

ON CREON, *ANTIGONE* AND NOT BURYING THE DEAD

The action of Sophocles' *Antigone* arises from Creon's decision not to bury Polyneices. Regarding this decision commentators often emphasize the view commonly held by Greeks that the dead should be buried, but they rarely mention that the Greeks sometimes denied burial to the dead¹). An exhaustive survey of every instance of non-burial would hardly be appropriate here, but I would like to consider some of these occasions, and some of the circumstances under which the dead were not buried, in order to broaden the frame of reference within which Creon's decision is to be judged. Our study will also, I hope, enhance our appreciation of some of the specific details of Sophocles' play, and it will illustrate once again the truism that a piece of literature like the *Antigone* is a product of its time and place and cannot be understood fully without reference to the fabric of social and literary history of which it is a part.

We may begin with the fact that the Athenians, at least sometimes, refused burial in Attic soil to traitors and temple robbers. This practice (*nomos*) of non-burial is enunciated in general terms in Xen. *H. G.* 1.7.22 (ἐάν τις ἢ τὴν πόλιν προδιδῶ ἢ τὰ ἱερὰ κλέπτῃ . . . μὴ ταφῆναι ἐν τῇ Ἀττικῇ) and we are told that it was applied specifically to the "traitor" Themistocles (Thuc. 1.138.6), to the orator Antiphon (Plut. *Mor.* 833 a, 834 a), to Arceptolemus (Plut. *Mor.* 834 a) and to Phrynichus (Lycurg. *Leocrat.* 113) because of their dealing with Sparta on behalf of the Four Hundred, and to Phocion (Plut. *Phoc.* 38.2) who was also charged with treason (cf. Plut. *Phoc.* 33.3)²). It should be noted, however,

1) Discussions of the Athenian practice of denying burial in native soil to traitors have appeared sporadically in the literature on the *Antigone* at least since W. Vischer, "Zu Sophokles Antigone," *RhM* 20 (1865) 44-52, the most recent extensive treatment being that of D. A. Hester, "Sophocles the Unphilosophical: A Study in the *Antigone*," *Mnemosyne*, ser. 4, 24 (1971) 19-21 and 55. These earlier discussions have not examined systematically all the evidence available for not burying the dead, and they also usually fail to distinguish between texts that establish contemporary Athenian practice and those which serve as *literary* precedents for Creon's refusal to burial Polyneices.

2) Cf. also Dinarchus' argument that Demosthenes, as a traitor, should be killed and his body cast out of Athens (Din. 1.77) and the plight of one of Hyperic-

that while these passages speak merely of refusing burial in Attica, the language, for example, which Lycurgus uses in reference to Phrynichus (τά τε ὄσα αὐτοῦ ἀνορύξει καὶ ἐξορίσαι ἔξω τῆς Ἀττικῆς, *Leocrat.* 113) would seem to imply no particular concern that the bones be buried at all³), and Plutarch's language in reference to Anitphon (ἄταφος ἐρρίφη, *Mor.* 833 a) also appears in Diodorus Siculus (16.25.2) as the statement of a common Hellenic practice (παρὰ πᾶσι τοῖς Ἑλλησι κοινὸς νόμος) of absolutely refusing burial to temple robbers (ἀτάφους ῥίπτεσθαι τοὺς ἱεροσύλους⁴).

By contrast, one of the striking features of Greek warfare in the fifth and fourth centuries was the practice of *anairesis* whereby the losing side in a battle was able to recover its dead for burial under a truce granted by the winners⁵). Typical is Thucydides'

des' clients who found himself charged with treasonous acts conviction for which would result in his being refused burial in Attica (*Hyp. Lyc.* 20; the client was actually charged with adultery but his accuser apparently claimed that this act of adultery undermined the state [καταλύειν τὸν δῆμον, 12] and so brought the charge under the procedures used for charges of treason).

3) In the case of Phocion the Athenians were specifically forbidden to cremate his body (*Plut. Phoc.* 28.2); similarly Creon at Eur. *Phoen.* 1630 ff. first orders that Polyneices' corpse be cast out (ἐκβάλετ' ἀθαπτον τῆσδ' ὄρων ἔξω χθονός, 1630) and then forbids subsequent burial on pain of death (1632–33). Note also that at *Plat. Leg.* 960 b temple robbing (among other crimes) is an ἀταφος πράξις.

