

ANTIGONH

Antigone, the final play of Sophocles' trilogy, portrays the solar-lunar events of the dawn which is symbolised by the assault against Thebes. Eteocles is buried, for the dark moon soon becomes invisible by day. This is also the point of the silence, and then late volubility, of Pylades in Aeschylus' *Choephoroe*: the dark moon initially being invisible in twilight, and then becoming discernible as night deepens. However, Polyneices by order of Creon remains unburied, his above-ground bulk representing the radiant moon's continued visibility in the dawn. Antigone's suspension in the cave also portrays this phenomenon; her deposition by Creon's sun Haemon, the moon's final drowning in the light of the sun (Haemon).

Let us examine the Messenger's announcement of Antigone's death:

II. 1220-25, 1231-40

έν δὲ λοισθίῳ τυμβεύματι
την μεν κρεμαστήν ἀυχένος κατείδομεν,
βρόχῳ μιτώδει σινδόνοσ καθημιμένην,
τὸν δ' ἀμφὶ μέσση περιπετὴ προσκείμενον,
εὐνήσ ἀποιμώζοντα τῆσ κάτω φθορὰν
καὶ πατρὸσ ἔργα καὶ τὸ δύστηνον λέχοσ.
.... τὸν δ' ἀγρίοισ ὄσσοισι παπτήνασ ὁ παῖσ,
πτύσασ προσώπῳ κοῦδὲν ἀντειπὼν, ζιφοὺσ
ἔλκει διπλοῦσ κνώδοντασ. ἐκ δ' ὀρμωμένου
πατρὸσ φυγαῖσιν ἡμπλακ' : εἶθ ὁ δύσμοροσ
αὐτῷ χολωθεῖσ ὡσπερ εἶχ, ἐπενταθεῖσ
ἤρεισε πλευραῖσ μέσσον ἔγκοσ, ἐσ δ' ὕγρον
ἀγκῶν ἔτ' ἔμφρων παρθένῳ προπτύσσεται.
καὶ φυσιῶν ὀξεῖαν ἐκβάλλει ῥοῆν,
λευκῆ παρειᾷ φοινίου σταλάγματοσ.
κειταῖ δὲ νεκρὸσ περὶ νεκρῷ...

'In the furthest part of the tomb we saw her hanging by the neck, fastened by a halter of fine linen threads, while he was embracing her with arms thrown around her waist, bewailing the loss of his bride to the spirits below, as well as his father's deeds, and his grief-filled marriage But the boy glared at him [Creon] with savage eyes, spat in his face, and without a word in response drew his twin-edged sword. As his father rushed out in flight, he missed his aim. Then the ill-fated boy was enraged with himself and straightaway stretched himself over his sword and drove it, half its length, into his side. Still conscious, he clasped the maiden in his faint embrace, and, as he gasped, he shot onto her pale cheek a swift stream of oozing blood. Corpse enfolding corpse he lay...' (trans. Francis Storr, 1912)

There are two phases to Haemon's embracing of Antigone. Firstly, he grasps her around the waist as she hangs aloft. Then, at some point she becomes disengaged from or breaks the

noose and reclines on the ground in Haemon's arms, where his wound bloodies her cheek. Jebb comments that, 'we are left to suppose that Haemon, while uttering his lament (1224 ff.), has lifted the corpse, so as to extricate it from the noose, and laid it down.' Alternatively, Sophocles' characterisation of the noose as made of 'threads of fine cloth' (μιτώδει σινδόνοϛ) might suggest that the noose is broken. In any case, Antigone's deposition portrays as allegory the disappearance of the radiant moon in the rays of the dawning sun.

Craik (2002) finds problematic the mention of the dual nature of the sword:

Haemon then ζιφουϛ ἔλκει διπλοῦϛ κνώδονταϛ, "draws the double teeth of his sword" ... The expression is odd, and the idea of duality otiose. ζιφουϛ has been suspected as a gloss, and the *v. l.* ὄλωϛ preferred, i. e. "replied nothing whatsoever"; but without the genitive διπλοῦϛ κνώδονταϛ would be still more odd, and oddly allusive. As Jebb notes, κνώδονταϛ are the projecting teeth on the blade of a hunting spear; other usage suggests that the singular was more common than the plural.

Certainly, the κνώδονταϛ would be a highly apt symbol of the rays of the dawning sun. Moreover, I would argue that διπλοῦϛ is a reference to the double-axe which Cassandra prophesies to be the murder weapon of the king in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 1118.¹ The shape of the blades of the bipennis (see note 1 below) renders it a superb potential symbol of the rising sun:



Figure 1: The bipennis, or double-headed axe

The process is essentially the same: the rays of the dawning sun engulfing Regulus in *Agamemnon*, and overwhelming the moon in *Antigone*. Craik (2002) also notes the inconsistency between ὀξεῖαν ῥοήν, 'sharp stream,' and σταλάγματοϛ, 'drop.' Haemon has lanced himself in the chest (πλευραῖϛ, 'ribs'), and this would not produce a 'sharp stream,' as would result from a severed artery near the surface, but rather a frothy flow, as Craik observes. I would argue that the allegory is rising to the surface here, perhaps deliberately fashioned thus by Sophocles. The adjective ὀξεῖαν would certainly be appropriate for the rays of the dawning sun in the process of obliterating the moon.

ll. 80-92

The stichomythic exchange between Antigone and Ismene indicates that the moon is gradually, by baby steps, becoming more dimly visible in the dawn. Antigone's final speech of the exchanges is of five lines (93-97), whereas Ismene's is of two lines (98-9). This may suggest that the dark moon begins to fade more quickly than the radiant.

ll.215-220

The stichomythic exchange between Creon and the Chorus indicates that the sun (Creon) is gradually growing in brightness, even as the stars are dimming. The processes are linked, as in an hourglass.

ll. 255-8

ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐφάνιστο, τυμβήρης μὲν οὖ,
λεπτὴ δ' ἄγος φεύγοντος ὥς, ἐπὴν κόνις
σημεῖα δ' οὔτε θῆρος οὔτε του κυνῶν
ἐλθόντος, οὐ σπᾶσαντος ἐξεφαίνετο.

Guard: 'The dead man was veiled from us—not shut within a tomb, but a light cover of dust was on him, as if put there by the hand of one who shunned a curse.'

Eteocles has been interred, but Creon has ordered that the corpse of Polyneices remain unburied. However, Antigone has laid a light cover of dust over it, as if to give her brother a burial of sorts in the circumstances. This means, in terms of the allegory, that the radiant moon (Polyneices) is as not yet invisible (buried) but is lightly dimmed in the first rays of the dawn. Antigone's deposition in the cave seen will indicate the complete obliteration of the bright moon (Polyneices=Antigone) in the sun's rays.

ll. 730-57

The stichomythic exchange between Creon and Haemon indicates that the sun is gradually growing in brightness.

ll. 98 ff.

What then is the allegoric value of the blind prophet Teiresias? He is old, like the Chorus of elders who represent the stars of the night sky; and he is blind: and I therefore propose that he bears here, as in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, the allegoric value of the erstwhile twinkling stars now rendered invisible in the light of the sun.

NOTES

1. Kennedy (1882) glosses it thus: ‘she [Cassandra] beholds the perpetration of the bloody deed, describing it under the image of a bull gored by an enraged cow. The μελάγκερων μηχάνημα means the ‘bipennis,’ the double axe, of which the two edges answer to the horns...’

REFERENCES

Craik, Elizabeth M., 2002, “Significant language in Sophocles’ *Antigone* 1192-1243,” *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, New Series, 70:1, pp. 89-94