

ANTIGONE 904-920 AND THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE*

Lines 904-20 of Sophocles' *Antigone* form one of the most vexed and controversial passages in classical literature.¹ Antigone, about to be buried alive as punishment for having defied Creon's official prohibition against burying her brother Polyneices, proclaims that she would not have done for a husband or child what, at the cost of her life, she has done for her brother. Addressing Polyneices, she says:

καίτοι σ' ἐγὼ τίμησα τοῖς φρονούσιν εὖ.
οὐ γάρ ποτ' οὐτ' ἂν εἰ τέκνων μήτηρ ἔφυν 905
οὔτ' εἰ πόσις μοι καθανὼν ἐτήκετο,
βία πολιτῶν τόνδ' ἂν ἠρόμην πόνον.
τίνος νόμου δὴ ταῦτα πρὸς χάριν λέγω;
πόσις μὲν ἂν μοι καθανόντος ἄλλος ἦν,
καὶ παῖς ἀπ' ἄλλου φωτός, εἰ τοῦδ' ἤμπλακον, 910
μητρὸς δ' ἐν Αἰδοῦ καὶ πατρὸς κεκευθότοι
οὐκ ἔστ' ἀδελφὸς ὅστις ἂν βλάστοι ποτέ.
τοιῷδε μέντοι σ' ἐκπροτιμήσας' ἐγὼ
νόμῳ, Κρέοντι ταῦτ' ἔδοξ' ἀμαρτάνειν
καὶ δεινὰ τολμᾶν, ὧ κασίγνητον κάρα. 915
καὶ νῦν ἄγει με διὰ χερῶν οὕτω λαβῶν
ἄλεκτρον, ἀνυμέναιον, οὔτε του γάμου
μέρος λαχοῦσαν οὔτε παιδείου τροφῆς,
ἀλλ' ὥδ' ἐρῆμος πρὸς φίλων ἡ δύσμορος
ζῶσ' ἐς θανόντων ἔρχομαι κατασκαφάς. 920

The passage is quoted without reservation by the most authoritative ancient critic of tragedy, Aristotle, who refers to it in the *Rhetoric*

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¹For a survey of discussions of this problem with extensive bibliography see D. A. Hester, "Sophocles the Unphilosophical," *Mnemosyne* 24 (1971) 55-58. Discussions that have appeared since Hester's survey include: H. R. Blumenthal, "Euripides, *Alcestis* 282ff., and the Authenticity of *Antigone* 905ff.," *CR* 24 (1974) 174-75; J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles III: The Antigone* (Leiden 1978) 158-60; T. A. Szlezák, "Bemerkungen zur Diskussion um Sophokles, *Antigone* 904-920," *RhM* 109 (1981) 108-142; R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation* (Cambridge 1980) 145.

as an illustration of the principle that if a speaker reveals his character through a statement that is incredible (ἄπιστον), he or she should give an explanation for it (*Rhetoric* 1417a). But these lines have rung false to numerous modern readers of the play, most prominently Goethe, whose hope that scholarship would prove the passage to be an interpolation is a famous contribution to the discussion of this problem.²

The passage has seemed troubling for two reasons. First, it seems to contradict Antigone's earlier assertion when confronting Creon that her action was in response to unwritten and immutable divine laws, ἄγραπτα κάσφαλῇ θεῶν/νόμιμα (454-55)—laws therefore that must apply equally to all and would not permit the kinds of discriminations Antigone now makes. It has, then, seemed to subvert the adherence to principle that gives Antigone's disobedience its noble and affecting significance. As Jebb puts it, "her feet slip from the rock on which they were set; she suddenly gives up that which, throughout the drama, has been the immovable basis of her action, — the universal and unqualified validity of the divine law."³ Secondly, readers have been repelled by the dispassionate, hyperlogical, calculating character of her argument, a quality that has caused it to be frequently labelled "sophistic." Thus Cedric Whitman, one of the relatively few recent critics to consider the passage spurious, complains that, "Suddenly . . . she begins to reason, in cold-blooded terms, about the relative value and availability of husbands, brothers, and sons," and adds that, "there is nothing in all the rest of Sophocles that is so deadly ψυχρόν."⁴

The question is further complicated by the fact that the argument Antigone advances in these lines is borrowed from a story in Herodotus, the story of the wife of Intaphernes told at *Histories* 3.119. On the one hand, this can be seen as lending support to the authenticity of the passage, because Sophocles was in the habit of borrowing from Herodotus.⁵ On the other hand, comparison of this passage with its source makes it possible to see how much better this clever argument fits the circumstances of the wife of Intaphernes than it does those of Antigone. The wife of Intaphernes is faced with the need to choose one of several rela-

²Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann*, March 28, 1827.

³Richard Jebb, *Sophocles: Antigone* (Cambridge 1900) 259.