4) Cf. the disinterment of Pausanias (τὸν νεκρὸν ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸ ἐκτὸς τῶν ὄρων, *Ael. V.H.* 4.7), the Corinthians' refusal to bury the last of the Cypselids and the disinterment of his ancestors (tyranny being akin to treason, one may suppose, at least in the eyes of the aristocrats who slew him: ἀταφὸν τε ἐξώρισε τὸν Κύψελον καὶ τῶν προγόνων τοὺς τάφους ἀνορύξας τὰ ὄσα ἐξέρριψεν, *Nic. Dam. FGH* 90F60) and the disinterment of the Alcmaeonids because of the sacrilege of Megacles who was responsible for slaying the Cylonian conspirators (sacrilege being akin to temple robbery: τῶν τεθνεώτων τὰ ὄσα ἀνέβαλον, *Thuc.* 1.126.12; αὐτοὶ μὲν τῶν τάφων ἐξεβλήθησαν, *Arist. Ath. Pol.* 1; τῶν δ' ἀποθανόντων τοὺς νεκροὺς ἀνορύξαντες ἐξέρριψεν ὑπὲρ τοὺς ὄρους, *Plut. Sol.* 12). The language in most of the passages cited here, in the text above and in the preceding note is almost formulaic, usually involving some form of the verb "to throw" (ῥίπτω or βάλλω) and some word(s) for "beyond the frontier" (e. g. ἐξορίζω). This suggests the possibility that the practices of non-interment and disinterment were common enough for such "formulaic" language to arise (cf. also *Aesch. Sept.* 1014; *Plat. Leg.* 873 b, 873 e, 874 a, 909 c). The repeated use of (ἐκ)βάλλω both with and without ἀταφον, in Sophocles' *Ajax* (1064, 1308–9, 1333, 1388, 1390; cf. 1177 [ἐκρίπτω = passive of ἐκβάλλω]) where the corpse is not cast ἔξω ὄρων but is simply left exposed on the beach (cf. 1064–65) suggests that the verb (ἐκ)βάλλω (even without ἀταφον) can mean "to expose a corpse". ἐκβάλλω, it may be noted, is also the verb for "to drive into exile" and ἐξορίζω can also be used in the same sense (e. g. *Hyp. Lyc.* 20).

5) According to legend the practice dated back to Theseus or Heracles (*Plut.*

account of the aftermath of the battle of Mantinea in 418 (5.74.2):

The Lacedaemonians, having posted a guard over the enemy corpses⁶), immediately set up a trophy and stripped the corpses, and they collected the corpses of their own men and took them away to Tegea where they were buried, and they gave back the corpses of the enemy under a truce.

Two points should be noted here however. First, that the victorious side stripped the bodies of their dead enemies⁷) indicates that the winners felt no great reverence for the corpses of their fallen foes and did not fear ritual pollution (*miasma*) from contact with them. Second, there is little evidence that the winners of a battle ever buried the enemy dead or that they were ever expected to⁸). Rather the obligations to the dead seem to have weighed exclusively on the side to which the dead belonged, a natural enough extension of the belief that the primary obligation for burial lay upon the next of kin⁹). Thus the winners regularly collected their

Thes. 29.4–5). For a partial list of the ancient sources see G. Busolt *et al.*, *Die griechischen Staats-, Kriegs- und Privataltertümer* (Nördlingen 1887) 55.

6) *προθήμενοι τῶν πολεμίων νεκρῶν τὰ ὄπλα*. “A guard was posted to oblige the enemy to ask leave to bury the dead”, C. E. Graves, *The Fifth Book of Thucydides* (London, 1891) *ad loc.*; so too J. Classen, *Thucydides* (Berlin, 1882–1908) *ad loc.* with modern sources. Cf. Xen. *Ages.* 2.15–16.

7) The stripping of corpses was a regular part of combat (for some other examples see M. H. N. von Essen, *Index Thucydideus* [Berolini, 1887] s. v. *σκόλευμα*, *σκολεύω*, etc.). The practice was common enough to elicit Plato’s extensive censure of it at *Rep.* 469c–e, though even Plato would allow *ὄπλα* to be stripped from enemy corpses. The present passage refutes the assertion in Plut. *Mor.* 228f. and Ael. *V.H.* 6.6 that the Spartans refrained from this practice.

8) Pausanias (9.32.9) does censure Lysander for failing to bury the Athenian prisoners whom he executed after Aegospotami, but the incident is not strictly parallel. Pausanias (*loc. cit.*) also says that the Athenians buried the dead Persians at Marathon and that the Persians buried the Spartans at Thermopylae. Pausanias’ earlier description of the burial at Marathon (*ἐς ὄρυγμα δὲ φέροντες σφᾶς ὡς τύχοιεν ἐσέβαλον*, 1.32.5) suggests, however, that the clearing of the Persian corpses was a matter of “housekeeping” and, despite the reason later alleged by the Athenians (*ὡς πάντως οἶσιον ἀνθρώπου νεκρὸν γῆ κοῦναι*, *ibid.*), did not arise out of any sense of obligation towards the dead (Hdt. 9.83.2 seems to imply that the Persians were not buried after Plataea). There is no confirmation, as far as I know, of Pausanias’ claim that the Persians buried the Spartans at Thermopylae, nor evidence for why they should have done so, but as far as reverence for the dead is concerned, it is worth noting that the Persians defiled the corpse of Leonidas by decapitation (Hdt. 7.238.1, 9.78.3; for other examples of Persian mistreatment of enemy corpses see R. Lonis, *Les usages de la guerre entre grecs et barbares* [= *Annales littéraires de l’Université de Besançon* 104] [Paris 1969] 60–62).

