyneices was therefore a traitor (he laid siege to his γῆν πατρώαν) and someone who acted against the gods (by trying to destroy the θεοὺς ἐγγενεῖς). Both of these qualifications are significant, because Athenian law made it possible for the corpses of traitors and temple robbers

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<sup>23</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood, C. (1981), 'Sophocles' Antigone as a "Bad Woman"' in F. Dieteren, E. Kloek (edd.), *Writing Women into History*, Amsterdam, 15; Honig, B. (2009), 'Antigone's Laments, Creon's Grief: Mourning, Membership and the Politics of Exception', *Political Theory* 37, 9. Blundell also acknowledges that Creon iterates "worthy principles", even though he is not always able to live up to them himself. (Blundell (1999) 116-117). Calder even calls the effect of Creon's speech "sensible and diplomatic" (Calder III, W.M. (1968), 'Sophokles' Political Tragedy, Antigone', *Roman and Byzantine Studies* 9, 394).

<sup>24</sup> Ferrario, S.B. (2006), 'Replaying Antigone: Changing Patterns of Public and Private Commemoration at Athens c. 440-350.' in C.B. Patterson (ed.) in 'Antigone's Answer: Essays on Death and Burial, Family and State in Classical Athens' in *Helios* 33S, 80-81.

to be exposed without burial.<sup>25</sup> Creon’s decree might have found precedent in Athens. The one difference between Creon’s law and historical law was the fact that in historical cases the corpses were still allowed to be buried outside Attica. Creon overstepped his boundaries by keeping the body of Polyneices within the borders of the *polis*.<sup>26</sup> His reason for doing so he restates once more:

τοιόνδ’ ἐμόν φρόνημα, κοῦποτ’ ἔκ γ’ ἐμοῦ τιμῇ προέξουσ’ οἱ κακοὶ τῶν ἐνδίκων.	This is my will, and in my eyes the bad shall never be preferred in honour to the just.
(207-208)	

Significant is Creon’s use of the plural (οἱ κακοί) to show his decree and his reasons are applicable not just to Polyneices, but to all future traitors as well. The state was injured by Polyneices’ actions, not Creon personally.<sup>27</sup> This makes Creon’s law more legitimate, because it serves to protect the state - as laws are supposed to do - rather than to exact revenge on one individual.<sup>28</sup> Although Creon may be crossing a line by keeping the body in clear view of the *polis*, the consequences of his decision are unclear for now. Sourvinou-Inwood argues that the audience would still have been firmly on Creon’s side at this point, while Antigone would be perceived as “a terrifying threat to order” and a bad woman.<sup>29</sup> There are signs even throughout the first part of the play that Sourvinou-Inwood overstates her case,<sup>30</sup> but she does have a point when she contends that Antigone transgresses the boundaries of her gender from the very

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<sup>25</sup> Hester (1971) 20; Rosivach (1983) 207-208; Lindenlauf, A. (2001), ‘Thrown Away Like Rubbish – Disposal of the Dead in Ancient Greece’, *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology* 12, 89; Patterson, C.B. (2006), ‘The Place and Practice of Burial in Sophocles’ Athens’ in C.B. Patterson (ed.) in ‘Antigone’s Answer: Essays on Death and Burial, Family and State in Classical Athens’ in *Helios* 33S, 33-34; Hame, K.J. (2008), ‘Female Control of Funeral Rites in Greek Tragedy: Klytaimestra, Medea, and Antigone’, *Classical Philology* 103, 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> Rosivach (1983) 209.

<sup>28</sup> See Etxabe, J. (2013), *The Experience of Tragic Judgment*, New York, 49. Harris claims that Creon’s *kerugma* is invalid, because it applies only to the burial of Polyneices and is only relevant to this particular occasion (Harris, E.M. (2004), ‘Antigone the Lawyer or the Ambiguities of Nomos’ in E.M. Harris, L. Rubinstein (edd.), *Democracy and the Rule of Law in Classical Athens: Essays on Law, Society, and Politics*, Cambridge, 36). However, Creon often speaks in abstracts: he will “never” (207) allow traitors to be honoured above the just. That does not just apply to the aftermath of this particular battle and makes Creon’s decree much broader than Harris sees.

<sup>29</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood (1981) 24 and 31-32. She asserts that Creon is “associated with the approved forms of democratic patriotism” in the first part of the play and therefore claims that the audience would have approved of Creon. Any tyrannical qualities he might have displayed would have been considered part of his position as a mythical king of the past.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Griffith argues that even “the most misogynistic and paternalistic Athenian” would have had problems with some of Creon’s remarks early on (Griffith (1999) 51). Rehm points to Creon’s “excessive desire for political control”, which was evident from the beginning (Rehm, R. (1994), *Marriage to Death: the Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy*, Princeton, 60-61).

beginning. Where Antigone finds no support for her ideas in Ismene, the Chorus states after Creon has finished speaking:

νόμῳ δὲ χρῆσθαι παντί πού γ' ἔνεστί σοι	It is up to you to utilize any law at all, I suppose,
καὶ τῶν θανόντων χῶπόσοι ζῶμεν πέρι.	concerning both the dead and all of us who live.
(213-214)	

At this point, Creon's ability to issue the edict goes unquestioned or is at least not openly condemned.<sup>31</sup>

When Antigone has performed the burial and has been caught and brought before Creon, she changes the emphasis of her arguments. In her conversation with Ismene she emphasized betrayal and Polyneices' needs, but in front of Creon she focuses on the gods and their laws:

οὐ γάρ τί μοι Ζεὺς ἦν ὁ κηρύξας τάδε,	Because it was not Zeus who proclaimed these things,
οὐδ' ἡ ζύνοικος τῶν κάτω θεῶν Δίκη	nor has Justice who resides with the gods below
τοιούσδ' ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ὄρισεν νόμους·	laid down such laws among men:
οὐδὲ σθένειν τοσοῦτον ὥόμην τὰ σὰ	And I did not believe that your decrees were so strong
κηρύγμαθ' ὥστ' ἄγραπτα κάσφαλῆ θεῶν	that a mortal could overstep the unwritten and
νόμιμα δύνασθαι θνητὸν ὄνθ' ὑπερδραμεῖν.	unfaltering laws of the gods.
(450-455)	

Antigone disputes the statement of the Chorus that Creon had the right to create a decree concerning the dead. She not only state that very different laws were made by the gods and that she chooses to follow these, but also that Creon's decrees lack power (οὐδὲ σθένειν) and that he is just a mortal (θνητόν) which gives him no right to interfere with matters best left to the gods. The discussion has moved from the burial of Polyneices to an evaluation of Creon's authority and power. The laws of the gods are not for νῦν γε κάχθέξ, ἀλλ' αἰεί (457), while Creon's rule is only something very temporary. Throughout the play, Creon is portrayed as someone who is terrified

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<sup>31</sup> Griffith (Griffith (1999) 163) and Harris (Harris (2004) 42) read doubt in the words of the Chorus. Harris believes the Chorus dissociates itself from Creon's decision by not voicing approval and both argue that πού indicates uncertainty on behalf of the speaker. However, to say the words of the Chorus derive only "from fear of punishment" perhaps goes a bit far. When the Chorus believes Haemon makes sensible points later on in the play, they are not afraid to speak up and tell Creon (724-725). Although πού might indicate some uncertainty or even surprise at Creon's words, I believe it goes too far to hinge the entire attitude of the Chorus on this one particle. Etxabe points out that the Chorus' refusal to stand guard over the body shows that they are not "mere puppets of Creon", but have their own opinion (Etxabe (2013) 57). Considering this, Harris' theory that the Chorus is afraid to contradict Creon seems unlikely.

of losing his power. He feels the need to prove himself as a ruler,<sup>32</sup> continually suspects those around him of treason and sees civil obedience as the most important thing in the *polis*.<sup>33</sup> Antigone's words serve to put the idea into Creon's mind that even a woman can defy his rule, although he previously did not suspect such a thing.<sup>34</sup> By questioning the strength of his laws, she questions Creon as a ruler, which enrages him. The gods are an intelligent argument for Antigone to use as well, because Creon has thus far shown reverence for the divine. Convincing him that he was acting against the wishes of the gods would likely be the most effective strategy, seeing how little regard Creon has for other matters, such as Polyneices or close family ties in general. Antigone therefore approaches this discussion differently than her conversation with her sister, in which she emphasized the feelings of her brother.<sup>35</sup>

Antigone also undertakes another attempt to rob Creon of his power by bringing κέρδος into the exchange:

εἰ δὲ τοῦ χρόνου	But if I will die
πρόσθεν θανοῦμαι, κέρδος αὐτ' ἐγὼ λέγω.	before my time, I will call this a gain.
(461-462)	

Dying is a gain for Antigone. Creon's frightening punishment of death, meant to serve as a deterrent for those considering disobedience, leaves her unfazed. In fact, she considers it a reward. Even without Creon's decree, she would have died anyway, she states (461). He not only has no power over her, but even his worst punishment is ineffective. Antigone's entire response invalidates Creon as a ruler and by calling him a fool in her final words (469-470) she greatly reduces the chance to reach a compromise. Her final insult makes it debatable whether her arguments about dishonouring the gods and the limits of Creon's rule were meant as a sincere attempt to persuade Creon of the error of his ways. Antigone's tone is too argumentative to provoke a productive dialogue. Instead, it might rather have been her aim to unsettle Creon as

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<sup>32</sup> Perhaps one of Creon's reasons for being so eager to prove himself a good leader is that he succeeded to the throne by virtue of being a relative of the previous kings and not on his own merit, while he himself does not value these family connections. (See also Blundell (1989) 126).

<sup>33</sup> Creon suspects conspiracies against his rule (289-303), punishes his own guard for telling him the truth (306-312), and believes seers work solely for profit (1033-1043). Foley remarks that Creon misjudges nearly every character that appears on stage (Foley, H. (1995), 'Tragedy and Democratic Ideology: The Case of Sophocles' Antigone' in B. Goff (ed.), *History, Tragedy, Theory: Dialogues on Athenian Drama*, Austin, 137).

<sup>34</sup> In 248, Creon asks τίς ἀνδρῶν has performed the burial.

<sup>35</sup> Hester (1971) 29. Hester sees this passage as Antigone's public rationalisation, thought out in advance and created to be as convincing as possible. When she is alone with her sister or provoked by the emotion of her impending death, she speaks the truth.

much as possible by her words. She knows the chances of convincing him are small, but she does use the arguments that might possibly make Creon think about his decision or cause him to feel uneasy, even if he will not admit it in conversation with her. Additionally, Antigone wants the citizens of Thebes to know of her actions<sup>36</sup> and the religious arguments she puts forward in these scenes are the most comprehensible to others, especially because the ordinary citizens are not bound to Polyneices by familial ties but simply see him as a hostile invader.

Creon responds entirely to the challenge of his authority and his reply does not even touch on his reasons for outlawing the burial.<sup>37</sup> First, he makes the point that anyone can be broken under the proper guidance (473-476). Then he moves on to the charges:

αὕτη δ' ὑβρίζειν μὲν τότ' ἐξήπιστατο,  
νόμους ὑπερβαίνουσα τοὺς προκειμένους·  
ὑβρις δ', ἐπεὶ δέδρακεν, ἦδε δευτέρα,  
τούτοις ἐπαυχεῖν καὶ δεδρακυῖαν γελᾶν.

ἢ νῦν ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἀνὴρ, αὕτη δ' ἀνὴρ,  
εἰ ταῦτ' ἀνατεῖ τῆδε κείσεται κράτη.

(480-485)

This girl already knew well how to be insolent  
when she overstepped the established laws:

And, after she had done that, this is a second violation:  
that she exults in these things and laughs after having  
committed them.

Certainly, I am no man, but she is the man, if the  
victory in these matters lies with her without punishment.

The burial itself was an act of ὑβρις, because it was against the νόμους προκειμένους, but Creon also specifically mentions Antigone's second crime: δέδρακεν (...) τούτοις ἐπαυχεῖν καὶ δεδρακυῖαν γελᾶν. Celebrating her deeds is as bad as committing them in the first place, and letting Antigone escape retribution would be the ultimate challenge to Creon's rule. He would lose his manliness if κράτη would rest with Antigone. In order to remind Antigone that he is still in charge, he reiterates that she will suffer a terrible fate (488-489) and includes Ismene as a co-conspirator. His focus has completely shifted from the burial to Antigone herself and to removing her before she threatens his position. When Antigone asks him what more he wants than to capture and kill her, he replies:

ἐγὼ μὲν οὐδέν· τοῦτ' ἔχων ἅπαντ' ἔχω.

(498)

I want nothing more. Having that, I have everything.

<sup>36</sup> Cf 86-87.

<sup>37</sup> Honig: "[Creon] sees that his struggle with Antigone is about more than a burial and a body." (Honig, B. (2009), 'Antigone's Laments, Creon's Grief: Mourning, Membership and the Politics of Exception', *Political Theory* 37, 9-10).

The discussion moves on to the public opinion. Both are convinced the city agrees with them.<sup>38</sup> It is Antigone who steers the exchange back to family and the importance of honouring them, even if others do not see it the same way (511). The stichomythia that follows seems the first genuine exchange about ideas Creon and Antigone have in the play. Creon questions, Antigone answers, but neither insults the other as they have done earlier in the dialogue. However, the gap between their beliefs is too wide to reach a consensus. Although both believe the dead are still sentient, they disagree on what they might be feeling. Creon thinks Eteocles would be insulted or angered if Polyneices would be honoured equally (520), while Antigone believes Eteocles is capable of forgiving his brother.<sup>39</sup> Antigone never denies Polyneices' role as a traitor and she presumes it would not matter to Hades (519). Even if Polyneices had been wrong to lay siege on Thebes, it would not make a difference to her anyway:

οὔτοι συνέχθειν ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφον.                      It is not my nature to join in hate, but in love.  
(523)

It is interesting that Antigone's final argument is about her own nature. Even if her brothers posthumously still hated each other, she would not let that influence her.<sup>40</sup> While her previous words centred on Eteocles' forgiveness of Polyneices, she now implies that even if that forgiveness was absent, she would have acted the way she did.