⁴Cedric Whitman, *Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism* (Cambridge, MA 1951) 92, 264.

⁵The most striking example other than this passage in the *Antigone* is Oedipus' reference in the *Oedipus at Colonus* to the topsy-turvy division of activities between men and women in Egypt (*OC* 337-41).

tives to be saved from death, and therefore appeals to a principle according to which they can be ranked. Antigone has been faced with a different choice, the choice of whether or not to bury her one dead unburied brother, and so a principle for ranking the competing claims of various relatives would seem to have no bearing on her situation. Rather than defending her action by saying that it was preferable to leaving her brother unburied, she says that it was preferable to other, hypothetical actions—burying a husband and burying a child—that she has never had the opportunity to take and that would not have been incompatible with her burial of Polyneices. Thus the passage seems to be an example of inept borrowing, of an idea lifted from another source and badly adapted to its new context, and this contributes to the sense that it is unsatisfactory and suspect. For example, Jebb asks, “In adapting the argument used by the wife of Intaphernes, could a great poet have overlooked the absurdities involved in transferring it from the living to the dead?”⁶

Nonetheless, in light of the absence of good textual grounds for rejecting the passage, most recent scholars accept it as authentic. But, as is frequently pointed out in discussions of this question, no one does so without some sense of reluctance and misgiving. The problems that make the passage disturbing have not been explained away. Most of its defenders stress its positive aspect, the deep attachment to Polyneices to which it testifies, and deemphasize its negative aspect, the statement that Antigone would have withheld the same service from a husband or a child. Her hypothetical claim that she would not have defied Creon and the citizens of Thebes to bury a husband or child is understood not as a reliable statement about what she would actually have done, but as a dramatic means of conveying the depth of feeling behind the action that she did take in the situation with which she actually was confronted. Thus there is a tendency to defend the passage by claiming that Antigone doesn’t really mean what she says, that what may read as dispassionate calculation in fact expresses a passion that is beyond reason or logic. For example, Bernard Knox has written that this speech is “not logical” but “an almost hysterically hyperbolic expression of her love for [her] brother,”⁷ and C. M. Bowra, noting that her argument is found in folklore, comments, “She is moved by an intense love for her brother, a feeling that her relation to him is unique and demands a special loyalty.

⁶Jebb (note 3 above) 260.

⁷Bernard Knox, *Word and Action: Essays on the Ancient Theater* (Baltimore 1979) 180.

So she explains herself in this unsophisticated, even primitive way."⁸ This line of interpretation rightly stresses the depth and personal quality of Antigone's feeling for her brother, but at the cost of denying the logic of her argument. But Antigone's argument is logical, both in the sense that it is rationalistic or sophistic, and in the sense that it makes sense in light of her situation and the role she plays throughout the play for her to say what she does.

Antigone's adoption of this argument emerges from her preoccupation at this point with the subject of marriage. This speech marks the moment when Antigone first confronts the loss of marriage and motherhood that her willingness to sacrifice her life for the sake of burying her brother entails. It is important in interpreting this play to be alert to the shifting evolution of Antigone's thoughts, which do not remain constant and monolithic but are formulated differently in response to her situation as it develops.⁹ When we first see her sharing her intention with Ismene, she does not speak of the immutable unwritten laws of the gods; she is simply caught up in an instinctive certainty that her brother must be buried. It is only in her confrontation with Creon that she articulates the basis for her action in such absolute terms. And only at the point when she is about to be led off to death does she begin to feel the reality of her imminent loss of the opportunities for marrying and becoming a mother. For this reason, the evident inconsistency of this speech with her earlier pronouncements is not a compelling reason for rejecting it. Sophocles is often interested in showing the way in which the human mind arrives at seemingly coherent and conclusive ways of understanding a situation only to have those visions dissolve and reform themselves under the pressures of changing events. Certainly the evolution of different perspectives on a character's situation is a major element in the two plays about Oedipus.

In her final speech, Antigone is groping for a way to reconcile herself to the renunciation of marriage that she has already made without at the time really focussing on its consequences. Finding that her decision to bury her brother rather than to leave him unburied was in effect a decision to forego marriage for the sake of honoring a tie of kinship, she gives a rationale (or, as she twice labels it, a *nomos*, 908, 915) for

⁸C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford 1944) 94.

⁹This point is well stated by Bernard Knox, *The Heroic Temper* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1964) 103. See also Matthew S. Santirocco, "Justice in Sophocles' *Antigone*," *Philosophy and Literature* 4 (1980) 187-90, who stresses the way in which Antigone's love for Polyneices consistently underlies her varying rationalizations of her actions.

choosing family ties over marriage. In doing so, she uses an argument derived from someone actually faced with that choice, the wife of Intaphernes, whose circumstances it naturally fits more closely. Antigone articulates a principle to which her past action is made retrospectively to conform in an attempt to make the consequences of her action more bearable.