9) D. C. Kurtz and J. Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (Ithaca, 1971) 143, 360 (selected sources).

own dead and the losers were obliged to sue for a truce in order to recover theirs. Indeed, to seek such a truce was considered tantamount to an admission of defeat (cf. Plut. *Nic.* 6.5)¹⁰), and we know that on at least two occasions (at Delium in 424/3 [Thuc. 4.97 ff.], and at Haliartus in 395 [Xen. *H.G.* 3.5.24]¹¹) the winning side held the corpses of their enemy hostage to extract political benefit, trying to force the enemy to concede defeat and withdraw before allowing him to recover his dead¹²). Again, in what was probably an extreme case, the side which was ultimately victorious in the Corcyrean *stasis* took the bodies of their enemies and *φορηθὸν ἐπὶ ἀμάξας ἐπιβαλόντες ἀπήγαγον ἔξω τῆς πόλεως* (Thuc. 4.48.4). The text does not say specifically that the corpses were left unburied, but this is clearly implied. As noted above, the obligation of burial fell on the side to which the dead belonged, and at Corcyra at least the losers' side had no survivors.

In the instances which we have examined thusfar, if the bodies of the dead go unburied, this is for the most part not necessarily intended but is rather a secondary effect arising from the failure of others to fulfill their obligations to the dead. There is another category, however, in which the body is intentionally exposed, and burial is prevented, as a way of further punishing one's enemies even after death. The intention here is not, as we are often told, to prevent the soul from finding eternal rest¹³). Among

10) Conversely the granting of such a truce was a sign of victory (cf. Xen. *H.G.* 7.5.26).

11) G. Grote, *A History of Greece*², vol. 6 (London, 1851) 542, note 1, observes: "When we recollect, in connection with this incident [sc. the withholding of the Athenian corpses at Delium], and another in Xen. *Hellen.* iii.5,24, the legendary stories about the Thebans refusing burial to the bodies of slain enemies, in the case of Polyneikes and the other Six Chiefs against Thebes – we may almost suspect that in reality the Thebans were more disposed than other Greeks to override this obligation."

12) Note also the incident in 355/4 recounted by Diodorus Siculus (16.25.2–3) when the Beotians renewed combat in order to kill additional Locrians whose bodies they then used as hostages to force the return of the Boeotian corpses which the Locrians had previously refused to allow to be buried.

13) Note, for example, at *Il.* 1.3–5 the souls of the dead go to Hades even though their corpses are left exposed. Patroclus, it is true, does appeal to Achilles for burial so that he may be accepted by the other dead in Hades (*Il.* 23.69 ff.), but this is the only place in the *Iliad* where the condition of one's corpse is thought to effect the condition of one's *psyche*. Certainly the notion plays no role in the other instances of the mutilation of corpses, including Achilles' mistreatment of Hector's body. At *Od.* 11.66 ff. Elpenor asks Odysseus to return to Aea to bury his body, but he does not say why he wants him to do so; it cannot be to secure Elpenor's entry into Hades, however, since his *psyche* is already there (cf. *Od.* 11.65).

the surviving sources for the Theban saga, for example, this motivation appears only very late in the tradition with Statius (*Theb.* 11.661–64). Rather when the dead are intentionally left unburied it is almost always in order that their bodies can be torn apart by scavenger bird and beast. In these cases then exposure is simply one way of abusing the dead and cannot be separated from the broader issue of mutilation of all sorts performed to dishonor and disgrace the dead enemy. The evidence for such mutilation and non-burial is mainly literary and goes back as far as the *Iliad* where the theme of mistreating corpses is touched upon in almost the opening lines of the epic (*αὐτοὺς δὲ ἐλώρια τεύχε κύνεσσιν οἰωνοῖσι τε πᾶσι*, 1.4–5; the dead are prey for dogs and carrion birds because their bodies have been left unburied). The motif of exposure and/or mutilation of corpses runs throughout the *Iliad*¹⁴⁾ with a special intensity in book 16 and following and climaxing in what is perhaps the most famous instance of such abuse and non-burial, Achilles' mistreatment of the dead Hector at *Il.* 22.395 ff. and 24.14 ff. In general, references to animals feeding on exposed corpses are quite numerous in the *Iliad* and the mention of dogs in particular is virtually a stereotyped expression related to death in battle¹⁵⁾. Indeed one gets the impression from reading the *Iliad* that the normal practice of Homeric warriors was to leave the enemy dead unburied as "prey for dogs and carrion birds", that actual mutilation of corpses (described notably by the verb *ἀεικίζω*¹⁶⁾ was, if not the norm, at least a frequent occurrence, and that the only way the dead were buried was when their bodies were recovered by their compatriots, usually in the course of the combat itself¹⁷⁾. There is in fact only one instance in

14) This motif is discussed in detail by C. Segal, *The Theme of the Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad* (= *Mnemosyne supplementum XVII*) (Lugduni Bataurorum 1971).

15) S. E. Bassett, "Achilles' Treatment of Hector's Body," *TAPA* 64 (1933) 47–49; M. Faust, "Die künstlerische Verwendung von *κύων* 'Hund' in den homerischen Epen," *Glotta* 48 (1970) 8–31, especially list (C), pp. 11–19.

16) In the *Iliad* the verb *ἀεικίζω* is used only to describe the mistreatment of a dead corpse (usually by human beings, but at 19.26 by worms) except at the problematic 24.54, on which see below, note 35. At *Od.* 18.222, however, the verb describes the suitors' mistreatment of the disguised Odysseus.