Creon is incapable of understanding Antigone's reasoning. He himself only uses one

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<sup>38</sup> Bennett and Tyrrell notice that Antigone frequently refers to her status as an outsider, acting alone, without support (Bennett and Tyrrell (1990) 446-448). Her sudden claim that the city is supporting her therefore seems unlikely and could be construed as another attempt to rob Creon of his confidence and power. However, Haemon also mentions support for Antigone to his father. Still later on, when she is marching to her death, Antigone once more contradicts this support by stating that she has acted βία πολιτῶν (907). Sourvinou-Inwood believes Haemon is lying, but her evidence is unconvincing (Sourvinou-Inwood (1981) 15-16, see Foley (1985) 135-136 for criticism). Foley is perhaps right when she states that the contemporary audience of the *Antigone* would be used to "negotiating among points of view that had equally valid claims to representing the interests of the *polis*" (Foley (1985) 138). The audience could see right and wrong in both Antigone and Creon at different stages of the play and maybe this means Sophocles purposefully left the loyalty of the *polis* ambiguous in order to encourage shifts in sympathy of the audience throughout the narrative.

<sup>39</sup> Yet she also believes that Polyneices would be incapable of forgiving her for not burying him. It is an inconsistent line of reasoning. Eteocles and Polyneices voluntarily entered into a war that assured mutual destruction, while Antigone, although she wants to bury Polyneices, is forbidden to do so on the penalty of death. If the dead were indeed capable of forgiveness, it seems more likely that Polyneices would pardon his still-living sisters for not burying him.

<sup>40</sup> Griffith (1999) 210. Blundell argues that Antigone's claim that it is "in her nature" to join in love implies "a broader claim of *philia*", but that in practise, her form of *philia* is quite limited and especially convenient as "useful rhetorical weapons at this moment of crisis" in the discussion with Creon (Blundell (1989) 113).

argument and although he rephrases it several times, he does not add to it.<sup>41</sup> He is concerned with Eteocles' honour, but never mentions a civic purpose for outlawing the burial, such as using Polyneices' grim fate as an example to deter others like him.<sup>42</sup> His thinking is one-sided, absolute and leaves no room for nuance. He is the one to end the dialogue, not by making a final statement about enemies to the city or his own correct opinion in the matter, but by returning to his power:

<p>ἐμοῦ δὲ ζῶντος οὐκ ἄρξει γυνή. (525)</p>	<p>But while I live, no woman will rule.</p>
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This is what the discussion with Antigone has come down to for Creon: the threat to his rule is what remains as the most important element. He is not persuaded by her arguments, but is convinced that she wants to exert power over him. The burial of Polyneices has become a secondary matter.

This change of focus is also apparent in Creon's conversation with his son Haemon. Creon's speech is filled with words like obedience, power and references to ruling. He never justifies the exposure of Polyneices' corpse to Haemon, but instead focuses solely on Antigone and her disobedience. There is no way back for Creon. In order to remain a good ruler – according to his definition – he needs to go through with the death sentence he pronounced upon the person who would perform the burial:

<p>ἐπεὶ γὰρ αὐτὴν εἶλον ἐμφανῶς ἐγὼ πόλεως ἀπιστήσασαν ἐκ πάσης μόνην, ψευδῆ γ' ἐμαντὸν οὐ καταστήσω πόλει, ἀλλὰ κτενῶ. (655-658)</p>	<p>Because I caught her while she alone of all the city defied me openly, I will not make myself into a liar to the city, but I will kill her.</p>
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Antigone's disobedience was public, so if Creon shows her mercy, the whole city will know that her disobedience went unpunished. Creon cannot afford to be found false in his threats or his rule:

<p>ὅστις δ' ὑπερβὰς ἢ νόμους βιάζεται ἢ τοῦπιτάσσειν τοῖς κρατύνουσιν νοεῖ, οὐκ ἔστ' ἐπαίνου τοῦτον ἐξ ἐμοῦ τυχεῖν.</p>	<p>But if anyone, overstepping, either violates the laws or thinks to command those in power, it is not possible that he earns my praise.</p>
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<sup>41</sup> 522: οὔτοι ποθ' οὐχθρός, οὐδ' ὅταν θάνη, φίλος ("An enemy is never a friend, not even when he has died").

<sup>42</sup> Blundell (1989) 119.



ἀλλ' ὄν πόλις στήσειε, τοῦδε χρῆ κλύειν  
καὶ σμικρὰ καὶ δίκαια καὶ τάναντία.

(663-667)

No, whomever the city may appoint, he must be  
obeyed in matters small and great, just and unjust.

Breaking the law is discussed on the same level as attempting to submit commands to the powerful. Creon condemns both of these actions and believes the obedience to a ruler should be absolute, in just matters and also τάναντία: the opposite of just. Creon now extends the power of a king even to unjust things.<sup>43</sup> Although Antigone and Creon have discussed the justice of the burial with each other (the question of whether it is proper to honour all the dead or just the good ones), Creon now implies that aspect was irrelevant: after all, if a ruler should be obeyed in δίκαια καὶ τάναντία, it hardly matters in which category forbidding the burial of Polyneices would fall. What matters to Creon is that his decisions, whatever they are, are consistently obeyed by the citizens.

Antigone's final scene provides interesting information about her motivations for her actions. Although 'dying a good death' has preoccupied her from the very beginning, she now recognizes that her current fate is undesirable. When the Chorus attempts to comfort her by bringing up honour and praise for her actions and by saying she is undergoing a fate similar to Niobe (817-822; 824-831), Antigone believes she is being mocked (839-840) and that her death is κάκιστα (895).<sup>44</sup> She feels ἔρημος πρὸς φίλων (919) and as if even the gods have deserted her (922-923). There is no-one left to convince to aid or pardon her and although Creon and the Chorus are on the stage with her, she can no longer expect a reprieve. Instead, the situation affords Antigone a final chance to explain why she has made the choice to do what she did. Her last argument is perhaps the most honest, but also the most controversial:

οὐ γάρ ποτ' οὔτ' ἄν εἰ τέκνων μήτηρ ἔφυν  
οὔτ' εἰ πόσις μοι κατθανῶν ἐτήκετο,  
βία πολιτῶν τόνδ' ἄν ἠρόμην πόνον.

Never if I had been the mother of children or  
if my husband had been decomposing after death,  
would I have taken this task upon myself in  
defiance of the citizens.

τίνος νόμου δὴ ταῦτα πρὸς χάριν λέγω;

Because of what principle do I say these things?

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<sup>43</sup> Podlecki remarks that Creon is now speaking as if he is a general and the citizens of Thebes are his troops. This is a mark of tyranny (Podlecki, A.J. (1986), 'Polis and Monarch in Early Attic Tragedy' in J.P. Euben (ed.) Greek Tragedy and Political Theory, 98-99).

<sup>44</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood claims that Antigone's end has several elements of what the Greeks would call a "bad death": Antigone died unmarried, without children, friendless, alone, unmourned, in a horrible manner, ultimately by suicide, after which she is largely forgotten by the other characters (Sourvinou-Inwood (1981) 33).

<p>πόσις μὲν ἄν μοι καθανόντος ἄλλος ἦν, καὶ παῖς ἀπ' ἄλλου φωτός, εἰ τοῦδ' ἤμπλακον· μητρὸς δ' ἐν Ἴδου καὶ πατρὸς κεκευθότοι οὐκ ἔστ' ἀδελφὸς ὅστις ἄν βλάστοι ποτέ.</p>	<p>With my husband gone, there could be another, and a child from another man, if I had lost one. But when mother and father lie hidden in Hades, no brother could ever be brought forth again.</p>
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(905-912)

First of all, Antigone recognizes in this passage that she was acting βία πολιτῶν<sup>45</sup> by performing the burial against the law and she also acknowledges that she only acted this way because of certain circumstances: if the dead body had belonged to a different family member than a brother, it would not have been worth it. Valuing family members based on the ability to replace them is known from the story of Intaphernes' wife in Herodotus,<sup>46</sup> but in that version, the wife had to choose which relative to save from death, not which to bury. Burying Polyneices because he is not replaceable is an illogical argument. Still, Antigone's reasoning makes it apparent that not all family members are equal to her.<sup>47</sup> Although in her discussion with Creon, her reasoning occasionally approached an ideology, her absolute statement that the gods always require burials falls apart in this passage. Antigone's motives were much more personal than she let on.<sup>48</sup> Not Polyneices' feelings and enmity, but Antigone's own affection is central now. Instead of at Ismene, Creon or the Chorus, she directs her words at her dead brother. Some critics have proposed excising this passage, based on Antigone's inconsistency.<sup>49</sup> However, throughout the play, Antigone has been highlighting different aspects of her brother's burial. His posthumous anger, the laws of the gods, Antigone's understanding of *philia*, his irreplaceability for her personally: all these have been used by Antigone as justifications at various stages. This moment is very much appropriate for Antigone's most personal motive. Creon's death sentence is being carried out – she is on her way to the tomb that will hold her until she expires. She has no future. This entails that she has already lost the prospect of a husband and children, which would make

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<sup>45</sup> For Antigone's actions as civil disobedience (and the phrase βία πολιτῶν as connoting civil disobedience), see Schuyt 348f, especially 352-355. According to Schuyt, it is important to view Antigone's deeds as civil disobedience, because the term recognizes that Antigone's conflict is with the state rather than her fellow citizens (Schuyt, K. (2006), *Steunberen van de Samenleving: Sociologische Essays*, Amsterdam).

<sup>46</sup> Herodotus 3.119. See Griffith (1999) 277.

<sup>47</sup> Griffith states that Antigone is affirming that her loyalty to her brother is more important than the prospect of marriage and that is why she prefers blood-ties above marriage-ties. This makes sense, but still does not explain Antigone's emphasis on replaceability (Griffith (1999) 277-278). If her parents had still been alive (yet unwilling or unable to perform the burial), would she have been content to let Polyneices' corpse remain exposed?

<sup>48</sup> Some scholars have even supposed that Antigone's love for Polyneices was somewhat incestuous. See Rehm (1994) 59, Griffith (1999) 33.

<sup>49</sup> See Griffith (1999) 277-279 for the reasons why this passage should be considered authentic.

her even more eager to strengthen her resolve and convince herself that she is taking the right course of action. It leads her to emphasize the importance of her brother above other family members that will not be available to her anyway. Antigone has not wavered in her decision to undertake the burial, but her reasons to do so have never been as consistent as Creon's one reason to forbid it. This particular passage just showcases that inconsistency, which explains Antigone's inglorious departure from the stage. She does not succeed, her words have not been enough to convince those she needed to persuade and not even the gods interfere in time to save her life. It is not because of her that Creon's rule comes to an end, but she does maintain some power over him right up to her own death. Although she laments her fate, she never begs him to change his mind and when Creon buries her alive while supplying her with food in an attempt to ward off pollution (773-776), she refuses to accept even his method of execution and, autonomous until the end, takes her own life.<sup>50</sup>

In the end, Teiresias finally reveals the displeasure of the gods and their refusal to accept sacrifices, because the city and all the altars are tainted with the body of Polyneices (1016-1022). As if dishonouring the gods is not reason enough to change course, he provides Creon with an additional argument:

ἀλλ' εἶκε τῷ θανόντι μηδ' ὀλωλότα	Yield to the dead and do not prick the fallen:
κέντει· τίς ἀλκή τὸν θανόντ' ἐπικτανεῖν;	what strength is there in killing the dead again?
(1029-1030)	

Punishing the dead is not a show of power, but rather a futile exercise, according to Teiresias. Creon at first refuses to accept these words, because he cannot fathom that a mortal is powerful enough to insult the gods:

εὖ γὰρ οἶδ' ὅτι	I know well that
θεοὺς μαινεῖν οὔτις ἀνθρώπων σθένει.	none of the humans has the power to defile the gods.
(1043-1044)	

Creon uses a surprisingly similar argument to Antigone's here. Earlier, Antigone told him that no mortal is capable of creating laws that are strong enough (σθένειν) to surpass those of the gods. Creon changes that argument slightly: he argues that his decree is not strong enough to damage or

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<sup>50</sup> Johnston, S.I. (2006), 'Antigone's Other Choice', in C.B. Patterson (ed.) in 'Antigone's Answer: Essays on Death and Burial, Family and State in Classical Athens' in *Helios* 33S, 183-184.

insult the gods.

Teiresias provides an additional reason why Creon is wrong: not only has the city been polluted, but the gods below have been deprived of the body:

ὧν οὔτε σοὶ μέτεστιν οὔτε τοῖς ἄνω θεοῖσιν, ἀλλ' ἐκ σοῦ βιάζονται τάδε. τούτων σε λωβητῆρες ὑστεροφθόροι λοχῶσιν Ἄιδου καὶ θεῶν Ἐρινύες, ἐν τοῖσιν αὐτοῖς τοῖσδε ληφθῆναι κακοῖς.	Neither you nor the gods above have any business with the dead, but this is violated by you. On account of these things the late-destroying avengers, the Erinyes of Hades and the gods, lie in ambush for you, so that you be caught in these same evils.
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(1072-1076)

The Chorus was mistaken when it remarked that Creon was capable of ruling both the dead and the living and Antigone was right when she stated that Hades always requires the rites for the dead.<sup>51</sup> When Creon finally relents, however, he cites necessity as his reason for doing so:

οἴμοι· μόλις μὲν, καρδίας δ' ἐξίσταμαι τὸ δρᾶν· ἀνάγκη δ' οὐχὶ δυσμαχητέον.	Ah, it is difficult, but I step away from my heart's resolve to carry on: one must not fight a losing battle with necessity.
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(1105-1106)

In his final actions on stage, he parallels Antigone once again. He mirrors her priorities: first the dead, then the living.<sup>52</sup> He chooses to bury Polyneices before he sets about freeing Antigone from her prison (1196-1205). After the death of his son and wife, he finally realizes, like Antigone attempted to tell him all long, that close family ties matter greatly as well. Without them, Creon is nothing (1325). His attempt to consolidate his power by punishing enemies and dissenters leaves him powerless in the end.