But, while this rationale may be applied retrospectively, that does not mean it is not consistent with the motivations behind her action. A starting point for understanding how this is so can be found in the discussion of this passage in the appendix to Jebb's edition of the play. Jebb, who concluded that the passage was spurious and bracketed it, formulated the problem in the following way: "The question comes to this: — Can the faults of the passage, as they appear to a modern taste, be excused by a peculiarity in ancient modes of thought? Or are they such as to make it inconceivable that any great poet, ancient or modern, should have embodied the passage in a work of art?" In giving consideration to the first possibility—the possibility that this passage reflects some peculiarly ancient mode of thought, he adds:

Now, the 'primitive sophism' employed by the wife of Intaphernes and the tendency to exalt the fraternal tie, are things which we may certainly recognise as characteristic of that age. And it is true that Aeschylus has some quaint subtleties of a similar kind: as when Apollo defends Orestes on the ground that a man's mother is not, properly speaking, his parent . . . and when Athena votes for Orestes because she herself had no mother at all.

He then goes on to say, "But all that is beside the question here" and to advance the arguments on which his own rejection of the passage is based.¹⁰ But Jebb's suggestive comparison between the strange logic of Antigone's speech and the equally strange logic of the arguments on which the outcome of the trial at the end of the *Oresteia* rests is worth pursuing—not because both passages reveal that "quaint subtleties" are characteristic of classical Greek culture but because in both cases a seemingly unnatural appeal to logical argumentation brings to the surface the kinds of normally unacknowledged, unspoken principles that govern human relations, and in particular the relations between men and women. Sophocles, by having Antigone impose a rationalization on her action retrospectively, and Aeschylus, by having the conflicts of the house of Atreus resolved in the artificial setting of a legal trial with di-

¹⁰Jebb (note 3 above) 259–60.

vine antagonists, have created dramatic contexts in which characters articulate the concerns that underlie people's actions without their ordinarily being aware of it. In both cases, this means that human actions are explained in terms that seem remote from perceived human motivations, and this accounts for the strangely rationalistic or scientific tone of both arguments.

In the trial at the end of the *Oresteia*, Apollo argues that Orestes should be pardoned for his murder of his mother because the mother contributes nothing to the development of the unborn child other than a place for the seed provided by the father to grow in, and points to Athena as evidence that the mother is dispensable. He is referring to the story told in Hesiod's *Theogony* of how Zeus, knowing that his wife Metis would produce first a daughter and then a son who would supplant him just as he supplanted Cronos and Cronos supplanted Ouranos, swallowed her while she was pregnant with Athena, who was then born from Zeus' head (*Th.* 886-900, 924-926). When it falls to Athena to make the final decision, she is persuaded by this argument, deciding in Orestes' favor because of this peculiarity of her own birth, which causes her always to side with the male.

As a number of critics have recently pointed out, the use of this argument, quaint and trivial as it may seem, should not be seen as simply the resort to a technicality to get Orestes off the hook. Like the story of Athena's birth which it recalls, it can be understood as part of a phenomenon of classical Greek culture and of patriarchal cultures in general: the attempt by men to confront the deeply disturbing fact of female procreative power by usurping it—as in the case of Zeus' swallowing of Metis to forestall her giving birth to Athena, controlling it—as seen in the culture's high valuation of chastity and marital fidelity in women and the considerable lengths taken to enforce those values, or undervaluing it—as in the argument advanced by Apollo in the *Eumenides* and the contemporary biological theories that it is thought to echo.¹¹ Denial of the role of the mother in procreation not only resolves the immediate conflict between Orestes and the Eumenides but also justifies the trilogy's wider project of establishing a hierarchy of val-

¹¹Cf. Aristotle *De Gen. An.* 763b30-33 where this view is attributed to Anaxagoras, and the discussion of Jean-Pierre Vernant who observes that, "The dream of a purely paternal heredity never ceased to haunt the Greek imagination." "Hestia-Hermes: the Religious Expression of Space and Movement among the Greeks," *Information sur les Sciences Sociales—International Social Science Council* 8 (1969) 138. That dream is expressed by Jason at Euripides, *Medea* 573-75, and by Hippolytus at Euripides, *Hippol.* 616-24.

ues by which female interests and powers are subordinated to male interests and powers.¹²