17) "... in the Heroic Age of Greece the vanquished champion neither claimed nor expected not to be 'thrown to the dogs,' unless his friends or kinsmen could rescue his body, or unless the victor should be content to receive a ransom in return for the body" (Bassett [above, note 15] 49); see further E. Buchholz, *Die homerischen Realien*, Bd. 2¹ (Leipzig, 1881) 326–27; A. Severyns, *Homère*, t. 3 (*L'artiste*) (Bruxelles, 1948) 111–13 with examples.

the *Iliad* of a slain warrior being buried by his former enemy, Achilles' burial of Eetion after the sack of Thisbe (6.414–16)¹⁸), a generous act which Achilles was under no obligation to perform, and one for which no explanation is given. Apart from this single exception, the repeated patterns of the poem imply that all a fallen warrior could expect from his foe was to be stripped of his armor and to have his body thrown to the dogs¹⁹).

We have little evidence for the actual exposure and/or mutilation of corpses by Greeks in the time after Homer²⁰), but the motif appears again in literature in Attic tragedy of the fifth century. Thus, for example, in Euripides' *Electra* Orestes comes on stage carrying the head of Aegisthus whom he has just slain (cf. *El.* 855–56)²¹) and he offers Electra the opportunity of exposing the corpse to beast or bird as she may choose (*El.* 896–98). Electra is at first reluctant to abuse the dead Aegisthus but Orestes insists that she speak her mind, *ἀσπόνδοισι γὰρ νόμοισιν ἔχθραν τῶδε συμβεβλήκαμεν* (905–6). Orestes' stance is Homeric: like Achilles he will pursue enmity beyond the grave. But Electra's reluctance is something quite different, the fear that she will incur the censure of her fellow citizens (900–4)²²). Electra does not say why her fellow citizens would find the abuse of a dead enemy censurable, but in a way she does not have to since the *Electra* was performed in fifth century Athens. The fifth century was a long way from

18) In the *Odyssey* Nestor also tells how Orestes buried Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus (3.309–10) although Menelaus would have prevented the burial of Aegisthus had he arrived in time (3.256–61); Menelaus' intention to deprive Aegisthus of burial is implicitly approved by Nestor (and hence by Homer). Note also that Odysseus feels no obligation to bury the suitors (22.437, 448–51) who are buried by their kinsmen (24.417).

19) The collection of the corpses at the end of *Iliad* 7 is an exception of a different kind since it occurs under a truce. Even here, however, the obligations fall on the compatriots of the dead, each side burying its own. Again there is no obligation felt towards the dead of the other side.

20) Perhaps Tyrtaeus 10.25 West (*αἵματόεντ' αἰδοῖα φίλαις ἐν χερσὶν ἔχοντα*) refers to such mutilation. Note that in the same passage *χρῶα γυμνωθέντα* (27) alludes to the stripping of the corpse of its armor, the usual concomitant of mutilation in Homer.

21) Orestes' abuse of the head of his enemy is quite Homeric and has several precedents in the *Iliad* (11.146–47; 13.202–5; 14.492–500; 18.176–77, 334–35) though by the fifth century it would be considered barbaric. Heracles also threatens to slay Eurystheus and bring his head home (*H.F.* 939), but this is the boast of a mad man (cf. *H.F.* 931 ff., 950 ff.) and, again, not normal behavior.

22) This is also implied by Electra's use of the verb *αἰσχύνομαι* (900). The concept of *αἰσχύνη* relates to the way an act is perceived by others rather than to the worth of the act *in se*.

the primitive world of Homer where exposure and mutilation of corpses was, if not the norm, then at least close to it. Attitudes had changed as sensibilities developed, and abusing one's former enemy was clearly no longer normal behavior.

But it is one thing to feel instinctively that something should not be done and quite another to be able to say why it should not be. In time justification was sought for this intuition that even enemy dead should be respected, and eventually three major reasons evolved, that mistreatment of the dead was impious, that it was uncivilized (or, as the Greeks put it, unhellenic) and that it was pointless since the dead, being dead, no longer existed and hence could no longer be affected by the mistreatment of their bodies.

As to the first of these reasons, we are frequently told by authors of our period that failure to bury the dead is impious because the gods wish the dead to be buried. This statement is essentially tautological however, since it does not tell us *why* the gods support the burial of the dead or why they disapprove of the mistreatment of corpses. It is only when we get to the *Antigone* that we are given a reason, and we are in fact given two. Teiresias first tells Creon that the gods refuse to accept his sacrifices because the carrion birds and beasts have polluted the sacrificial hearths with pieces torn from Polyneices' corpse (1015–22). Teiresias later adds that by not burying Polyneices Creon has deprived the gods of the nether world of their due (1070–71)²³. These arguments are, I would suggest, Sophocles' innovation, an elaboration of the traditional tautological statement that not burying the dead was impious because the gods wanted the dead to be buried. I would further suggest that this tautological statement was in origin nothing more than a projection onto the supernatural plane of the developing intuition that the dead should not be abused. In other words, if I am correct, the original train of thought was not "the gods disapprove; therefore it ought not to be done" but rather "it ought not to be done; therefore the gods must disapprove."