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<sup>51</sup> Rosivach calls this reason “Sophocles’ innovation” and claims that in the *Antigone*, the reason why not burying the dead is displeasing to the gods is given for the first time in literature. (Rosivach (1983) 199)

<sup>52</sup> Segal, C. (1981), *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles*, Cambridge, 176.

## Chapter 2: *Ajax*

Several elements immediately make it apparent that the banning of the burial in Sophocles' *Ajax* and the conflict it creates differ significantly from the proceedings in the *Antigone*. Unlike Polyneices (who was never present on stage and gains no unique personality from the remarks of other characters about him), Ajax is both the protagonist of the first half of the play and an integral part of the second half as the corpse that gives rise to the dispute between Teucer and the Atreidae. By the time he commits suicide, we are intimately familiar with his thoughts and motivations. Despite his attempt to murder the leaders of the Greek army, he is capable of inciting sympathy in the audience.<sup>53</sup> His burial is both necessary<sup>54</sup> and desired, while the presence of his corpse on stage after his suicide serves as a reminder of the stakes in the conflict. Yet Teucer struggles to secure an honourable funeral for his brother. His discussions with Menelaus and Agamemnon often move from Ajax to “the more general issue of authority”<sup>55</sup> and some scholars have even concluded that Teucer's arguments are “intellectually inadequate”<sup>56</sup>. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the justifications on both sides of the debate and to analyse how and why authority and power feature so prominently in the conflict.

While Antigone reacts to Creon's decree with a tone of surprise,<sup>57</sup> Ajax already fears for the fate of his body during his last moments alive:<sup>58</sup>

σὺ πρῶτος, ὦ Ζεῦ, καὶ γὰρ εἰκός, ἄρκεσον.	And do you, Zeus, be the first to help me, as is fitting.
αἰτήσομαι δέ σ' οὐ μακρὸν γέρας λαβεῖν.	I shall not ask you to grant me a great gift.
πέμψον τιν' ἡμῖν ἄγγελον, κακὴν φάτιν	Send some messenger on my behalf, bearing the
Τεύκρω φέροντα, πρῶτος ὧς με βαστάση	evil news to Teucer, so that he may be the first to raise me
πεπτῶτα τῷδε περὶ νεορράντῳ ξίφει,	after I have fallen on this freshly-bloodstained sword,
καὶ μὴ πρὸς ἐχθρῶν του κατοπτευθεις πάρος	so that I will not be cast out, thrown to the dogs and

<sup>53</sup> March even sees in Odysseus' character “Sophocles' own compassion for the figure of Ajax”, who, in this version of the story, finally gets “an honourable end worthy of his greatness” (March, J.R. (1993), *Sophocles' Ajax: The Death and Burial of a Hero*, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 38, 34).

<sup>54</sup> At the time of the play's staging, Ajax was worshipped in a cult in Athens. His honourable burial is a way to ensure that Ajax's enduring fame, as the audience would know it in their own time, would be realized. (March (1993) 25).

<sup>55</sup> Barker, E. (2004), ‘The Fall-out from Dissent: Hero and Audience in Sophocles' *Ajax*’, *Greece & Rome* 51, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Bowra, M. (1944), *Sophoclean Tragedy*, Oxford, 51.

<sup>57</sup> See Ch.1, pg 5.

<sup>58</sup> Some scholars have criticized the *Ajax* for its diptych structure (see March (1993) n116), but March remarks that Ajax's anxiety over his own burial is just one of the dramatic devices that firmly connects the first and second half. (March (1993) 27)

ρίφθῶ κυσὶν πρόβλητος οἰωνοῖς θ' ἔλωρ.      birds as prey, after being discovered first by enemies.  
(824-830)<sup>59</sup>

His estimation that this is only an οὐ μακρὸν γέρας will turn out to be very much mistaken,<sup>60</sup> but his anxiety concerning the discoverer of his corpse is justified. Tecmessa is the one who finds him (891) and although Teucer arrives before Ajax's enemies, he is not able to complete the preparations for the burial in time. Both he (988-989) and the Chorus (1040-1044) share Ajax's dread that an enemy will come to gloat over his body and soon Menelaus arrives to do just that.

Menelaus orders Teucer not to touch the corpse and forbids the burial immediately. When Teucer asks him why he is issuing this command, Menelaus replies that he has made this decision on behalf of himself and his brother (1050: ὃς κραίνει στρατοῦ). It is noticeable that by using the word κραίνει and emphasizing his brother's status, he is eager to establish his authority in front of Teucer and clearly expects to be obeyed without question, as is apparent from the fact that he did not actually reply to Teucer's query by giving his reason for forbidding the burial. Teucer impatiently repeats his request (1051).

When Menelaus finally responds, he starts by giving an accurate summary of Ajax's actions and status at the beginning of the play: he was a σύμμαχος and φίλος (1053), yet ἐχθῖω Φρυγῶν (1054) to the Greeks. He planned to murder the entire army (1055), attempted to do so at night (1056) while they were defenceless and only the intervention of a god had thwarted him (1058-1060). Thus far, Menelaus' anger at these events and Ajax himself is understandable. However, Menelaus immediately moves on to issues of power and his wish to exert it over the rest of the army. He believes no-one will be able to bury Ajax, because no-one is strong enough (1062: σθένων) to accomplish the burial, and he quickly reveals his true reason for pronouncing such a harsh punishment on his former ally:

εἰ γὰρ βλέποντος μὴ ἴδυνήθημεν κρατεῖν, πάντως θανόντος γ' ἄρξομεν, κἂν μὴ θέλης,	If we were not able to rule him while he lived, at least we shall do so now that he's dead, even if you don't want it,
χερσὶν παρευθύνοντες. οὐ γὰρ ἔσθ' ὅπου λόγων γ' ἀκοῦσαι ζῶν ποτ' ἠθέλησ' ἐμῶν.	controlling him with our hands. Because to my words he never wanted to listen while he lived.
(1067-1070)	

<sup>59</sup> The Greek text of the *Ajax* is taken from Finglass (2011).

<sup>60</sup> See Finglass (2011) 381-382 on the irony of this phrase.

It was the inability to control Ajax while he lived that was most vexing to Menelaus. Although he goes on to disguise his antipathy for the deceased by presenting his forbidding of the burial as a way to protect the city and the laws, it is clear that his hatred for Ajax stems from a very personal dislike. Often he speaks in the plural, denoting himself and Agamemnon, but occasionally he speaks only of his own relationship with Ajax, as when he remarks that Ajax refused to obey λόγων (...) ἐμῶν (1070).<sup>61</sup> Menelaus then attempts to justify this hatred for Ajax by framing his disobedience as a danger to laws and the *polis* as a whole (1073-1083). In his view, authority should rely on δέος (1074; 1079), φόβος (1076) and αἰδώς (1076) to control its subjects and keep the state safe. On the basis of these sentiments, Pearson deems him “a sort of Creon in miniature”<sup>62</sup>. Like Creon, Menelaus believed that absolute obedience to the state is of great importance and anyone who refuses to conform is automatically κακός (1071). Menelaus also uses the metaphor of the state as a sailing ship that should be kept on course (1081-1083), just like Creon in his opening speech.<sup>63</sup> The difference between them, however, is that Creon starts off with noble and possibly even democratic intentions (which allows some commentators to side with him throughout the play), and he gradually becomes more tyrannical as the narrative progresses. His decision to expose the corpse of Polyneices does not stem from personal enmity, but is portrayed from the beginning as an act against a traitor (and all future traitors) to the city. Menelaus, however, never seems to deserve the benefit of the doubt for his decision to outlaw the burial of Ajax. Although Ajax had been a threat to the army and Menelaus identifies flaws in his character that he clearly possessed,<sup>64</sup> his whole case is undermined by his obvious hatred of Ajax, his glee at Ajax’s fall and his assertion that it is now his turn to be proud (1088), which shows a fundamental lack of insight in what brought his enemy down in the first place.<sup>65</sup>

Many believe Teucer does not fare better in his reply to Menelaus. While Menelaus is considered to be afflicted by “an ugly arrogance”<sup>66</sup> or an “ugly authoritarian tone”<sup>67</sup>, Teucer

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<sup>61</sup> His initial command to forbid the burial is phrased in the first person singular as well (1047) and he puts himself in front of his brother (the commander) when addressing Teucer’s first question (1050). Later on in his speech, he also speaks about how this is his moment to be proud (1088: νῦν δ’ ἐγὼ μέγ’ αὖ φρονῶ) and once more repeats his ban on the burial in the first person (1089: καί σοι προφρονῶ τόνδε μὴ θάπτειν).

<sup>62</sup> Pearson, L. (1962), *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece*, Stanford, 194.

<sup>63</sup> See *Ant.* 187-190. For other uses of the image of the state as a ship: see Finglass (2011) 443-444 and Blundell (1989) 118 n46.

<sup>64</sup> “[Ajax] was deficient in *aidos*, *aischune* and *sophrosune*”, as Menelaus claims (Blundell (1989) 91).

<sup>65</sup> See also Bowra (1944) 53.

<sup>66</sup> Bowra (1944) 53.

<sup>67</sup> Blundell (1989) 91.

comes off as “hot-tempered”<sup>68</sup>. The foundation of his rebuttal rests on Ajax’s status in the army. Teucer holds that Ajax was no σύμμαχος (1098), as Menelaus claimed, but a commander in his own right. Menelaus is merely the king of Sparta (1102) and Ajax was not fighting for Helen, but because he was bound by an oath (1112-1114). Teucer responds only to this practical issue of authority and power, which was a large part of Menelaus’ speech. This is a convenient route for him to take: excusing Ajax’s attempted murder of the generals would be a much harder case to make.<sup>69</sup> However, if we accept that Teucer is correct in stating that Ajax was not insubordinate, because he was not one of Menelaus’ subjects, this hardly changes the facts of his crime or his right to burial. Teucer in no way rehabilitates Ajax, who still remains guilty of trying to cause a slaughter among his own people. He introduces no redeeming circumstances or qualities; he does not even argue that burial is an absolute right that is granted by the gods. His only argument is that Menelaus has no authority to pronounce this particular punishment in the current situation,<sup>70</sup> implying that if Ajax had indeed sailed just to recover Helen or explicitly with a particular allegiance to the Atreidae, they would have been entirely justified to deny him burial.<sup>71</sup> He counters Menelaus by attacking what Menelaus values most, his authority, which is a similar strategy to the one employed by Antigone against Creon. However, Antigone’s position is strengthened by her appeal to the gods and their divine laws. Teucer does not mention the gods in his initial reply. His final words address Menelaus’ character:

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<sup>68</sup> Bowra (1944) 54.

<sup>69</sup> Finglass remarks that focussing on the issue of Ajax’s insubordination is a way for Teucer to exploit “the rhetorical incapacity of his opponent” (Finglass (2011) 446).

<sup>70</sup> Teucer’s argument is reminiscent of the fourth stasis (μετάληψις or status translatus) of the rhetorical stases theory, which is the strategy of attacking the appropriateness of the court or the judges and thereby escaping the charge. This was generally seen as the weakest of the four stases, used especially by those lawyers who could not deny or justify the charge in another manner (according to the first three stases). Teucer resorts to it now, because he will have a hard time asserting that Ajax did not commit the crime (or would not have done so if he had not been stopped by the god) (first stasis), that the charge did not fit the crime (second stasis) or that there were extenuating circumstances that excused the crime (third stasis). Although the stases theory was first written down by Hermagoras in the second century BC, the fourth stasis was already used by the Attic orators and contemporaries of Sophocles. For the use of the fourth stasis in early Greek rhetoric, see Dearin, R.D. (1976), ‘The Fourth Stasis in Greek Rhetoric’ in J. Blankenship et al. (edd.), *Rhetoric and Communication: Studies in the University of Illinois Tradition*, Urbana, 3-16, especially 9-12.

<sup>71</sup> Teucer himself later on curses any man who attempts to drag Eurysaces away from the corpse with death and wishes that such a man would remain unburied (1175-1179). For his own dishonourable enemies, a punishment like that would apparently be appropriate, once more confirming that Teucer does not believe in an absolute right to burial.