Antigone's reasoning in her final speech is similarly engaged with more central and significant issues than its apparent sophistry suggests, and the issues it engages are similar ones. As she articulates a rationale for preferring the tie of kinship she has honored over the marriage she has necessarily renounced, Antigone draws an important distinction between ties of marriage and ties of blood: ties of marriage are seen as artificial human constructs that can be made and unmade while ties of blood are seen as natural, unalterable, and incapable of being manufactured through human conventions.¹³ In particular, she stresses the way in which the socially defined role of husband is not restricted to a single individual but can be taken by any of a number of different men. The emphasis on this point in her speech can be measured by comparing it to its Herodotean source: while the wife of Intaphernes says, "I could have another husband (ἀνὴρ . . . ἄλλος) and other children (τέκνα ἄλλα) if I should lose these," Antigone makes the same point by twice mentioning the possibility of acquiring a new husband, "If my husband died I could have another husband (πόσις μὲν ἂν μοι κατθανόντος ἄλλος ἦν), or a child from a new husband if I lost the child of my first husband (καὶ παῖς ἀπ' ἄλλου φωτός, εἰ τοῦδ' ἤμπλακον)."¹⁴ Antigone is defining "husband" not as the unchanging identity of a specific individual but as an abstract role that could be played by several different men. In doing so, she is pointing to the way in which marriage, unlike ties of kinship, is not created irrevocably by nature but instituted by society.

Furthermore the aspect of marriage that she especially emphasizes—the possibility of replacing one participant in it with someone else—is central to its character as an institution. Social institutions characteristically establish principles of substitution and replacement

¹²For discussions of the *Oresteia* that stress the sexual politics of the trilogy see Michael Gagarin, *Aeschylean Drama* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1976) 87–105; Brian Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy* (London 1973) 347–37; Froma Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the *Oresteia*," 159–94 in John Peradotto and J. P. Sullivan, edd., *Women in the Ancient World: The Arethusa Papers* (Albany 1984).

¹³Cf. the Chinese saying quoted by Vickers (note 12 above) in connection with this passage: "The bond between brothers and sisters comes from heaven, whereas the bond between husband and wife is created by man" (p. 543).

¹⁴This departure is particularly striking because in general the phraseology of the Sophoclean passage follows that of the Herodotean passage very closely. See Denys L. Page, *Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1934) 86–87.

whereby entities that are not identical can be treated as interchangeable. This quality is well-illustrated by the social institution that forms a central, if implicit, concern of the *Antigone*, the democratic *polis* of fifth-century Athens, which was constituted through a series of offices with stable functions held by a succession of different individuals. Similarly, one of the principal functions of another major institution of Athenian life, the *oikos*, or household, was to assure its own continuity through a system of inheritance whereby the father was replaced by the son. Human institutions counter the precarious, transitory, contingent nature of all specific people and things by establishing equations that allow them to be replaced by other people and things that are in actuality different but by convention identical.¹⁵

The way in which institutions like the the *polis* treat individuals, who would from another perspective seem unique, as interchangeable and replaceable can be illustrated from a statement in Pericles' funeral oration. Towards the end of the speech, Pericles addresses the parents of the men killed in the war and says, καρτερεῖν δὲ χρὴ καὶ ἄλλων παίδων ἐλπίδι, οἷς ἔτι ἡλικία τέκνωσιν ποιεῖσθαι · ἰδίᾳ τε γὰρ τῶν οὐκ ὄντων λήθῃ οἱ ἐπιγιγνόμενοί τισιν ἔσσονται, καὶ τῇ πόλει διχόθεν, ἔκ τε τοῦ μὴ ἐρημοῦσθαι καὶ ἀσφαλείᾳ, ξυνοίσει (Thuc. 2.44.3). Gomme, in his commentary on Thucydides, notes the strangeness of this sentiment: "it is extraordinary that this should mean, as it must, [consolation through] 'hopes of having other sons', not 'from younger (or, indeed, elder) sons'; for not only would very few parents of sons killed in war be likely to have more, however philoprogenitive the Greeks were, but many must actually have had other sons who would help forgetfulness of the loss, and these are ignored."¹⁶ As Gomme sug-

¹⁵This characteristic is most overtly apparent in the institutions that regulate economic activity, which depends on the exchange of markedly different commodities. Thus the institution of currency allows for the exchange of a piece of metal for any of a variety of goods. But the operation of what might be called an economic principle in all realms of human life is illustrated by the institution of the blood-price, invoked by Ajax at *Iliad* 9.632-636 in an attempt to reconcile Achilles to Achaeon society, according to which material objects are accepted as compensation for the life of a relative. Levi-Strauss, in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston 1969), argues that marriage is the institution that makes society possible precisely because of its affinity to an economic system: prohibitions against incest compel men to exchange women as if they were units of currency or linguistic signs and so to form the alliances that constitute society. Whitman, in the complaint against this passage quoted above, criticizes Antigone's formulation by paraphrasing it in quasi-economic terms: "availability," "relative value."

¹⁶A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* II (Oxford 1956) 142.

gests, this statement makes no sense as an attempt to address the personal feelings of the parents of the slain. It should, rather, be understood as an expression of a statesman's perspective according to which the citizens who have been lost in the war can—and for the benefit of the state should—be replaced with new citizens who will take their place in the service of the city—and, by the same principle, in the hearts of their parents.