The other two reasons, that not burying the dead is uncivil-

23) The same arguments, that the shrines of the upper gods are polluted and the nether gods are deprived, are picked up again in Lysias' *Funeral Oration* (Lys. 2.7), a passage apparently inspired by Teiresias' arguments in the *Antigone*. Lys. 2.7–10 deals with the Athenians' campaigns against the Thebans to obtain the burial of the Argive corpses which the Thebans refused after the defeat of the Seven. We should therefore not be surprised to find in the Lysias text traces of the *Antigone* and the *Suppliants*, plays which dealt with the same events.

ized and that it is pointless, are based on more substantial arguments however, and reflect, it would seem, an increased sense of Hellenic superiority *vis-à-vis* barbarians on the one hand and heightened speculation on the nature of man and death on the other.

After the battle of Thermopylae Xerxes displayed his particular hatred for Leonidas by ordering that his head be cut off and displayed on a stake (Hdt. 7.238.1). After the battle of Plataea a certain Aeginitan by the name of Lampon proposed that Pausanias, the Spartan victor, treat the corpse of the Persian general Mardonius in a similar fashion (Hdt. 9.78.3). Herodotus calls the proposal *ἀνοσιώτατον* (9.78.1)²⁴ and tells how Pausanias rejected it as something more fitting for barbarians than for Greeks to do (*τὰ πρόπει μᾶλλον βαρβάροισι ποιέειν ἢ περ Ἑλλήσι*, Hdt. 9.79.1)²⁵, and Herodotus elsewhere provides other examples of similar behavior by barbarians (e.g. the Taurians' treatment of shipwrecked Greeks and of their enemies in war, 4.103.1–3²⁶); Artaphernes' treatment of Histiaeus, 6.30.1). Similarly in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* Apollo classifies decapitation (*καρανιστῆρες . . . δίκαι*) with other forms of primitive punishment (including stoning and empalement) which befit the savage Erinyes but which are out of place in civilized Delphi (*Eum.* 185–90)²⁷ and in the

24) Cf. *ῥοια . . . ῥοια* in Pausanias' reply (9.79.2). At 7.288.2 Herodotus also says that in abusing Leonidas' corpse Xerxes *παρενόμησε*, by which he means, however, only that Xerxes thus violated the *νόμοι* of the Persians themselves, as what follows in the text makes clear.

25) Pausanias, however, is not a moral relativist: abusing corpses may more befit barbarians than Greeks, but the barbarians are nonetheless censured for it (*κάκεινοι οὖν δὲ ἐπιφθονέομεν*, 9.79.1).

26) Cf. Eur. *I.T.* 74–75 which, in view of Hdt. 4.103.2 (and Amm. Marcell. 22.8.34), probably refers to human skulls attached to the front of the temple which forms the play's stage backdrop.

27) Cf. Hector's threat of *καρανιστῆς μόρος* at *Rh.* 817; the threat is uttered in a moment of wrath, and its primitive and barbaric nature is an index of the wrath's effect on Hector. The *Eum.* passage lists both primitive forms of execution (decapitation, stoning, etc.) and primitive forms of torture and mutilation of the living (blinding, empalement, etc.). Even though instances of torturing and/or mutilating the living are attested beginning with Odysseus' treatment of Melanthius (*Od.* 22.475–77) this was still not normal Greek practice (cf. e.g. Ael. *V.H.* 5.11), and F. A. Paley, *The Tragedies of Aeschylus* (London, 1879) *ad loc.*, may well be correct in his suggestion that the list in the *Eum.* passage represents Persian practice, or at least what the Greeks believed Persian practice to be (for decapitation in particular cf. e.g. Aesch. *Pers.* 371; Plat. *Menex.* 240 b; Ctes. *Pers.* 10, 13, 36). Such may also be the origin of the lists of barbarous tortures in Plat. *Gorg.* 473 c and *Rep.* 361 e, though in these cases one tends to think of the tales associated with tyrants, e.g. Phalaris and his bull.

Rhesus the Thracian barbarian Rhesus threatens to empale Odysseus (*ἀμπεύρας ῥάχιν*, *Rh.* 514; cf. Aesch. *Eum.* 189–90)²⁸ and leave his body exposed as food for the birds (*Rh.* 514–15)²⁹. In all these instances abusing corpses and/or leaving the dead exposed is considered primitive or barbaric. Conversely one can be said to contravene common Hellenic custom if he prevents his defeated enemies from burying their dead (Eur. *Supp.* 311) while performing such burial on behalf of the defeated is commendable because it preserves *τὸν Πανελλήνων νόμον* (Eur. *Supp.* 526, cf. 671).

Euripides' *Suppliants* is of particular interest to our inquiry since it contains the fullest discussion of why the dead should be buried. The play revolves around the Thebans' decision not to allow the defeated Argives to recover their dead for burial. Again there is no question of any obligation upon the victorious Thebans to bury the Argive dead. This obligation falls rather upon the surviving Argives who are prevented from burying their dead by the Thebans who thereby contravene the normal procedures of *anairesis* outlined above. We are never really told why the Thebans wish to prevent the Argive burials beyond the passing remark that burying the Argives would benefit men who are still enemies even after their death (*ἄνδρας ἐχθροὺς καὶ θανόντας*, 494)³⁰ and we can only assume that the Thebans are functioning like Homeric warriors for whom, as we have seen, it was typical practice to expose and mutilate corpses as a means of further afflicting their dead enemies³¹).