τοῦ δὲ σοῦ ψόφου οὐκ ἂν στραφείην, ἕως ἂν ἦς οἷός περ εἶ. (1116-1117)	I won't change my mind on account of your noise, as long as you are the man you are.
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Teucer's first words levelled an insult at Menelaus' nobility (1093-1096) and he ends his speech in the same vein. These final words, however, reveal an inconsistency. Teucer seems to suggest that he would be capable of changing his mind (1117: στραφείην<sup>72</sup>) if Menelaus had been different to the person he is. Whether that means a more noble or powerful individual or even a divinity is not clear in this context, but it does imply that Teucer's refusal to obey is not absolute, but instead tethered to Menelaus' character and his perceived unworthiness in outlawing the burial. Just like Menelaus was influenced by his personal hatred of Ajax, Teucer's reply is equally influenced by his feelings for Menelaus. Heath defends Teucer's speech by calling it "brief and crushing" and his retorts in the stichomythia "calm" and "apt"<sup>73</sup>. He omits mention, however, of the disapproval of the Chorus following Teucer's rebuttal. Although the Chorus has been shown throughout the play to have been firmly on Ajax's side and in favour of burial, they reprimand Teucer for his tone, as they did Menelaus after his speech:

οὐδ' αὖ τοιαύτην γλῶσσαν ἐν κακοῖς φιλῶ· τὰ σκληρὰ γάρ τοι, κἂν ὑπέρδικ' ἦ, δάκνει. (1118-1120)	Nor do I appreciate such a tone in these troubles: Because harsh words cause pain, no matter how just they are.
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The Chorus agrees with Teucer's intentions, but not his methods. As Finglass points out, this would have guided the audience's response to Teucer's words and this response would likely not have been wholly favourable.<sup>74</sup>

The stichomythia that follows clearly demonstrates the mutual dislike between the two opponents. Menelaus launches into an attack on archers and their arrogance (1120; 1122); Teucer

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<sup>72</sup> στραφείην in this verse can mean both 'changing one's mind' or 'turning to notice'. (Finglass (2011) 452). Both meanings are present: Teucer will not change his mind on account of Menelaus' words, nor will he even turn around to notice him or pay attention to him while he is speaking.

<sup>73</sup> Heath, M. (1987), *The poetics of Greek tragedy*, London, 200.

<sup>74</sup> Finglass (2011) 452-453. Finglass also remarks that it is rare for the Chorus to react in such a manner (he calls it "a startling intervention"), which is why it is important to acknowledge these verses and not gloss over them like Heath does.

defends his pride by finally appealing to justice (1125). Menelaus responds by asking a question very reminiscent of Creon:<sup>75</sup>

δίκαια γὰρ τόνδ' εὐτυχεῖν κτείναντά με;                      So it is just that he who murdered me should prosper?  
(1126)

Instead of using this opportunity to make a point about the meaning of justice as Antigone would have done, Teucer reacts purely to κτείναντα and contends that Menelaus hardly appears murdered to him, deliberately sidestepping the real issue. Menelaus retorts that it is only through the intervention of a god that he was saved, which allows Teucer to put forward another argument:

**Μενέλαος**

θεὸς γὰρ ἐκσώζει με, τῷδε δ' οἴχομαι.

**Menelaus**

Because the god rescued me, but as far as he's concerned, I'm gone.

**Τεῦκρος**

μὴ νυν ἀτίμα θεοῦς, θεοῖς σεσωμένος.

**Teucer**

Then do not dishonour the gods now, after you've been saved by the gods.

It is Menelaus' mention of a god that reminds Teucer of this stronger and more conventional argument.<sup>76</sup> It misses its effectiveness, however, because the discussion is moved on before the implication of dishonouring the gods is properly explored. Instead, both men focus on the meaning of enemies and Teucer brings up Menelaus' alleged cheating in the voting during the awarding of Hector's arms (1135). This matter is irrelevant to Ajax's burial, but is once more an evaluation of Menelaus' character by Teucer, even though he has no proof for his cheating.<sup>77</sup> The end of their exchange comes in the form of two short fables,<sup>78</sup> with Teucer's mocking Menelaus', and they conclude in the same antagonistic tone with which they started the scene.

The brief moment before Agamemnon's arrival heralds the second *agon* allows Teucer to

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<sup>75</sup> Cf *Antigone* 520. Creon does not believe that people who died doing evil deserve the same privileges as those who died doing good.

<sup>76</sup> Not burying the dead as an impious act towards the gods has a prominent place in Sophocles' *Antigone* (450-70) and is also mentioned in other tragedies such as Euripides' *The Suppliant Women* (18-19, 561-3) and his *Helen* (1277). It will have an equally prominent place in Odysseus' speech later on in this play. (Finglass (2011) 456).

<sup>77</sup> Blundell states that "Sophocles refrains from taking sides on the point" and there is no evidence in the play that Ajax was actually cheated (Blundell (1989) 89-90).

<sup>78</sup> For the rare uses of fables in tragedy, see Finglass (2011) 459-460.

make the corpse into a site for supplication by Ajax's son and wife. It is the Chorus that recognizes another important reason for burial at that moment, which is absent in the *Antigone*:

ἀλλ' ὡς δύνασαι, Τεῦκρε, ταχύννας  
σπεῦσον κοίλην κάπετόν τιν' ἰδεῖν  
τῷδ', ἔνθα βροτοῖς τὸν ἀείμνηστον  
τάφον εὐρώεντα καθέξει.

But you, Teucer, hurry as quickly as you can to  
find a hollow trench for him,  
where he shall occupy a dank tomb,  
a lasting memorial for mortals.

(1164-1167)

Ajax's grave will be an ἀείμνηστον τάφον, a place that will ensure his legacy in the minds of future generations. Unlike Polyneices', Ajax's burial and his memory will have an important cultural function. The cult of Ajax was to be an important feature in Athens in the fifth century BC and in this scene, the audience is reminded of what rests on Teucer's success or failure.<sup>79</sup> Ajax needs to be buried in order to achieve his heroic status that will still be significant even centuries after his death.<sup>80</sup> The arrangement of the supplication also aids Teucer's position in the conflict. There is pathos in the image of the dead warrior protecting his young son and Teucer once more shows his loyalty and determination in arranging his brother's funeral.<sup>81</sup> It is also interesting to note that even death has not completely robbed Ajax of his power. Eurysaces needs to protect the body,<sup>82</sup> but through his act of supplication the body itself becomes a sacred place, capable of protecting its suppliants by putting into action the curse spoken by Teucer in this scene if anyone attempts to remove Eurysaces or the corpse from their places.<sup>83</sup> Menelaus' claim that he is finally powerful enough to rule Ajax now seems to be inaccurate.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> March (1993) 27.

<sup>80</sup> For an analysis of how Ajax's heroization and subsequent status as a cult hero begin to take shape at this moment, see Henrichs, A. (1993), 'The Tomb of Aias and the Prospect of Hero Cult in Sophokles', *Classical Antiquity* 12, 170f.

<sup>81</sup> Heath (1987) 201.

<sup>82</sup> Teucer urges Eurysaces to hold on to the body of Ajax (1171-1172; 1180-1181) and to throw himself on top of it when an enemy comes to remove him in order to get to the corpse. For the double meaning of the corpse also protecting Eurysaces, see n84.

<sup>83</sup> Burian, P. (1972), 'Supplication and Hero Cult in Sophocles' Ajax', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 13, 152-154.

<sup>84</sup> Henrichs points out that when Teucer tells Eurysaces ἔχ' αὐτόν, ὃ παῖ, καὶ φύλασσε (1180), he does not tell his nephew to protect the corpse, but that in the context of suppliance, φυλάσσειν "specifies the suppliant's physical attachment to the locus of suppliance where he abides, as well as his ritual attention to the supernatural power that protects him" (Henrichs (1993) 166-167). Rather than Eurysaces protecting the body, it is just as much the other way around: Ajax is capable of protecting his son. Finglass, however, disagrees and believes φυλάσσειν lacks this nuance, because its object in this verse is πλόκον (1179) (Finglass (2011) 468). Perhaps Henrichs indeed overstates his case, but the curse and the ritualistic elements in this scene do seem to indicate that a special bond is created between Ajax and his suppliants.

The second *agon* is notable for the fact that it contains many statements that are irrelevant to the burial.<sup>85</sup> Agamemnon's entire speech focuses on the same issue Menelaus and Teucer have discussed, namely the question of whether the Atreidae were Ajax's commanders or not and with whom lays the most power. Agamemnon adds to the charges Teucer's tone and his insults towards Menelaus. If one read his speech out of context, one would not be able to discern that the issue at stake was a burial. The fact that Agamemnon does not even deign to mention the subject of their conflict shows his belief in his own superiority. He begins his speech by diminishing Teucer and Ajax as men. He calls Teucer the son of a captive woman (1228), someone who is nothing (1231) and a slave (1235). His first argument for disallowing Ajax's funeral (implicit, since he does not mention the burial) is that Ajax was nothing special in the Greek army. Agamemnon appears to believe that a burial is something to be earned and not a fundamental right, and Ajax was not special enough to earn it after his attempt to murder the Greek leaders:

ποῖου κέκραγας ἀνδρὸς ᾧδ' ὑπέφρονα,	Of what kind of man are you shouting such arrogant words?
ποῦ βάντος ἢ ποῦ στάντος οὔπερ οὐκ ἐγώ;	Where did he go or stand where I did not?
οὐκ ἄρ' Ἀχαιοῖς ἄνδρες εἰσὶ πλὴν ὅδε;	Have the Greeks then no other men except him?
(1236-1238)	

Ajax's actions were not sufficient to wipe out the record of his destructive madness and rage just before his death. With these questions, though, Agamemnon unwittingly paves the way for Ajax's rehabilitation. By asking Teucer to justify his attachment to his brother, he makes the audience think about Ajax's qualities as well. It invalidates the rest of his speech, because although he makes a sensible point about respecting a majority verdict (1242-1249), his arguments never take hold. Agamemnon fears that if the kind of crimes Ajax committed go unpunished, the laws and by extension the state would be in danger (1245-1249). It is again an argument that revolves around authority, but Agamemnon is right in pointing out the severity of Ajax's actions and the danger they posed to the army. However, he fails to justify the exposure of the body as an appropriate punishment for these crimes. The sense in his argument is undermined by what follows. Agamemnon goes on to illustrate his idea of rule, which is similar to Menelaus'. There are leaders and those who obey them. Agamemnon equates Ajax with a μέγας βοῦς (1253),

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<sup>85</sup> Instead, it is filled with "specious but irrelevant maxims, with extravagant insults, and with threats" (Heath (1987) 201).

reducing him to nothing more than his brute strength. Although Ajax has shown himself to be much more complex than that, Agamemnon does not give him credit for his intelligence. He puts Ajax in the category of those men who lack the capacity to be anything other than followers or blunt instruments that need to be kept in line by those in charge.<sup>86</sup>

Agamemnon gives one additional reason why Teucer should not labour on behalf of his brother:

ὄς τὰνδρὸς οὐκέτ' ὄντος, ἀλλ' ἤδη σκιᾶς,	Although he is no more, but already a shade,
θαρσῶν ὑβρίζεις κάξελευθεροστομεῖς.	you daringly insult us and you speak too freely.
(1257-1258)	

Ajax is a σκιά now and he can no longer protect Teucer as he did when he was still living. Fighting for Ajax's burial puts Teucer in a dangerous position and Agamemnon warns him of that. He himself clearly cannot fathom the loyalty Ajax inspires in his brother or the importance of the burial. To Agamemnon, this whole conflict is about power and his own ability to crush a dissenting voice in his army by silencing him (1255-1256) or making him unreliable and worthless as a person, a barbarian whose language cannot be understood by civilized men (1259-1263).

Teucer makes a more balanced reply to Agamemnon than he did to Menelaus. He focuses on two points: Agamemnon's claim that Ajax was nothing special and Agamemnon's insults aimed at Teucer's family. He starts his speech with an apostrophe aimed at Ajax, while lamenting to the loss of χάρις (1267) towards the dead. Teucer again does not mention the gods in his reply to Agamemnon nor an existing universal right to burial for all the dead. Finglass considers this unused argument of divine law "the most obvious buttress to [Teucer's] case"<sup>87</sup> and finds that with Teucer's chosen strategy, he "provides a less effective vindication of his half-brother than he might have done"<sup>88</sup>. But perhaps criticizing Teucer's omission of this strongest argument is missing the point of his defence. Antigone was in favour of burying Polyneices no matter what his faults or crimes might have been.<sup>89</sup> Teucer does not want to earn his brother's burial on the

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<sup>86</sup> Like Agamemnon believes that those with only brute strength (the oxen) should be kept in line by intelligent leaders (with a whip), Creon also uses an animal-metaphor to describe Antigone in *Antigone* 477-478, where he likens her to a horse that needs to be broken. (Finglass (2011) 485-486).

<sup>87</sup> Finglass (2011) 488.

<sup>88</sup> Finglass (2011) 489.

<sup>89</sup> Antigone never denies that Polyneices was a traitor or that he was wrong to march on Thebes, but she insists on his burial, because he is family (514-517) and because she believes that Hades required the rites nonetheless (519). She

basis that anyone, regardless of their character, valour or importance, would have gotten one. He wishes to gain the right to bury his brother because Ajax deserves a burial on account of his excellence, even after his unquestionably problematic actions. Rehabilitating him after his madness is equally important to burying him at all. Ajax's heroic status demands a restoration of his honour, which requires the burial to be his entitlement, granted as *χάρις* for his life.

Teucer attempts to secure this rehabilitation of his brother by bringing up two very specific instances, replying directly to Agamemnon's question of what Ajax had achieved during his life that was so extraordinary (1236-1238). The first situation was when Ajax rescued Agamemnon while the ships were burning (1273-1279). Agamemnon was:

ἤδη τὸ μηδὲν ὄντας ἐν τροπῇ δορός,  
(1275) by then reduced to nothing in the turning of battle

The only thing that saved him from becoming actually nothing, as Agamemnon claims Ajax is now (1257) and Teucer has always been (1231<sup>90</sup>), was Ajax's brave intervention. The second occasion Teucer mentions is when Ajax took up Hector's challenge for man-to-man combat after a drawing of lots (1283-1287), something which the Atreidae failed to do with honour. Not only did Ajax thus win more glory than Agamemnon, but Teucer himself shared that glory as well. He specifically mentions being with his brother during those events (1288).