By stressing this institutional aspect of marriage, Antigone places it in the category of those things it is characteristic of her to devalue and reject. For throughout the play she consistently undervalues human institutions. Her conflict with Creon is generated by her tendency to ally herself with what lies outside the realm of human culture—the natural (the blood kinship that ties her to her brother) and the supernatural (the gods whose laws she claims to uphold)—in opposition to the human institutions, most notably the *polis*, valued by Creon. Thus, she opposes his κήρυγμα or proclamation, a regulation he had contrived in his role as leader of the *polis* with the interests of the *polis* in mind, by reference to a body of laws that, in contrast to the important political institution of the written law-code, do not depend for their authority or their continuity on the human invention of writing, have no origin or history, can never be changed, and belong not to men but to the gods.¹⁷

The difference between Creon and Antigone is expressed in a difference of outlook that causes him to stress the political, impersonal dimension of any character or situation while she stresses its personal dimension. Thus they become antagonists because they have different ways of perceiving Polyneices: he chooses to privilege Polyneices' political identity as public enemy of Thebes, while she chooses to privilege his personal identity as her brother. Similarly, Antigone views the family as the locus of intensely-felt personal loyalties while Creon views it in political terms, seeing it, as Knox puts it, as “a sort of training ground for the exercise of political virtue,”¹⁸ an arena in which the civic virtues of discipline, obedience and loyalty are to be developed. He identifies service to

¹⁷The vulnerability of lawcodes as human constructs is reflected in the legends of the Greek lawgivers in which the lawgiver is often obliged to include some provision or device to ensure the stability of the code or to defend it by an act of self-sacrifice (e.g., Charondas' suicide on discovering that he had inadvertently violated his own law making it a capital offense to enter the assembly armed), and in which there is in general an emphasis on lawmaking as a human activity. See Andrew Szegedy-Maszak, “Legends of the Greek Lawgivers,” *GRBS* 19 (1979) 199–209.

¹⁸Knox (note 9 above) 89. On Creon's and Antigone's differing conceptions of the family see Christina Elliot Sorum, “The Family in Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Electra*,” *CW* 75 (1982) 205.

the family as the exercise of qualities that will allow one to be known as a good citizen: ἐν τοῖς γὰρ οἰκείοισιν ὅστις ἔστ' ἀνὴρ/ χρηστός, φανεῖται κὰν πόλει δίκαιος ὢν. (666-67). In this he is like Pericles in the funeral oration, who imports an impersonal, political perspective into the family, suggesting that just as a new citizen is as good as an old one from the point of view of the state, so should a new son be as good as an old one from the point of view of his parents.

For Antigone to stress the institutional character of marriage and to dissociate herself from it is furthermore consistent with her gender. It reflects the phenomenon, characteristic of patriarchal societies in which the abstract and the conventional are valued over the natural and are associated primarily with men, that women are relatively less identified with cultural institutions than men.¹⁹ It is also consistent with the actual conditions of classical Athenian society, in which a woman's participation in marriage served primarily to assure the continuity of a household with which she was never fully identified and to provide citizens for a city in which she was never a fully participating member, and in which the role of women in maintaining the *oikos* freed men for cultural and political pursuits from which women were largely excluded.²⁰ This conception of marriage as an institution allied with the interests of the *polis* and of men is reflected in the *Oresteia*, where, as the complex issues of the first two plays are reduced in the *Eumenides* to a series of sharp polarities, a conflict between ties of blood and ties of marriage becomes identified with a conflict between the interests of women and the interests of men, and with a conflict between the primitive conditions antedating the *polis* and the civilization that the *polis* represents.

In this context, it is interesting to consider the legends surrounding the figure of the mythical first king of Athens, Cecrops. Cecrops was a culture-hero like Prometheus or Cadmus who was variously credited with the invention of city-planning and census-taking — two particularly civic institutions — as well as agriculture, the burial of the dead, writing, and monogamous marriage.²¹ The legends, then, reflect a conception

¹⁹See the now classic statement of this point by Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in M. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, edd., *Women, Culture and Society* (Stanford 1974) 67-87.

²⁰See Sarah Pomeroy's defense of the sentiments voiced at *Antigone* 905-912 as reasonable in the context of classical Athens on the grounds that the identification of children with their father's household discouraged the formation of close bonds between mothers and children, in *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (New York 1975) 101.