The arguments for burial are more numerous:

- I. *anairesis* is common Hellenic practice (526–27; cf. 671–72);
- II. one gains honor from defeating enemies while they are

28) Rhesus, it may be noted, considers Odysseus a temple robber (*Rh.* 516–17); temple robbers, as we have seen, formed with traitors a special category not eligible for the usual privileges of burial.

29) Cf. also the Taurian Thoas' threat of empalement at Eur. *I.T.* 1430.

30) The Theban herald also threatens war if the Athenians attempt to bury the Argive dead (473–75) and he argues that the gods clearly wanted the Argive chieftains to die (496–505). The threat of war is hardly an explanation for the Thebans' refusal of burial, nor does it follow from the fact that the gods wanted the chieftains dead that they also wanted them unburied. The argument does suggest that the chieftains are not a worthy object for Athenian intervention, but like the threat of war this explains why the Athenians should not bother to intervene, not why the Thebans try to prevent them.

31) Note in this context the references to exposing the corpses to scavenger beasts (47, 282) similar to the Homeric references to scavenger birds and beasts discussed above.

alive (and they gain shame from the defeat)³²) but once they die they cease to inhabit their bodies which, the argument implies, can no longer suffer shame nor yield glory, and which should therefore be allowed to disintegrate into their constituent elements of earth and air (528–35);

III. depriving these dead of burial would set a bad precedent which could make all other Greeks unwilling to fight (536–41);

IV. there is no reason to fear harm from the dead (542–48);

V. burying the dead is pious since it accords with the law of the gods (558–63; cf. 19, 123, 301–2, 348, 373)³³).

The first and last of these arguments, that *anaireisis* is common Greek practice and that burying the dead is the gods' will, have already been discussed sufficiently above. The third argument, that all Greek warriors will fear mistreatment after death, is in fact a corollary of the Thebans' (and Homeric warriors') belief that mistreating corpses does have an adverse effect on the dead, a belief which is expressly contradicted by the second argument, that corpses are nothing but earth and air, incapable of suffering shame – or of doing harm (argument IV) – once the person has left the body through death³⁴).

The most substantial of these arguments would appear to be the second, that since the dead no longer exist it is pointless to abuse their corpses, since it directly addresses the "heroic" belief that mutilating corpses was a source of damage and shame to the defeated (and of glory to the victors), and the frequency with which this second argument occurs may be taken as an index of the survival, at least in literature of the "heroic" belief. We are told, for example, in two fragments of the fourth century tragedian Moschion (frag. 3 Snell, v. 1):

κενὸν θανόντος ἀνδρὸς αἰκίζειν σκιάν

32) For the sense of *καλῶς* and *αἰσχρῶς* in this passage see A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford, 1960) 157.

33) *ἄνομοι* (45) may refer to the *νόμοι* of either gods (argument V) or Greeks (argument I). *νόμοι βροτῶν* (378, in a prayer addressed to Athena) is probably an overbroad extension of *Πανελλήνων νόμος*.

34) This is not meant to imply that the person survives death in some form, but rather usually the opposite, that the person ceases to exist when death occurs and the dispersion process begins. Cf. e.g. Soph. *Ajax* 1257 where Agamemnon calls Ajax who had just died *ἀνδρὸς οὐκέτ' ὄντος*, *ἀλλ' ἤδη σκιάς*, and hence incapable of aiding Teucer.

(frag. 7 Snell, vv. 1–2)³⁵):

〈τί〉 κέρδος οὐκέτ' ὄντας αἰκίζειν νεκρούς;
τί τὴν ἀναυδον γαῖαν ὑβρίζειν πλέον;

Antigone uses a similar argument for the burial of Polyneices in Euripides' *Antigone* (frag. 176 Nauck):

θάνατος γὰρ ἀνθρώποισι νεικέων τέλος
ἔχει· τί γὰρ τοῦδ' ἔστι μείζον ἐν βροτοῖς;
τίς γὰρ πετραῖον σκόπελον οὐτάζων δορι
ὀδύνασαι δώσει; τίς δ' ἀτιμάζων νέκυς,
εἰ μηδὲν αἰσθάνοιντο τῶν παθημάτων;

And Plato uses this same notion that the person of one's enemy leaves the body at death as the basis of his argument that both the stripping of corpses and the prevention of burial³⁶) should be forbidden. The verb *αἰκίζειν* in both Moschion passages takes us back to the world of the Homeric warriors and shows us that the arguments in these passages are addressed to people who believe, just like the Homeric warriors, that they are achieving something by outraging the dead, presumably the disgrace of their enemies and their own glory. Similarly in the Euripides passage Antigone speaks of Creon trying to dishonor (*ἀτιμάζων*) Polyneices by refusing burial, and the language which Plato uses to censure stripping corpses and non-burial (*γυναικείας τε καὶ σμικρᾶς διανοίας τὸ πολέμιον νομίζειν τὸ σῶμα*, 469 d; note also the demeaning comparison with dogs, 469 d–e) suggests that he too is arguing against a belief that the mistreatment of corpses was in some way a sign of masculinity (*ἀνδρεία*) and a source of honor. Finally in this context we may note the contrast between living enemies and dead bodies and the misguided attempt to demonstrate *εὐψυχία* by abusing the dead at Lys. 2.8³⁷):

35) The language of the second verse of this fragment strongly recalls *Iliad* 24.54 (*κωφὴν γὰρ δὴ γαῖαν αἰκίζει μεναίνων*).