The second half of Teucer's speech is devoted to his own standing and worthiness, directed to combat Agamemnon's insults aimed at his family. Finglass considers this an answer to "an irrelevant charge"<sup>91</sup>, but Bowra and Heath recognize that Teucer's authority as Ajax's advocate is relevant if he wishes to be taken seriously by anyone.<sup>92</sup> Especially given Menelaus' and Agamemnon's unrelenting attempts to make him seem like nothing and a slave, Teucer needs to reply to these accusations, defending both his own lineage as well as Ajax's, while simultaneously denouncing Agamemnon's (1291-1303). He is able to turn this celebration of his

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does not justify his actions or make any attempt to rehabilitate him on the basis of past excellence. He deserves and requires burial because he is her brother and because the gods demand it, not because certain actions during his life negate his treacherous attempt to seize power in Thebes.

<sup>90</sup> Agamemnon tells Teucer οὐδὲν ὄν τοῦ μηδὲν ἀντίεσθης ὕπερ (1231): "you who are nothing have made a stand on behalf of him who is also nothing".

<sup>91</sup> Finglass (2011) 488.

<sup>92</sup> Bowra (1944) 55. Heath (1987) 202. However, to call this *agon*, like Heath does, "an overwhelming rhetorical victory" for Teucer is perhaps taking it too far. Finglass is right when he points out that Teucer ends his speech with "a final, futile threat" and "a wildly exaggerated assertion of his own capacity to inflict harm" (488). There are still flaws on both sides of the debate.

own family into an additional argument, namely that a noble man, born of noble parents (1304-1305), would bring shame (1305: αἰσχύνοιμι) on his relative by not fighting to bury him. It is again a defence of Ajax's honour. Teucer cannot stand by while Agamemnon humiliates his brother in word and deed.

After Teucer's speech has called to mind the figure of Ajax before his madness and downfall, it is up to Odysseus to find a solution to the conflict that will allow Ajax's body to be buried without robbing the Atreidae of their power. He appears suddenly and begins by neutrally assessing the situation. Agamemnon tells him about Teucer's wish to bury Ajax, but he is characteristically more concerned that this is an act πρὸς βίαν ἐμοῦ (1327) rather than giving his reasons for denying the burial. Odysseus first emphasizes that he is a *philos* of Agamemnon (1328-1329) (and Agamemnon acknowledges this in 1330-1332) before setting down his arguments in favour of burial. In his speech, he turns to traditional morality and ethics to underline his position.<sup>93</sup>

His first argument is that Agamemnon is doing harm to justice (1334-1335). Although Teucer briefly mentioned justice in his debate with Menelaus, this is the first time the issue is actually explored. Other than Antigone, Creon, Teucer, Menelaus and Agamemnon, Odysseus shows himself capable of knowing how to balance friendship and enmity towards one person simultaneously without devaluing either one of those concepts.<sup>94</sup> For Odysseus, Ajax can be both ἔχθιστος στρατοῦ (1336) and ἄριστον Ἀργείων (...) πλὴν Ἀχιλλέως (1340-1341). This latter qualification means that Agamemnon cannot dishonour him:

ὥστ' οὐκ ἂν ἐνδίκως γ' ἀτιμάζοιτο σοί·	So he cannot justly be dishonoured by you:
οὐ γάρ τι τοῦτον, ἀλλὰ τοὺς θεῶν νόμους	Because it is not him, but the laws of the gods
φθείροις ἄν. ἄνδρα δ' οὐ δίκαιον, εἰ θάνοι,	you would destroy. It is not just to harm a good
βλάπτειν τὸν ἐσθλόν, οὐδ' ἐὰν μισῶν κυρῆς.	man, if he's dead, not even if you happen to hate him.

(1342-1345)

In contrast to Antigone, however, Odysseus still seems to qualify to whom the θεῶν νόμοι actually apply. If a man is ἄριστος and ἐσθλός, it is not just to hurt him after his death. This implies, like others characters have already put forward as well, that under certain circumstances, for example when a man is not just an enemy but also inherently evil and not ἐσθλός at all,

<sup>93</sup> Finglass (2011) 502-503, Heath (1987) 203.

<sup>94</sup> Blundell (1989) 96.

denying a burial would be appropriate.<sup>95</sup> It is Ajax's nobility that spares him this fate.

Agamemnon tries to raise some objections, but it becomes clear that when confronted directly on the issue of the burial, he has not even one good reason to forbid it. He contends that it is not easy for a ruler to be εὐσεβής (1350) and that a good man would have followed the orders of one in authority (1352), implying that Ajax could never be truly ἐσθλός. His attempt to turn this debate to an area on which he is on stronger footing – his own power and authority over Ajax – is effectively shut down by Odysseus' παῦσαι (1353). To Odysseus, the issue of power is completely immaterial, even though the two debates in the play between Teucer and the Atreidae have largely dealt with this concept. He adds a consolation to Agamemnon: κρατεῖς τοι τῶν φίλων νικώμενος (1353). His authority will not be diminished if he grants a favour to his *philoí*.

Odysseus then changes tactics, having realized that his moral arguments are not potent enough to convince Agamemnon. They are strong enough to make credible Odysseus' own position as a defender of Ajax and simultaneously a friend of Agamemnon, but his justifications are not capable of instilling the same moral values in Agamemnon, who remains incredulous that one person can both be an ἐχθρὸς ἀνὴρ (1355), yet γενναῖος (1355). Odysseus therefore abandons his appeal to the laws of the gods and Ajax's nobility, and focuses instead on the utility that burying Ajax will provide both himself and Agamemnon: Agamemnon would be seen as just in front of all the Greeks (1363), which would be the kind of public acknowledgment that a ruler values. When Agamemnon questions whether Odysseus is urging him to bury the corpse, Odysseus replies:

ἔγωγε· καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἐνθάδ' ἴξομαι.

Yes, because I myself shall arrive at that need.

(1365)

Odysseus considers the prospect of his own future burial, thus presenting a unique argument by calling attention to the fact that everyone will need to be granted burial eventually. This way, he reflects on his own mortality<sup>96</sup> and also allies himself with Ajax, who now occupies a state that one day all men will occupy. Odysseus is capable of recognizing similarities between them, while Agamemnon's egocentric vision forbids him from doing the same. He now believes Odysseus speaks from purely selfish motives (1366), but relents anyway, permitting the burial on the

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<sup>95</sup> Blundell (1989) 97.

<sup>96</sup> Which Odysseus has done in the prologue as well: ὁρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν / εἶδωλ' ὅσοιπερ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν. (125-126): "Because I see that all we who live are nothing more than phantoms or a fleeting shadow."



grounds that Odysseus has earned this χάρις for his friendship (1371). His own opinion stays unaltered: Ajax remains an enemy to him (1372-1373).

The subsequent burial shows that Odysseus is alone in his capability of transcending enmity. Although Teucer gracefully admits he was wrong in his estimation of Odysseus (1381-1388), he is unable to keep from aiming one final curse at the Atreidae (1389-1392), even though there is no active conflict between them anymore.<sup>97</sup> Despite his reconciliation with Teucer, Odysseus is still excluded from Ajax's funeral:

σὲ δ', ὦ γεραιοῦ σπέρμα Λαέρτου πατρός,	But, child of your old father Laertes,
τάφου μὲν ὄκνῳ τοῦδ' ἐπιψάειν ἔαν,	I hesitate to allow you to touch this burial,
μὴ τῷ θανόντι τοῦτο δυσχερὲς ποιῶ.	in order to avoid doing something offensive to the dead.

(1393-1395)

Ajax holds on to his anger even in death and is capable of influencing his own burial from beyond the grave.<sup>98</sup> March thinks it is not so much Ajax's ongoing resentment that is responsible for the exclusion of Odysseus, but rather believes that Sophocles intended to have Ajax as the absolute focal point of this final scene and that Odysseus therefore "must now give way to the greater figure".<sup>99</sup> Roberts, however, believes Odysseus' exclusion serves to illuminate Ajax's character one final time.<sup>100</sup> He has shown himself as an unforgiving and stubborn Homeric hero throughout the narrative and in death he remains powerful and unchanged. His rejection of Odysseus also prefigures the Homeric tradition in which Ajax refuses to speak to Odysseus in the underworld.<sup>101</sup> Roberts also theorizes that with Odysseus' exclusion, the audience is partly excluded from the funeral as well.<sup>102</sup> Odysseus has been the most sympathetic character, he was there when the action commenced in the first scene and he resolved the conflict to make the final scene happen. He is "the eyes and ears" of the audience and therefore stands closest to us.<sup>103</sup> When he is not allowed to be a part of the final burial, it shows that there is a gap between the

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<sup>97</sup> See Finglass (2011) 515.

<sup>98</sup> His remaining anger can also be seen in Teucer's description of warm black blood still emanating from the corpse (1411-1413) (Finglass (2011) 522-523). It also gives Ajax's corpse a strangely supernatural quality, since a normal body would have stopped bleeding fairly soon after death had set in.

<sup>99</sup> March (1993) 13.

<sup>100</sup> Roberts, D. (1993), 'The Frustrated Mourner: Strategies of Closure in Greek Tragedy' in R.M. Rosen, J. Farrell (edd.) in *Nomodeiktēs: Greek studies in Honor of Martin Ostwald*, Ann Arbor, 583-584.

<sup>101</sup> Roberts (1993) 584. (Homer, *Odyssee* 11.553-64)

<sup>102</sup> Roberts (1993) 585.

<sup>103</sup> Roberts (1993) 584.

dead and the living that cannot be bridged by any reconciliation. It is an effect that makes Ajax seem more mysterious, more out of reach. Roberts' ideas seem more fitting to the play as a whole. March's notion that Ajax needs to be centre stage is somewhat invalidated by the fact that he has dominated the action even when he was dead. His corpse occupied a central position on the stage, surrounded by suppliants, and will hardly have been forgotten by the audience. Furthermore, Teucer's final speech served to rehabilitate him and provide an image of Ajax as the hero he was before his madness. He has not been overshadowed by other characters. Even Odysseus, although he played a pivotal role, exalted his greatness at almost every turn. Instead, the exclusion of Odysseus complements the outcome of the narrative. Although the burial is accomplished, Agamemnon and Menelaus never gain insight in their wrongness and they are not punished for their cruelty. Teucer remains vengeful even after having gotten what he wanted and the burial itself is only granted because of Odysseus' cleverly chosen arguments, rather than on the basis of Ajax's own excellence. It is fitting that Ajax himself remains equally unchanged and Odysseus' exclusion serves as a reminder that all is not entirely well.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Blundell (1989) 104-105.

## Chapter 3: *The Suppliant Women*

*The Suppliant Women*, like the *Ajax*, has a diptych structure and its first half is taken up by the conflict about and the recovery of the Argive dead following the battle between Eteocles and Polyneices, while the second half deals with the actual burial of the corpses and the effects of grief on the survivors. On the surface, it seems to be a play about one of Athens' finest hours, in which it intervened on behalf of justice and piety in the conflict between Argos and Thebes and restored not only the dead to their families, but also Greek values to those who neglected them. This interpretation of *The Suppliant Women* as "an encomium of Athens"<sup>105</sup> has not made it popular among critics. Fitton calls it "odd and apparently unsatisfactory"<sup>106</sup>, while Gamble claims that after finishing *The Suppliant Women*, the reader is left with a "vague uneasiness" stemming from the fact that it is nearly impossible to give a definitive meaning of the play without neglecting or rejecting several parts of it.<sup>107</sup> Some scholars, however, defend the play's celebration of Athens as fitting considering the historical circumstances: shortly before the production of *The Suppliant Women*, the Theban-led Boeotians had refused the Athenians access to their dead following the battle of Delium.<sup>108</sup> This and the lengthy war Athens had been engaged in may have inspired Euripides to write a patriotic play, unequivocal in its praise of his city.<sup>109</sup> Others have argued that such uncritical approval is wholly unlike Euripides and search the play for irony and a hidden meaning.<sup>110</sup> Their view is that Theseus and his war are not as praiseworthy as they initially appear.

The conflict in *The Suppliant Women* is essentially one between three rulers: the failed king Adrastus who (unsuccessfully) supplicates Theseus, the leader of a democratic Athens, for aid and Creon (who communicates solely through a herald), who refuses to return the Argive dead. In this chapter, I plan on studying their arguments in the debates held throughout the first

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<sup>105</sup> This phrase was used by a scholiast to describe the contents of the play (Kovacs, D. (ed. and trans.) (1998), *Euripides: Suppliant Women, Electra, Heracles*, Cambridge, 3).

<sup>106</sup> Fitton, J.W. (1961), 'The Suppliant Women and the Herakleidae of Euripides: I. The Suppliant Women', *Hermes* 69, 430.

<sup>107</sup> Gamble, R.B. (1970), 'Euripides' "Suppliant Women": Decision and Ambivalence', *Hermes* 98, 385-386.

<sup>108</sup> Toher, M. (2001), 'Euripides' 'Suppliants' and the Social Function of Funeral Ritual', *Hermes* 129, 342 and Thucydides 4.97-101.

<sup>109</sup> For this view, see, for example, Zuntz, G. (1955), *The Political Plays of Euripides*, Manchester and Toher (2001) 342-343.

<sup>110</sup> See Fitton (1961) 437f and Greenwood, L.H.G. (1953), *Aspects of Euripidean tragedy*, Cambridge, 92-120. Greenwood is convinced that Euripides in writing *The Suppliant Women* was especially motivated by his hatred of war, no matter how justified, which would have been obvious to the more discerning members of the audience.

half of the play to see whether, as some scholars have argued, Theseus is indeed the prime example of how a benevolent and democratic ruler uses his power to win a justified war or whether he is just as capable of turning the burial conflict into a reproachable display of authority as characters in Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Ajax* have done.