²¹For the legends concerning Cecrops see W. H. Röscher, *Ausführliches Lexicon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Leipzig 1890-1894) II.1 1014-1024.

of marriage that places it in the category of human cultural constructs—in the same category, that is, as the human achievements celebrated in the first stasimon of the *Antigone*, the ode that is sometimes called the “ode on man,” whose presence in this play reveals its connection to the fifth-century debate on the relation of *nomos* and *phusis* and affirms its concern with the value and limitations of such achievements.²² The significance of this invention for women is suggested by another story told about Cecrops.²³ During his reign, a vote was taken to determine whether the city would be named for Poseidon or Athena. Since women could vote and there was one more woman than there were men, Athena won. But Poseidon was angry and flooded the territory of Athens until women were forced to undergo three penalties; they lost the vote, they were no longer citizens, and they no longer gave their names to their children. Thus the exclusion of women from political life is associated with the loss of matrilineal naming, something that only becomes possible with Cecrops’ other invention, monogamous marriage, in which female fertility is controlled so that it is possible for the paternity of children to be known and reflected in their names.²⁴

A similar conception of how the interests of men and women may differ in relation to the family underlies the story of the wife of In-taphernes. There, a woman, who is essentially a private person, makes a choice indicating a greater allegiance to the family into which she was born and to which she is tied by blood kinship than to the family into which she married and which, by marrying into it, she helped to create. The king, who is very much a public and political figure, is puzzled by this choice. From his perspective she should be expected to prefer a member of the family she married into to her brother who, as he puts it, is less closely related (ἀλλοτριώτερος) than her children and less beloved (ἥσσον κεχαρισμένος) than her husband. However, she is able to express her preference in terms of a logical argument which delights him, and he decides not only to honor her choice but to reward her for

²²For interpretations of the *Antigone* that stress the way in which this ode places the action of the play in the context of questions about the nature of civilization, see Charles Segal, “Sophocles’ Praise of Man and the Conflicts of the Antigone,” *Arion* 3 (1964) 46–66 and *Tragedy and Civilization* (Cambridge, MA 1981) 152–206. On the play’s relationship to fifth-century philosophical speculation see also Robert F. Goheen, *The Imagery of Sophocles’ Antigone* (Princeton 1951) 86–91.

²³This story is told by St. Augustine (*Civ. Dei* 18.9), who attributes it to Varro.

²⁴On this story see Simon Pembroke, “Women in Charge: the Function of Alternatives in Early Greek Tradition and the Ancient Idea of Matriarchy,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 30 (1967) 30–31.

her skillful argumentation. And yet his reward is not only a reward but also a correction of her choice, for he grants her the life of her eldest son, the heir produced as a result of her marriage, who should in his view therefore be her most valued relative.²⁵

But the abstract cleverness that makes a story like that of the wife of Intaphernes an effective means of articulating such normally unspoken issues also makes it inadequate to the actual complexity of human relations. Marriage is not, after all, simply a conventionalized relationship in which two people come together like interchangeable parts to assure the continuity of society. It also has a personal dimension that plays a more prominent role than its social function in any individual's experience of it and determines the success of any individual marriage. If a marriage is to succeed, it must take on the permanence and particularity of kinship. Its durability depends on the willingness of those who enter into it to consider it inviolable and irreversible, to see it as having the enduring quality that automatically attaches to a tie of blood. This sense of an irrevocable bond cannot be guaranteed by the institution itself but depends on a personal attachment that belongs to the irrational and irregulable realm of love and desire, and this undermines any exclusive association of marriage with culture rather than nature.²⁶ Thus in the *Oresteia*, when Apollo, the divine champion of marriage, praises it to the Furies, he describes married love as something greater than an oath, "ὄρκου . . . μείζων," (*Eum.* 218)—that is, involving an element that transcends the contractual agreements that give it its offi-

²⁵See Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "Exit Atossa: Images of Women in Greek Historiography on Persia," Averil Cameron and Amelie Kuhrt, edd. *Images of Women in Antiquity* (Detroit 1983) 30–31.

²⁶Thus Levi-Strauss (note 15 above) characterizes marriage as "a dramatic encounter between nature and culture" (p. 489). For the development of this point in relation to Greek mythology and religion see Marcel Detienne, *Les Jardins d'Adonis* (Paris 1972), and the introduction by Jean-Pierre Vernant. Helene Foley, in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* (New York 1981) 147, points out that in the fifth-century context of classical tragedy, marriage could seem relatively closer to nature than the *polis*. In the *Antigone*, Haemon's love for the woman he intends to marry is felt by Creon to be subversive to the city, and evokes a choral ode on the disruptive power of Eros. Similar evidence of the instability of the categories of nature and culture is provided by burial of the dead, which in one of the legends about Cecrops (Cicero, *Leg.* 2.25) is represented as a civilized advance, but in the *Antigone* is opposed, at least by Creon, to the interests of the city. Furthermore, it should be noted that kinship cannot be considered a solely natural phenomenon. While it has an undeniable basis in nature, it is also invested with cultural significance and usually plays a large role in determining social status. This was in fact especially true in classical Athens, where kinship served as the basis for citizenship.

cial status.²⁷ Both the difficulty and the possibility of finding in marriage a bond as compelling as kinship are recurrently expressed in a range of folktales and legends in which characters are compelled to establish rankings of their relatives and in some cases, like those of Antigone and the wife of Intaphernes, place a blood relative highest,²⁸ but in others a spouse.²⁹ And yet, while a marriage must be based on a tie that is felt to be like a blood tie, prohibitions against incest require that it not be based on an actual blood tie. Once again the creation of an institutionalized relationship demands that similarity be treated as identity.