36) Plato's outlawing of *τάς τῶν ἀναιρέσεων διακαλύψεις* (Rep. 469 e) from his ideal state suggests that the practice of preventing burial was more prevalent in the real world of the fifth and fourth centuries than our historical sources would lead us to believe. Cf. above, note 7.

37) For *εὐψυχία* as a synonym of *ἀνδρεία* see K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1974) 166. The Lysias speech gives as further reasons for seeking burial (2.9) to stop *ὑβρις* against the gods (= *Suppliants* argument V) and to provide the dead with *πάτριος τιμῆ* in accordance with *Ἑλληνικός νόμος* and *ἐλπῖς* (= *Suppliants* argument I).

... ἀνδρῶν μὲν ἀγαθῶν εἶναι ζῶντας τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τιμωρήσασθαι, ἀπιστούντων δὲ σφίσιν αὐτοῖς ἐν τοῖς τῶν τεθνεώτων σώμασι τὴν εὐψυχίαν ἐπιδείκνυσθαι.

As in the *Suppliants* and the *Antigone* the issue of burying the dead also figures prominently in Sophocles' *Ajax*. Here, as we shall see, the emphasis is particularly on "honor". After Ajax' suicide the Atreidae order that his body be left exposed in true Homeric fashion as "food for the birds" (1065)³⁸. At first Menelaus pretends that this is done because Ajax was a traitor who tried to kill the whole Greek army (στρατῶ ξύμπαντι, 1055) – recall that Attic traitors were refused burial at least in their native soil –, but as Menelaus continues it becomes obvious that he prevents burial so that he can exert over the dead Ajax a superiority which he could not exercise while Ajax was still alive (1067–70). The Atreidae and Ajax had been enemies, and from the Atreidae's point of view this feud did not end with Ajax' death but still continues (1134, 1344–45, 1372–73)³⁹. In the Atreidae's world of competitive values it is a disgrace not to pay your enemy back when you have the chance. If hostility continues beyond death, then requital for insults must continue also, and non-burial is in fact requital, ὕβρις for ὕβρις, for the insults of Ajax (1087–88). Agamemnon finds it difficult to accept that Odysseus would respect the corpse of an enemy (1356) for, from the point of view of the Atreidae, to allow the burial of one's enemies is οὐ . . . καλόν (1132) and shows a man to be δειλός (1362). Put simply, the Atreidae think that they will look bad if they allow Ajax to be buried.

In true competitive fashion the Atreidae wish to disgrace their enemy, but mistreating Ajax' corpse is pointless since Ajax no longer exists, a natural enough argument to make – and one which Tecmessa had made earlier in a slightly different context (971–72) – but one at which Odysseus barely hints (1343–44). Odysseus casts his argument rather in terms of justice which he links to the "honor" standard of the Atreidae. Odysseus concedes that it is still possible to disgrace Ajax and thereby to enhance one's own position (cf. κέρδεσιν, 1349) though to do so would not be just (οὐκ ἂν ἐνδίκως γ' ἀτιμάζοιτο, 1342)⁴⁰ and Odysseus

38) This is exactly what Ajax had feared would happen (829–30), naturally enough since Ajax and the Atreidae share the same "heroic" values.

39) οὗτος δὲ κακεῖ κἀνθάδ' ὦν ἔμοιγ' ὁμῶς ἐχθιστος ἔσται (1372–73). On ἐκεῖ referring to the realm of the dead see *LSJ* s. v. ἐκεῖ, 2.

40) See further W. B. Stanford, *Sophocles: Ajax* (London, 1963) *ad loc.*

himself certainly would not do it (*οὐκ ἀντατιμάσαιμ' ἄν*, 1339) even if Ajax was his enemy (1336–39). Odysseus says that it was *καλόν* to hate Ajax while he was alive but it is no longer *καλόν* to victimize him now that he is dead (1347–49), maintaining in effect that hostility must yield once a man is dead (1344–45) – we are reminded of Antigone's description of death as *νεικέων τέλος* (Eur. frag. 176.1 Nauck quoted above) – and when hostility yields justice requires that Ajax be honored for the noble warrior he was⁴¹). The argument is superficially similar to argument II of the *Suppliants* but is based on quite different premises, not on the non-existence of Ajax but on the continuation of his particular martial merits even after death. The argument is thus in no way a universal claim that all dead should be buried but is quite restricted, applying only to Ajax and to other warriors of similar stature, though in a play concerning *arete* the limitation seems appropriate. In the end Odysseus says that the burial of Ajax is in his (Odysseus') own interest for he too will die (1365), implying that he would hope for similar honorable treatment after his own death. The argument is essentially the same as argument III of the *Suppliants*. It is one which should and does appeal to Agamemnon (cf. 1366) since, as we have seen, this argument is simply a corollary of the belief, shared by the Atreidae⁴²), that one can affect the dead adversely by mistreating their corpses.