The play begins with Aethra's introduction of the events and her description of the suppliants and their mission. Instead of one corpse and one voice calling for its burial, Adrastus is accompanied by the mothers of the seven generals to secure the funerals of all the fallen Argives. Aethra is quick to frame the conflict as a struggle between οἱ κρατοῦντες<sup>111</sup> (18) and the powerless. She recognizes Creon is acting against the laws of the gods (19) and experiences both pity for the suppliants themselves (34-35) as well as reverence for their status (36). But although she feels bound to them by a δεσμὸν ἄδεσμον (32) and clearly identifies with them, she knows the decision is up to her son Theseus and he will have the choice of removing them or helping them by doing ὅσῳ τῷ (40). Her own preference is unambiguous to the audience, but Theseus' decision can still go both ways.

Before Theseus' arrival, the Chorus of the mothers of the Seven illustrates the impact the grief of having to leave their sons unburied has had on them. They are physically destroyed by mourning (49-51) and emphasize Aethra's connection to them as a fellow mother (55-59). Although Aethra herself has stated that the decision to help the suppliants is left to her son, the Chorus recognizes that she herself also holds some power (66: τῷ σθένει) through him, setting up her intervention after Theseus rejects Adrastus' supplication.

Upon his arrival, Theseus first engages his mother Aethra to discover the objective of the suppliants, but she makes way for Adrastus to tell his story (109). Theseus addresses Adrastus in a rather brusque manner, cutting off his weeping by demanding speech (110-112).<sup>112</sup> It is an abrupt shift from the sympathetic and female opening to this discussion between men. Theseus begins by questioning the Argive king on his purpose and the war he waged. It immediately becomes clear that Theseus does not feel nearly as connected to the fate of Argive dead as his mother. When Adrastus tells him that he has lost the ἄνδρας Ἀργείων ἄκρους (118), Theseus' reply is simple and impersonal:

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<sup>111</sup> The Greek text of *The Suppliant Women* is taken from Collard, C. (1975), *Euripides: Supplices Volume I & II*, Groningen.

<sup>112</sup> Collard (1975) II: 131-132.

τοιαῦθ' ὁ τλήμων πόλεμος ἐξεργάζεται.

The cruel war caused these things.

(119)

Although Theseus admits that Adrastus' request of Creon was ὄσιος (123), he does not see why Creon's refusal to return the corpses has brought Adrastus to Athens. In this scene, he shows that the disrespect to the gods and the laws that caused the bodies of the Argive warriors to remain unburied is not a cause of distress to him on its own. The circumstances of their deaths matter greatly. Theseus quizzes Adrastus on whether Argos cannot take care of its own business (127), whether this request is Adrastus' alone (129), on the cause of the war (131), on Adrastus' interpretation of the Delphic oracle (145) and his use of his own seers (155). Adrastus is forced to keep to short replies that showcase his own inadequacies as a general, until he is at last given the opportunity to explain his request for Athens' help more fully.

Adrastus' appeal is one for pity. He describes the plight of the mothers and sees the deaths of the young men as a subversion of the natural order: instead of the sons burying their mothers, it is the mothers who have to tend to the bodies of their children (174-175). It is an emotional argument, devoid of mention of the gods or the laws. Theseus has thus far shown himself to be ruled by λόγος and would perhaps have been more amenable to a rational rather than an emotional appeal.<sup>113</sup> Adrastus also reacts to Theseus' lack of involvement in the conflict between Argos and Thebes by bringing into play what Collard calls “a general ‘humanitarian’ argument”.<sup>114</sup> According to Adrastus, a rich man should always watch those in the opposite situation, presumably to lend them aid, and Athens is in a unique position to do this:

πόλις δὲ σὴ  
μόνη δύναιτ' ἂν τόνδ' ὑποστῆναι πόνον·  
τά τ' οἰκτρὰ γὰρ δέδορκε καὶ νεανίαν  
ἔχει σὲ ποιμέν' ἐσθλόν· οὐ χρεῖα πόλεις  
πολλαὶ διώλοντ', ἐνδεεῖς στρατηλάτου.

(188-192)

Your city  
alone could undertake this labour:  
For it looks on pitiful things and  
has you as a young and good leader: through the lack of  
such a general many cities were destroyed.

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<sup>113</sup> Burian describes the discrepancy between Theseus' “kosmos of intellect” and the “kosmos of emotion” embodied by the suppliant women, Aethra and Adrastus. Adrastus' appeal is rooted firmly in the kosmos of emotion and will thus be ineffective. (Burian, P. (1985), ‘Logos and pathos: the Politics of the Suppliant Women’ in P. Burian (ed.), *Directions in Euripidean criticism: a collection of essays*, Durham, 130-132).

<sup>114</sup> Collard (1975) II: 154.

Adrastus believes that in this case, Athens alone has the strength and the leader to accomplish the return of the bodies.

At first glance, Theseus' reply appears to have little bearing on the current situation.<sup>115</sup> He begins with his own view that mortals have been given good things by the gods, such as speech, food, shelter and divination (203-215), before turning suddenly and harshly on Adrastus by putting him in the class of those arrogant and foolish enough to disregard the gods. (216-218). He rebukes Adrastus for allying himself with the foreigners Polyneices and Tydeus:

χρῆν γὰρ οὔτε σώματα	The wise man should
ἄδικα δίκαιοις τὸν σοφὸν συμμιγνύναι,	never mix unjust bodies with just ones,
εὐδαιμονοῦντας δ' ἐς δόμους κτᾶσθαι φίλους.	but should acquire fortunate friends for his house.
κοινὰς γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τὰς τύχας ἡγούμενος	Because the god, confusing their common fates,
τοῖς τοῦ νοσοῦντος πῆμασιν διώλεσε	destroys through the calamities of the unfortunate one
τὸν συννοσοῦντα κοῦδὲν ἡδίκηκότα.	his companion, who never committed injustices.
(223-228)	

Adrastus should not have mingled with bad allies and Theseus will follow his own rules, thereby rejecting Adrastus, because mingling with such an unfortunate man (τοῦ νοσοῦντος) might prove to be contagious. Theseus is concerned about his own fate and about the possibility of suffering for the aid he lends Adrastus. At no point have his thoughts turned to the bodies of the fallen or their mothers. The emotional aspect of the conflict is entirely lost on him.<sup>116</sup> Instead, he analyses Adrastus' mistakes and the mistakes of the young men that led him:

νέοις παραχθεῖς, οἵτινες τιμώμενοι	Led astray by young men, who enjoy being held in
χαίρουσι πολέμους τ' αὐξάνουσ' ἄνευ δίκης,	esteem and multiplying wars without justice,
φθειρόντες ἀστούς, ὁ μὲν ὅπως στρατηλατῆ,	destroying their citizens; one wants to command an army,
ὁ δ' ὡς ὑβρίζῃ δύναμιν ἐς χεῖρας λαβῶν,	another to run riot after having taken power into his hands,
ἄλλος δὲ κέρδους οὔνεκ', οὐκ ἀποσκοπῶν	yet another wants gain, not minding whether
τὸ πλῆθος εἴ τι βλάπτεται πάσχον τόδε.	the people are somehow hurt, receiving such treatment.
(232-237)	

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<sup>115</sup> Fitton: "[Theseus is] anxious to parade his comforting cosmic vision." (Fitton (1961) 430). He sees this, among other character traits of Theseus, as evidence that there is irony in *The Suppliant Women*.

<sup>116</sup> Gamble argues that Theseus' present εὐδαιμονία renders him incapable of understanding Adrastus' negative world view, contributing to his inability to connect with the suppliants. (Gamble (1970) 389)

The war Adrastus and the Seven engaged in was ἄνευ δίκης and Theseus takes this as a point of departure to start a diatribe on the different kinds of men. According to him, young men are eager to seize positions that will provide them with military control, power and profit, regardless of the consequences to themselves or the people they lead. Theseus, himself a young man, wants to establish his uniqueness in not reaching for these things.<sup>117</sup> He worries about what he would tell the citizens of Athens if he took as an ally such an unfortunate man as Adrastus (247) and seemingly forgets that his own war against Thebes would not be for power or ἄνευ δίκης, because he would be motivated by the recovery of the bodies. His final words contain a brusque dismissal of Adrastus and the confirmation that Theseus still does not feel a duty towards the Argives:

<p>χαίρων ἴθ'· εἰ γὰρ μὴ βεβούλευσαι καλῶς αὐτὸς πιέζειν τὴν τύχην, ἥμᾶς λίσαν.<sup>118</sup></p> <p>(248-249)</p>	<p>Farewell, go! Because if you have not been well-advised, bear your own fate, but do not weigh us down with it.</p>
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Morwood may be correct when he argues that Theseus had the right to reject the suppliants this way,<sup>119</sup> but Theseus' tone throughout his speech is problematic. He shows himself to be judgemental<sup>120</sup> and bases his rejection almost fully on Adrastus' failure as a general and his own reluctance to help such an unfortunate man. Even though Theseus' reasons may be rational and within the bounds of the law (divine or otherwise), his decision is still disappointing.<sup>121</sup>

Adrastus is unimpressed with the reply; he did not ask Theseus for his condemnation, but for his help (253-256). Just before he leaves, he has one final argument: if Theseus is unwilling to help for the sake of the Argive mothers or the dead themselves, perhaps he is willing to do so because he and Adrastus share the same ancestors (263-266). It is a desperate attempt to once more establish a connection between them.

Theseus then notices his mother's distress at the continued pleas of the suppliants and

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<sup>117</sup> On the contrast between young and old throughout the play and Theseus' atypical youthfulness, see Shaw, M.H. (1982), 'The ἦθος of Theseus in 'The Suppliant Women'', *Hermes* 110, 5f.

<sup>118</sup> The Greek in these two verses is very problematic. According to Collard, πιέζειν is "uncertain in sense and apparently without construction" and λίσαν is probably not genuine. The whole verse "lacks meaning or grammar". No conjectures are completely convincing. (On the problems and possible solutions of this passage, see Collard (1975) II: 174-175). Theseus' words are probably supposed to reflect that Adrastus caused his own problems and must therefore solve them himself, instead of putting the burden on others. I have tried to capture that meaning in the translation.

<sup>119</sup> Morwood, J. (2012), 'Euripides' Suppliant Women, Theseus and Athenocentrism', *Mnemosyne* 65, 555.

<sup>120</sup> Greenwood (1953) 108.

<sup>121</sup> Even Zuntz, a fervent defender of Theseus and the play itself, recognizes: "Theseus has demonstrated that he is under no obligation to succour Adrastus: [the suppliants] have no argument to oppose to his; but here is their helpless despair: Theseus is wrong" (Zuntz (1955) 10).

although Aethra remains reluctant to get involved, she finally speaks her mind, because she believes her suggestion will benefit her son and the city (293). Her task is to combine her own pity with rational arguments that will appeal to Theseus. Her first argument hinges on the laws of the gods, a point that has been neglected during the exchange between Adrastus and Theseus:

<p>ἐγὼ δέ σ', ὦ παῖ, πρῶτα μὲν τὰ τῶν θεῶν σκοπεῖν κελεύω μὴ σφαλῆς ἀτιμάσας· (301-302)</p>	<p>First, my child, I urge you to mind the will of the gods, so that you are not caused to fall by dishonouring it.</p>
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Interesting is that Aethra does not urge Theseus to mind τὰ τῶν θεῶν for their own sake, but because Theseus will come to harm if he does not. She ties his wellbeing to the appeal of the suppliants and also implicitly compares his actions to Adrastus', who dishonoured the gods and came to ruin.<sup>122</sup> Aethra then states that she would not have intervened if she did not think this opportunity would afford her son a chance of being *τολμηρός* (305) and it would bring him *τιμή* (306). Burying the corpses would be the right thing to do from a political standpoint as well:

<p>κάμοι παραινεῖν οὐ φόβον φέρει, τέκνον, ἄνδρας βιαίους καὶ κατείργοντας νεκροὺς τάφου τε μοίρας καὶ κτερισμάτων λαχεῖν ἐς τήνδ' ἀνάγκην σῆ καταστῆσαι χερί, νόμιμά τε πάσης συγχέοντας Ἑλλάδος παῦσαι· τὸ γάρ τοι συνέχον ἀνθρώπων πόλεις τοῦτ' ἔσθ', ὅταν τις τοὺς νόμους σώζῃ καλῶς. (307-313)</p>	<p>And it brings me no fear to urge you, child, to use your power to make violent men who deprive the dead of burial and funeral rites perform this necessity and to put a stop to those who frustrate the laws of all Greece: because this, the proper observance of the laws, is what maintains the cities of men.</p>
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Instead of burial being necessary because of the gods, Aethra now names it a Panhellenic custom. Collard recognizes that Aethra wishes to make the burial of the Argive dead an important issue for Athens as well.<sup>123</sup> She mentions that the observance of laws keeps cities together, which is important to Theseus as a ruler. She has now addressed how Theseus' own wellbeing and the integrity of his *polis* are tied up in this conflict.

Her final argument speaks to Theseus' reputation and is the most personal of all. She tells Theseus he will be thought of as being afflicted with *ἀνανδρία* (314) if he abstains from earning

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<sup>122</sup> Burian (1985) 135.