This personal dimension not only limits the extent to which marriage can be identified with the institutional, political sphere associated with men, but is itself often represented as the particular concern of women. This association is reflected in a number of stories in which women come into conflict with men through their allegiance to a con-

²⁷See the discussion of this phrase by J. H. Kells, "Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 312-24 and Athenian Marriage," *CP* 56 (1961) 169-71, where it is interpreted as a specific reference to the oath between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, the oath, that is, by which Clytemnestra replaces her first husband Agamemnon with someone else.

²⁸Parallels to the choice made by the wife of Intaphernes have been found in stories from India, China, Scotland, and modern Greece. See R. Pischel, "Zu Sophokles Antigone 909-912," *Hermes* 28 (1893) 465-68; *Neue Jahrbücher für Philologie und Paedagogik* (1874) 301; Bowra (note 8 above) 94; Johannes Th. Kakridis, *Homeric Researches* (Lund 1949) 155-57.

²⁹For Greek legends in which hierarchies of affection privileging love between a husband and wife are established, see Kakridis (note 27 above) 11-64, 152-164. The division of preferences along gender lines outlined in this essay can be observed even in such stories for, as Kakridis points out (p. 20), the only example of a wife preferring her husband to her own people is that of Andromache in *Iliad* 6. In Andromache's case the sentiment is forced on her by circumstances since all of her own relatives have been killed. Some stories, such as that of Alcestis, do underscore a wife's affection for her husband, but they do so by contrasting it, not with her feelings for her family, but with the feelings of other members of his family for him. In Euripides' *Alcestis* this point is made in a speech that closely resembles and is quite possibly modelled on *Antigone* 904ff. See Blumenthal (note 1 above). The starting point of Kakridis' investigation is the story of Meleager told in *Iliad* 9, in which both choices are present: Althaea puts her brother ahead of her son while Meleager puts his wife ahead of his family. Once again, it is the woman who places highest value on family ties and the man who places highest value on the marriage bond. Kakridis himself replicates the assumption, reflected in the various Greek legends discussed in this essay, that a preference for marriage represents a connection with civilization and progress, for he argues that Meleager's choice is a later addition to the story designed to accommodate a more civilized code of ethics, commenting, "It is no longer blood which blindly governs his preference; it is affection which now binds human beings together even if they have no common blood" (p. 39).

ception of marriage as a personal and inviolable bond. One obvious example of this is Euripides' *Medea* in which Medea responds with a sense of insupportable betrayal when Jason acts out a purely political conception of marriage and replaces her with another, more politically advantageous wife.

Another illustration is provided by the role of Penelope in the *Odyssey*. Penelope's loyalty to Odysseus as her unique husband, on which the successful outcome of his story depends, brings her into conflict with most of the male figures on Ithaka and with the means of social continuity that they pursue. Her sharpest opponents are her suitors, whose attempt to replace Odysseus, while it is discredited in their case by their insincerity and greed, does represent a procedure for the orderly transfer of power on Ithaka. Thus Antinous is able, during the assembly scene in Book 2 (a scene, that is, set in a public and political context rather than the more usual domestic setting of the house of Odysseus), to make a persuasive speech blaming Penelope for the prevailing social disorder (*Od.* 2.85-127). But Penelope's determination to wait for Odysseus' return also brings her into conflict with Telemachus, who is reaching the age at which he can play his own destined social role by replacing Odysseus as head of his household. Telemachus' maturity and the suitors' presence finally combine to create pressures on her which she can no longer withstand, and she reluctantly institutes a mechanism for replacing Odysseus through a contest among her suitors. As it turns out, this mechanism is miraculously circumvented. Odysseus' return effectively undoes the passage of time so that the institutionalized expedients for assuring continuity over time that Penelope has resisted prove unnecessary. The social order is restored and guaranteed without any need for substitution or change. Penelope's resistance is rewarded with personal happiness and her loyalty to Odysseus becomes the central virtue of the poem.