<sup>123</sup> Collard (1975) II: 190.



glory for his city. It is the longest argument of her speech and she drives it home by saying that Theseus has not yet proven himself against men in combat (318-319) and that his country is not known for remaining silent when glory can be won (321-323). Greenwood remarks that Aethra's plea is largely an appeal to Theseus' "vanity"<sup>124</sup> with some "perfunctory words about the religious obligations involved"<sup>125</sup> thrown in at the beginning. Fitton agrees: Aethra began with "ethical hauteur", but then aimed for her son's pride and ego.<sup>126</sup> Burian holds an opposite view. He believes critics like Greenwood and Fitton make the mistake of breaking down Aethra's arguments in "heterogeneous components",<sup>127</sup> while he believes that Theseus' pride and the ethical and political angles of the conflict are all interrelated.<sup>128</sup> He argues that even the appeal to personal pride is in a sense political, because Theseus must also win a *στέφανος εὐκλείας* (315) for the city as well.<sup>129</sup> The religious and political aspects of the matter force Theseus to act and damage to his reputation is the consequence for not doing so. To judge Aethra's ethical argument in verse 301-302 as "perfunctory" is to ignore the prologue of the play, in which Aethra immediately raised religious concerns,<sup>130</sup> but Greenwood and Fitton do have a point when they notice the prominence personal pride takes in Aethra's speech, especially combined with Theseus' reply, which solely responds to this argument. What connects her entire appeal is Theseus' central position and involvement in each of the arguments. She has listened to Theseus' reasons for rejecting Adrastus' supplication and finds the most effective way to respond to them, which consists of showing her son that every part of the conflict (religious, ethical, political and personal) involves him already, even though he has not recognized it.<sup>131</sup> It is not unusual for a participant in a debate concerning burial to pick the arguments most suitable for his or her opponent, even though they do not necessarily think these arguments the most important themselves. Antigone uses a different line of reasoning on her sister than on Creon; Odysseus

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<sup>124</sup> Greenwood (1953) 109.

<sup>125</sup> Greenwood (1953) 108.

<sup>126</sup> Fitton (1961) 431.

<sup>127</sup> Burian (1985) n12 on page 214.

<sup>128</sup> Burian (1985) 135.

<sup>129</sup> Burian (1985) 136.

<sup>130</sup> Cf 19.

<sup>131</sup> Gamble asserts that Theseus' eventual agreement to help is motivated by his recognition of his connection to the suppliants. It is accomplished by Aethra's speech, but Theseus' involvement still differs from that of Aethra and remains based on his reputation rather than the empathy his mother feels (Gamble (1970) 386-387). Gamble also points out that the Athenian audience may not have made a distinction between the motivation to perform an act and the moral result of that act, meaning that although Theseus may not have buried the dead out of piety (but had rather taken on the task to benefit his own reputation), the act itself would still have been perceived as pious by the audience. (Gamble (1970) 402-403)

ends up persuading Agamemnon with practical arguments rather than the moral ones he utilized first. Perhaps Aethra simply modifies some of her own reasons to suit her son's character.<sup>132</sup>

Theseus stands by his judgement of Adrastus (334-336), but now sees that there are more important considerations. The divine or Panhellenic laws are not among these yet, as stated above. Not even Athens seems to be part of the equation. Theseus is persuaded to act on his own personal honour:

πολλὰ γὰρ δράσας καλὰ  
ἔθος τόδ' εἰς Ἑλληνας ἐξεδειξάμην,  
ἀεὶ κολαστὴς τῶν κακῶν καθεστάναι.  
οὐκ οὐκ ἀπαυδᾶν δυνατὸν ἐστὶ μοι πόνους.  
τί γάρ μ' ἐροῦσιν οἳ γε δυσμενεῖς βροτῶν,  
ὄθ' ἢ τεκοῦσα χ' ὑπερορρωδοῦσ' ἐμοῦ  
πρώτη κελεύεις τόνδ' ὑποστῆναι πόνον;  
(339-345)

Because having done many noble deeds,  
I have demonstrated to the Greeks this habit  
of always being the punisher of the evil.  
Therefore it is not possible for me to refuse this labour.  
Because what will the hostile among mortals say of me,  
when you, mother, who fear the most for my safety,  
are the first to order me to undertake this labour?

He not only owes it to his reputation as a hero and to his τιμή,<sup>133</sup> but is also especially motivated because his mother has urged him in public to pursue this mission. Aethra runs the risk of losing her son by encouraging him to help Adrastus and thus becoming like the mothers of the Seven she now sees before her. If even the person who stands to lose the most by Theseus' death still wants him to go to Thebes, he would be all the more a coward for refusing. Not only Aethra's arguments win him over, but the fact that she is the one to present those arguments is significant as well.

Once Theseus has made his decision, he immediately has his plan ready. He himself is very much at the centre of it and the assent of his fellow citizens appears to be somewhat of a formality:

δόξαι δὲ χρήζω καὶ πόλει πάσῃ τόδε.  
δόξει δ' ἐμοῦ θέλοντος· ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου

But I need the whole city to approve this.  
and they will approve, because I wish it: but by sharing

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<sup>132</sup> I agree therefore with Burian's claim that in this conflict "the issues involved are unavoidably complex and inextricably interlocked", but I would also argue that Aethra is very aware of the most effective way to use these issues in persuading her son. The suppliants have already told her about her power over him (65-67) and she introduces the notion of honour for Theseus even before she begins her speech to convince him (293). Her speech itself carefully builds up the arguments to the one that will be most persuasive: Theseus' fear of being found a coward.

<sup>133</sup> On the importance of τιμή to a Greek, see Gamble (1970) 390 n1.



of Argos.

(471-472)

Theseus' lack of connection to Argos is the reason why Athens should stay out of this conflict, according to Creon's mouthpiece. Furthermore, meddling in these matters might lead to trouble for Athens, which should be avoided by a good leader (473-475). The herald next exalts the virtues of peace and its infinite preference over war:

ἡ πρῶτα <sup>138</sup> μὲν Μούσαισι προσφιλεστάτη, Ποιναῖσι δ' ἐχθρά, τέρπεται δ' εὐπαιδία,  χαίρει δὲ πλούτῳ. ταῦτ' ἀφέντες οἱ κακοὶ πολέμους ἀναιρούμεσθα καὶ τὸν ἥσσονα δουλούμεθ', ἄνδρες ἄνδρα καὶ πόλις πόλιν.	Peace, most beloved by the Muses and the enemy of the goddesses of vengeance, delights in a happy group of children and is pleased with wealth. Throwing these things away, we evil men take up wars and enslave the weaker, men enslaving men and cities enslaving cities.
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(489-493)

The herald's image of war (the subjugation of the weaker by the stronger) speaks to Theseus' reluctance to behave like the other young men who rush into wars without thinking about their city. The herald later enforces this connection between youth and reckless war by comparing a ἡγεμῶν θρασύς (508) to a νέος ναύτης (509), who is also inclined to make mistakes.

The final argument of the herald regards the character of the dead. They were destroyed by the gods and rightfully so, he argues:

ἢ νυν φρονεῖν ἄμεινον ἐξάχχει Διός, ἢ θεοὺς δικαίως τοὺς κακοὺς ἀπολλύναι.	Either brag now that you know better than Zeus, or admit that the gods justly destroy the bad.
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(504-505)

According to the herald, the Argives deserved to die and the gods even actively made it happen, as the deaths of Capaneus and Amphiaras<sup>139</sup> demonstrate (496-501). This is not a fact Theseus disputes. The argument is somewhat invalid, however, because it does not touch on the issue of the burial. Just because the Seven acted impiously and rightfully lost their battle does not necessarily mean that they should be denied burial.

Theseus chooses to answer each of the herald's points in turn, starting with the charge that

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<sup>138</sup> The subject of 489 is εἰρήνη from the previous verse.

<sup>139</sup> Although in myth, Amphiaras is usually known for his reluctance to join the expedition. (Collard (1975) II: 243).

Athens has no business interfering in a conflict between Thebes and Argos. Theseus responds to this by turning that argument around: Thebes has no business telling Athens whether it can interfere or not:

οὐκ οἶδ' ἐγὼ Κρέοντα δεσπύζοντ' ἔμοῦ  
οὐδὲ σθένοντα μείζον, ὥστ' ἀναγκάσαι  
δρᾶν τὰς Ἀθήνας ταῦτ'· ἄνω γὰρ ἂν ῥέοι  
τὰ πράγμαθ', οὕτως, εἰ 'πιταξόμεσθα δῆ.

(518-521)

I am not aware that Creon rules me, nor  
that he is more powerful, so that he can force Athens  
to do these things: because rivers would flow backwards  
if we allowed ourselves to be commanded like this.

He is now aware of the role power plays in the conflict and knows that allowing Creon to dictate Athens' actions would be equal to acknowledging that Thebes has power over Athens. This is the point where Theseus has a choice: he can react like the Atreidae in the *Ajax* and focus on authority and dominance throughout his speech, or he can move on to actually talking about the burial. He chooses the latter. Although he refuses to acknowledge Theban dominance, he is also not interested in establishing Athens' power. He emphasizes that he was not the one to start the war (522) and that he is making a peaceful request (525). A refusal will constitute a war, but it will not be one of Athens' choosing. Theseus then moves on to arguments that are directly related to the burial, showing that Athens' involvement is not selfish or motivated by a desire for power, but that this burial is necessary for many different reasons. His first argument is diplomatic and practical: Thebes has already (and justly) vanquished these Argive leaders (528-530). They are dead and there is nothing else to be gained from leaving them exposed. He follows this with an explanation of why burial is important:

ἔασατ' ἤδη γῆ καλυφθῆναι νεκρούς,  
ὄθεν δ' ἕκαστον ἐς τὸ φῶς ἀφίκετο,  
ἐνταῦθ' ἀπελθεῖν, πνεῦμα μὲν πρὸς αἰθέρα,  
τὸ σῶμα δ' ἐς γῆν· οὔτι γὰρ κεκτήμεθα  
ἡμέτερον αὐτὸ πλὴν ἐνοικῆσαι βίον,  
κᾶπειτα τὴν θρέψασαν αὐτὸ δεῖ λαβεῖν.

(531-536)

Allow the corpses to be buried in the earth now,  
and let each element go back to the place from where it  
came into the light, the breath to the air,  
the body to the ground: because in no way do we  
possess our bodies as our own except to live our lives in,  
after which mother earth must take them back.

It is proper that the bodies should return to the earth that gave them life to complete a kind of cosmic circle. Of the plays that revolve around a burial conflict, *The Suppliant Women* is alone in

providing this particular reason. In the words of Theseus, standing in the way of the burial becomes standing in the way of the natural order of things. Another interesting thought he proposes here is that bodies only temporarily belong to the individuals themselves and that at the moment of death, they revert back to belonging to the *θρέψασα*. This implies that harming the bodies is not harming the dead people themselves, since those bodies do not belong to them anymore. It is a pointless thing to do.<sup>140</sup>

This thought that Thebes does not know what it is actually accomplishing by denying burial to the Argives is continued in the next argument:

δοκεῖς κακουργεῖν Ἄργος οὐ θάπτων νεκρούς;	Do you think that you hurt Argos by not burying the dead?
ἦκιστα· πάσης Ἑλλάδος κοινὸν τόδε,	Not at all. It is the business of the whole of Hellas
εἰ τοὺς θανόντας νοσφίσας ὄν χρῆν λαχεῖν	if someone robs the dead of what they need and keeps
ἀτάφους τις ἔξει· δειλίαν γὰρ ἐσφέρει	them unburied: because if this becomes a law, it will
τοῖς ἀλκίμοισιν οὗτος ἦν τεθῆ νόμος.	make cowards of the bravest men.

(537-541)

Burial is granted by the Panhellenic law first introduced by Aethra to convince Theseus and now Theseus uses it against Thebes while also iterating a consequence to breaking such a law: it would turn even the bravest men into cowards.<sup>141</sup> It is similar to the practical argument Odysseus uses in the *Ajax* to persuade Agamemnon.<sup>142</sup>

Theseus then expands more on the idea that refusing burial is pointless. He uses a *reductio ad absurdum*<sup>143</sup> to insult the Thebans for their actions:

κάμοι μὲν ἤλθες δεῖν' ἀπειλήσων ἔπη,	And you have come to threaten me with terrible words,
νεκρούς δὲ ταρβεῖτ', εἰ κρυφήσονται χθονί;	while you are afraid of the dead even if they're buried in the ground?

<sup>140</sup> See Rosivach (1983) 201-203 for the use of this argument in Euripides' *Antigone*, works of Plato and fragments of the tragedian Moschion.

<sup>141</sup> Rosivach considers this argument a contradiction of the argument that the dead are not harmed by posthumous mutilation. He asks: if the dead were not harmed by such abuse, because their bodies no longer belonged to them (as Theseus claims in 531-536), why would living warriors fear exposure after death? (Rosivach (1983) 202). However, not all warriors might share Theseus' rather philosophical ideas about the body returning to the earth after death. Some might still believe the mutilation affected them in the afterlife. And even if they did not, the idea of being exposed after death – to the distress of countrymen and family members – might in itself be frightening enough to deter warriors from entering battle. As such, I fail to see a true contradiction in Theseus' arguments.

<sup>142</sup> Odysseus, however, keeps in mind his own funeral and does not focus on warriors, although his argument is, like Theseus', a warning that future funerals could be in jeopardy if the burial is not granted (1365).

<sup>143</sup> On this and other rhetorical devices present in Theseus' speech, see Collard (1975) II: 247.

τί μὴ γένηται; μὴ κατασκάψωσι γῆν

What do you fear will happen? That they will bring down  
your land

ταφέντες ὑμῶν; ἢ τέκν' ἐν μυχῶ χθονὸς  
φύσωσιν, ἐξ ὧν εἶσί τις τιμωρία;

from their graves? Or that they will father children in the  
recesses of the earth, through whom there shall come  
vengeance?

σκαῖόν γε τὰνάλωμα τῆς γλώσσης τόδε,  
φόβους πονηροῦς καὶ κενοῦς δεδοικέναι.

It was a foolish waste of speech,  
to show that you dread cowardly and empty fears.

(542-548)

Theseus plays into the herald's failure to give a clear reason for the refusal of the burial by presuming that it was a type of cowardice stemming from incredible and foolish beliefs. The only way the Thebans can disprove this absurd claim that they actually fear the dead and the offspring they will produce underneath the earth is, conveniently, by burying the bodies. If they refuse, the idea that they are afraid of the Argive corpses, however ridiculous, stands.

Theseus' final argument is prefaced by a digression on the relationship between mortals and the gods (549-557) of which the essence seems to be that the lives of men are a struggle regardless of whether they are rich or poor and that the gods are unpredictable. Every person has to try his best to please them and burial is part of that:

πῶς οὖν ἂν εἶη; τοὺς ὀλωλότας νεκροῦς  
θάψαι δὸς ἡμῖν τοῖς θέλουσιν εὐσεβεῖν.

Well, what will it be then? Let us,  
who wish to be pious, bury the dead bodies.

(558-559)

Burial is pious and Theseus states that the νόμος παλαιὸς δαιμόνων (563) will not be broken on account of his refusal to act, by force if he must. In his speech, he has used the principles found in the arguments of his mother (piety, Panhellenic custom, the reputation of himself and Athens), and expanded and added to them significantly.<sup>144</sup> He provides us with the most complete exposition on why the dead need to be buried and fully owns his involvement in the conflict.<sup>145</sup> An appeal to his pride was perhaps necessary to win his support, but now Theseus is capable of realizing the importance of securing the burial of the Seven and his own role in that task. In the

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<sup>144</sup> Shaw remarks that Euripides includes this elaborate speech to showcase Theseus' intelligence and complexity (Shaw (1982) 9-10). For example, Theseus adds rational consequences (the refusal of men to fight in future wars) to Aethra's arguments concerning justice, while also making points that rely on nature and metaphysics. He now shows awareness of "the full range of Athenian intellectual life" (Shaw (1982) 10).

<sup>145</sup> Rosivach (1983) 201-202.

second half of the play there is clear evidence that Theseus' speech was not merely rhetoric to justify his war with Thebes. There has been a fundamental change in his involvement, which shows in the fact that he himself washes the bodies of the dead, lays them on their biers and covers them (765-766).<sup>146</sup> The arguments that Theseus puts forward in his speech to the herald were all rational and it is logical that a good leader bases his decision to go to war on such calculated and political arguments rather than an emotional appeal. His actions after the battle, however, demonstrate emotional involvement as well. Theseus' own task (securing the recovery of the dead) has at that point already been accomplished and normally the rather unpleasant job of preparing the corpses for transportation and burial would have fallen to slaves, as Adrastus assumes (762). Yet Theseus chooses to do it himself<sup>147</sup> and also shows newfound generosity towards Adrastus after his return by allowing him to give the funeral oration for the dead (838-856) and demonstrates empathy towards the mothers of the Seven by sparing them the sight of the mutilated bodies of their children (942-946).

In the end, it is not Theseus' arguments but rather his army that decides the conflict with Creon, but even in this military victory Theseus is a good leader. After defeating the Thebans, he displays the restraint, refusing to sack the city and simply leaving with the Argive dead (723-725), exacting no revenge on his enemies like Creon did to his detriment.

Theseus' triumph, however, has an aftermath that has been viewed by some critics as problematic. The mothers of the Seven nearly lose themselves in grief when the bodies are returned to them<sup>148</sup> and the old Iphis witnesses his daughter throw herself on the pyre of the dead Capaneus (1069-1071). About the bones of his perished son Eteoclus, Iphis says:

<p>οὐχ ὡς τάχιστα δῆτ' ἄξειτ' ἐς δόμους          σκότῳ τε δώσεται, ἔνθ' ἀστιταίς ἐμὸν          δέμας γεραίων συντακεῖς ἀποφθερῶ;          τί μ' ὠφελήσει παιδὸς ὀστέων θιγεῖν;</p> <p>(1104-1107)</p>	<p>Take me to my house as soon as possible          and hide me in the dark, where I shall destroy          my old body with fasting, slowly wasting away.          Why will it help me to touch the bones of my son?</p>
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He departs before the ashes arrive. Instances such as these have prompted Greenwood to theorize that Euripides means “to question the common belief that the burial of the dead is so vitally

<sup>146</sup> Gamble (1970) 391, Morwood (2012) 559.

<sup>147</sup> Morwood remarks that Theseus is no longer afraid that the bad fortune of the Argives is infectious, as he did earlier when he refused Adrastus' request for aid and chose not to take him to Thebes (Morwood (2012) 560).

<sup>148</sup> See Greenwood (1953) 114. Seeing the bodies is the πάντων μέγιστον ἄλγος (785).



important a matter”.<sup>149</sup> That would not only be a rather cruel suggestion bearing in mind the historical events at Delium, but also misconstrues the supposed effect a burial was meant to have. Nowhere in *the Suppliant Women* does it say that the recovery of the Seven would entail a cessation of grief. Similarly, the endings of the *Antigone* and the *Ajax* also demonstrate that the accomplished burial does not negate the suffering or the conflict in those plays.<sup>150</sup> The mothers of the Seven recognize that the confrontation with the bodies is both *πικρόν* and *καλόν* (783) and in the end they voice their indebtedness to Theseus.<sup>151</sup> Athens wins glory (779), Theseus’ own honour is doubled (780-781) and an alliance with Argos is created (1191-1195), yet the promise of future war is also made and the continuation of violence is presented as inevitable by Athena (1213-1224). The burial of the Seven is far from “a superstition that brings no benefit either to the dead or to the living”.<sup>152</sup> It is a necessity, as Theseus explained at length to the herald, and the incomplete closure it provides is in keeping with the rest of the play, in which much appears to be ambiguous. Theseus’ initial unexpected refusal, Adrastus’ funeral speech,<sup>153</sup> the reaction of the mothers, the suicide of Evadne and the intervention of Athena are all elements that highlight that *the Suppliant Women* is more complex than a simple encomium of Athens. However, the negative aspects do not govern the play, as Greenwood insists,<sup>154</sup> and in the end, the gratitude of the Argives, expressed by both Adrastus (1176-1179) and the Chorus (1232-1234), is undeniable.

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<sup>149</sup> Greenwood (1953) 102.

<sup>150</sup> The miasma brought about by Polyneices will have been removed, but Antigone, Haemon and Eurydice remain dead, while Creon is left with nothing. Ajax holds on to his anger and there is no forgiveness or understanding between Teucer and the Atreidae.

<sup>151</sup> See Gamble (1970) 396-397. In the final verses of the play, the Chorus urges Adrastus to swear the oath to Theseus and recognizes the Athenians deserve honour for their actions on behalf of the Argives (1232-1234).

<sup>152</sup> Greenwood (1953) 115.

<sup>153</sup> Adrastus’ funeral speech contains several notable inconsistent elements, such as his praise of Capaneus as a particularly modest and humble man (862-871), while his arrogance and hubris led Zeus to strike him down during the battle. For the many different interpretation of the funeral speech, see Morwood (2012) 560 n27.

<sup>154</sup> Greenwood (1953) 117-120.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analysed the burial conflicts in Sophocles' *Antigone*, his *Ajax* and Euripides' *The Suppliant Women* to gain insight into how issues of power cause the inception of these conflicts, shape their development and influence their escalation or resolution. To do so, I have studied the different arguments used in the debates in the plays to find out why those particular justifications were utilized and what their efficacy turned out to be. Additionally, I have looked at lasting difficulties in the interpretation of these tragedies to see whether the dissent among critics can be better understood if we treat the burial conflict as a power struggle.

In the first chapter, Sophocles' *Antigone* showed that the conflict arises because Creon and Antigone have fundamentally different interpretations of *philia*. Creon's sole argument for denying the burial of Polyneices stems from his belief that enemies and friends do not deserve equal treatment, while Antigone does not make a distinction between her two brothers. Her reasons for wanting to secure the burial are much more varied. Throughout the play, her choice of arguments is influenced by the other characters present and by her own goals. When she tries to convince Ismene to join her, she plays on her sister's guilt and love for her brother, emphasizing Polyneices' anger if he remains unburied. Divine laws and the limits of a mortal ruler's power are the focus of her confrontation with Creon, where the issue of the burial is briefly pushed aside for a discussion about authority and obedience. This is when the conflict escalates. Antigone directly challenges Creon's position and her remarks trigger his insecurities about his rule. Creon is well aware that he has only been placed on the throne because of his connection to his (polluted) family members instead of on his own merits. In order to strengthen his position, he places the wellbeing of the city above everything else. Although his intentions at first may have been to protect the city from future traitors, he becomes increasingly tyrannical when Antigone challenges him. All his arguments and actions become focussed on curbing her disobedience. He cannot allow himself to be defied by this young woman and sentences her to death. On her way to her tomb, Antigone puts forward her most honest justification for her actions: Polyneices, as a brother, was irreplaceable to her and therefore deserved her devotion more than a husband or child. Her position is personal rather than an ideology after all, but in no way effective in persuading Creon. Only after he learns from Teiresias that the gods are displeased by his deeds does he alter his course and take on several of Antigone's values: he tends to the dead before the

living and realizes that he is powerless and worth nothing without his family. Viewing the burial conflict in the *Antigone* as a power struggle shows that there are faults and manipulations on both sides of the debate. Antigone is inconsistent and transgressive in her behaviour, bent on showing Creon that he has no authority at all over her, while Creon's obsession with his own rule makes him lose sight of the pollution he causes by ignoring the laws of the gods.

In Sophocles' *Ajax*, Ajax's central position and the audience's personal connection to him influence the burial conflict significantly. Unlike in the *Antigone*, most characters in the *Ajax* do not speak about general moral truths, but specifically consider Ajax's virtues or flaws in order to defend why he deserves a burial or not. For the Atreidae, this quickly turns into a discussion about power and obedience. Ajax's fury was specifically targeted at them and whereas Creon wished to protect his city and punish all those who would betray Thebes, Menelaus especially wants to prove that he can rule Ajax in death, even though he was incapable of doing so in life. This is the cause of the conflict. Denying the burial becomes a way to exact personal vengeance while simultaneously showing power. The escalation happens almost immediately. The tone of both Menelaus and Teucer is insulting, disrespectful and uncompromising. Teucer's main argument to secure his brother's burial is an attempt to prove that Ajax sailed as his own commander, which would rob the Atreidae of their authority over him. The discussion never moves beyond the issue of authority. In his subsequent debate with Agamemnon, Teucer fares better. While Agamemnon is so concerned with obedience and his status as a ruler that he does not even mention the burial, Teucer takes this opportunity to rehabilitate his brother and argue that Ajax's crimes are negated by excellence during his life. He never uses the strongest argument available to him (an appeal to the laws of the gods), because he wants and needs to earn the burial on the basis of Ajax's achievements. His speech to Agamemnon therefore focuses on Ajax's glorious deeds. It falls to Odysseus, who intervenes in the debate, to bring the more traditional arguments. He speaks of justice and states that refusing a burial is to dishonour the gods. At times, his arguments remind us of Antigone's, but the important difference is that Odysseus still believes that the right to a burial is earned by noble and good men. Although he and Ajax were enemies in life, this does not influence Ajax's inherent nobility in Odysseus' view. In the end, though, Agamemnon is only convinced to grant the burial when Odysseus points out that he will seem like a just man before all the Greeks if he does so. Agamemnon's reputation and his belief that Odysseus acts out of selfish motives are what persuade him. Odysseus' exclusion

from the burial reflects the somewhat incomplete closure it provides.

Theseus in *the Suppliant Women* is in a unique position compared to the characters in the other two plays. His own authority is initially not challenged by burial conflict and his lack of involvement leads him to reject Adrastus and the suppliant mothers. Theseus approaches the suit of the suppliants from a very rational standpoint and refuses to become one of those rash leaders who rush into a war motivated by their own desire for power and gain rather than the benefit of their cities, while his mother Aethra immediately feels an emotional connection to the suppliants. It is her plea that shows Theseus that his own wellbeing, the integrity of his city and his reputation are bound up with the fate of the suppliants. Theseus especially responds to the argument that his own honour is at risk if he refuses to take on the mission. He takes the approval of the other Athenians for granted when he comes up with a plan to recover the bodies and for a moment, it seems as if Theseus could be equally motivated by his own pride and a desire for power like the other young leaders he himself condemns. However, once he has decided to help Adrastus, he becomes capable of recognizing other reasons for the importance of the burial as well. Instead of focussing on his own might or military power, his speech to Creon's herald contains a wide range of arguments that include the pointlessness of the abuse of the corpses, the subversion of the natural order the act entails, the harm done to the Panhellenic law and the dishonour towards the gods. The fact remains, however, that the herald only serves as Creon's mouthpiece and is not in a position to be convinced. Theseus has to recover the dead by force, but even in the battle and during the aftermath, he demonstrates mercy towards his enemies and pity towards the dead. When he could have exacted his vengeance on the Thebans, he showed restraint. His refusal to turn the burial conflict into a power struggle and his ability to accept Aethra's arguments demonstrate his capacity for being a good leader. In the second half of the play, however, Euripides reveals that although Theseus' actions are honourable and deserving of gratitude, the recovery of the dead will not and cannot put an end to the grief of the mothers, nor will it stop the cycle of violence that looms in the future of the sons of the Seven. Even the power of a good leader had its limits.

Overall, keeping in mind issues of power when analysing a burial conflict may elucidate why not all arguments to bury an individual appear in every play and why some arguments are specifically employed at a particular time. It can aid in showing why some conflicts escalate and recognizing that both parties are responsible for such escalations could go some way in

explaining why it is often difficult for critics to side wholeheartedly with one character throughout the narrative. Burial conflicts, both those of antiquity and their modern reoccurrences in the twenty-first century, lend themselves to devolving into power struggles and this aspect should be taken into consideration in the analyses of such disputes.

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