By contrast, the pathos of Antigone's situation can be felt in the way in which, as she gropes for a position that will provide justification and consolation for her own loss of marriage, she finds it necessary to ignore this personal dimension of marriage. While she addresses Polyneices in terms that reveal an intensely-felt bond even after his death, she dismisses marriage by adopting an argument that depends for its point on suppressing the idiosyncratic preferences that influence human relations. For what makes the argument of the wife of Intaphernes amusing in its Herodotean context and disturbing in its tragic context is precisely its depersonalizing of a highly personal choice. Antigone not only emphasizes the idea that the role of husband is not specific to any

one individual, but also speaks of marriage exclusively in abstract and hypothetical terms. She speaks of herself generally as "*alektros*," "without a marriage bed," and "*anumenaios*," "without a marriage song," but makes no reference to Haemon with whom she has already formed a close personal tie that is painfully sacrificed as a result of her and Creon's actions.³⁰ In her effort to justify her sacrifice of marriage by making it consistent with her willingness to dismiss the political meaning of her action of burying Polyneices, she adopts the same limited perspective of which Creon is guilty, seeing marriage only as an impersonal institution and neglecting its personal dimension.

This impersonal conception of marriage is actually expressed by Creon earlier in the play and opposed to another, articulated by a woman, that stresses its personal, specific character. When Ismene asks him if he really intends to kill his own son's bride, Creon responds, ἀρώσιμοι γὰρ χάτέρων εἰσὶν γύαι (569), expressing in cruder terms the same idea later voiced by Antigone, that the partners in a marriage are replaceable,³¹ and Ismene replies, οὐχ ὥς γ' ἐκείνῳ τῇδ' ἡν ἡρμοσμένα (570), pointing to the irreplaceable personal affection that has bound Antigone and Haemon specifically to each other. Antigone's expression of a view similar to Creon's can be associated with other departures from conventionally feminine actions and attitudes, represented in the play through the figure of Ismene, to which she is led by her determination to bury her brother.

Antigone's formulation in this passage is unquestionably unsatisfying—excessively cold and inadequate to the complexities of the situation to which she responds. But it is not unsatisfying because it is the work of an incompetent interpolater or even because it is out of keeping with her character and circumstances for her to say what she does. The passage is disturbing because of the nature of the situation that gives rise to it. What makes the argument of the wife of Intaphernes inappropriate—the fact that Antigone has never had a husband or a child for whom she might perform rites of burial and furthermore that those actions are not incompatible with burying her brother—is also what makes her situation pathetic. The sterility of her logic expresses

³⁰The troubling character of Antigone's silence about Haemon is reflected in the tradition, going back to the sixteenth-century editions of Aldus and Turnebus, of assigning line 572 to Antigone even though all manuscripts assign it to Ismene.

³¹Creon's words also echo the language of the Athenian marriage ceremony. See A. W. Gomme and F. H. Sandbach, *Menander: A Commentary* (Oxford 1973) on *Pk.* 1010 and Lowell Edmunds, "The Cults and Legend of Oedipus," *HSCP* 85 (1981) 235, n.53. On the association of marriage and plowing see Vernant (note 11 above) 145.

the sterility of her situation, the way in which her exclusive focus on the family has conspired with Creon's exclusive focus on the city to condemn her to what is repeatedly figured in the play as a marriage to death. As a number of critics have pointed out, Antigone's single-minded determination to honor her family is finally destructive to it.³² The overvaluation of relationships that cannot be renewed through marriage and procreation that she expresses in her preference for a brother who is dead over a prospective husband or child leads to the termination of her family's line. The family cannot maintain itself without its members engaging in marriage and thus in the kind of wider social interaction it entails, just as—in a view expressed by a number of Greek philosophers³³—the city cannot maintain itself through laws that do not correspond to the religious customs and traditions that constitute the unwritten laws of the gods.

The *Antigone* dramatizes the consequences of rifts between entities that ought ideally to overlap and support each other: the family and the city, political policies and religious traditions. Such disjunctions both originate and reveal themselves in the kind of exclusivity of vision that characterizes both Creon and Antigone and is expressed in this passage. Antigone's words express this state of disjunction both through their one-sidedness and through their discordant tone—the way in which the calculation with which she considers a hypothetical husband and hypothetical children is out of tune with the warmth of affection she displays towards her actual brother, an incongruity that interpretations like those of Knox and Bowra quoted above have tried to deny by claiming that the calculation somehow expresses that warmth. But we should not search for an interpretation that would eliminate our dissatisfaction with Antigone's words, for it is an appropriate response to them. It can be understood as a measure of what Sophocles has achieved in writing them: it forms part of that recognition to which the whole of the play leads us, that the splitting up of the personal and the political—however congenial to the human mind—is untenable and that there can be no adequate justification for Antigone's loss of a full life containing not only close and properly honored family ties but the experiences of marriage and motherhood as well.

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³²See Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization*, 189–90; Sorum (note 18 above) 206–207.

³³Cf. Heraclitus fr. 114; Plato, *Laws* 793a.