Odysseus' arguments for Ajax' burial are thus an interesting attempt to link burial to the heroic behavioral code which normally countenanced or even commended mutilation and non-burial. For our purposes, however, the *Ajax* is most valuable not for Odysseus' arguments but for the arguments and attitudes of the Atreidae whom Odysseus addresses since these arguments and attitudes reflect in striking fashion the suppositions and values underlying the practice of mutilation and exposure⁴³).

41) Note the repeated emphasis on justice (*Δίκην*, 1335; *ἐνδίκως*, 1342; *δίκαιον*, 1344; *ἐνδίκους*, 1363) and on Ajax' excellence as a warrior (*ἀριστον*, 1340; *ἑσθλόν*, 1345; *γενναῖος*, 1355; *ἀρετή*, 1357; *ἀρίστοις ἀνδράσιν*, 1380). Odysseus' reference to *τοὺς θεῶν νόμους* (1343) apparently refers only to this adherence to justice. Teucer's earlier invocation of the gods (1129–31), on the other hand, is more likely to refer to the instinctive feeling that the dead should not be abused (= *Suppliants* argument V).

42) Not only by the Atreidae but also by Teucer who threatens a similar fate of non-burial for anyone who tries to prevent the burial of Ajax (1175–77); cf. 1384–85 where Teucer remarks of Odysseus that he alone of the Greeks dared not to outrage (*ἐφρυβρίσαι*) the dead Ajax.

43) For the sake of completeness we may also note that the issue of burial arises at the end of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (1005 ff.) and at the end of

To summarize the results of our inquiry thusfar:

1. From at least the fifth century onward the Athenians were prepared to refuse burial at least in Attic soil to traitors and to temple robbers.

2. In the combat represented in the Homeric poems non-burial of corpses as a form of mutilation of the dead is common practice. The motivation for this practice would seem to be rooted in the competitive ethic of the heroic warrior and in his consequent unwillingness to allow his enemy any advantage or honor even after death.

3. By at least the fifth century such mutilation was no longer acceptable, though it may still have been occasionally practiced. For the Greeks in general in the fifth century and later victors in combat were still under no obligation to bury the enemy dead themselves but Panhellenic custom now required them to allow the defeated side to recover their dead for burial.

4. Several instances of exposure/mutilation occur in Attic tragedy. The characters of Attic tragedy are drawn from the world of the epic, and this may account for their practicing exposure/mutilation, something which would be otherwise unacceptable behavior in the fifth century. Yet even here the practice is sometimes explicitly censured (as, e.g. in Euripides' *Suppliants*) and elsewhere even when it is recognized as licit behavior within the context of the drama it is still at least implicitly censured by

Euripides' *Phoenician Women* (1628 ff.), though in both cases the passages are probably later interpolations. The discussion in both passages fits well within the patterns we have been considering. The Theban authorities define Polyneices as a traitor (*Sept.* 1017–19; *Phoen.* 1628–29; *πόλεως ἐχθρός ἦν οὐκ ἐχθρός ὢν*, 1652) and order that his body be cast out and left unburied to pay for his treachery (*Sept.* 1013–14; *Phoen.* 1654), adding the Homeric detail that it will be given over to the dogs (*Sept.* 1014; *Phoen.* 1650). The language of the order (*νεκρὸν ἔξω βαλεῖν ἀθαπτον*, *Sept.* 1013–14; *νέκυν ἐκβάλετ' ἀθαπτον τῆσδ' ὄρων ἔξω χθονός*, *Phoen.* 1629–30) reminds us that this was the punishment reserved for traitors (on the “formulaic” nature of this language see above, note 4). The Theban herald in the *Seven* adds that the paternal gods of Thebes are opposed to Polyneices because of his treachery (in contrast to Eteocles who has been *ιερώων πατρώων δσιος* [1010]; the detail sounds inspired by Creon's claim in Sophocles' *Antigone* that Polyneices intended to burn down the temples of the *πατῶροι θεοί* [Ant. 199–201]). In the *Seven* Antigone's insistence on burying Eteocles is based on the closeness of family ties (1026 ff.). In the *Phoenician Women* Antigone claims only that the punishment is *οὐκ ἔννομον* (1651), presumably referring to the *νόμοι* of the gods whose judgement it is *μη' ἐφρυβρίζεσθαι νεκρούς* (1663), but the point is not developed further and is soon forgotten in the emotional stichomythia where Creon and Antigone state headstrong positions rather than logical arguments.

being associated with characters to whom the audience responds negatively (Orestes, Rhesus⁴⁴), the Atreidae⁴⁵).

5. In time three major arguments were developed to justify the later Greek feeling that exposure/mutilation was unacceptable:

- a. that it was against the will of the gods;
- b. that it was unhellenic;
- c. that it was pointless since the dead were beyond suffering and humiliation.

The first of these reasons appears to be merely the projection onto a supernatural plane of the instinctive human rejection of mutilation. The second, it is suggested, evolved as a result of the Greeks' expanded awareness of the non-Greek world and in particular of the Persians whom the Greeks seem to have associated with particularly primitive forms of punishment⁴⁶), while the third represents a more developed and sophisticated view of the nature of man and of death than that found in the Homeric poems.

The application of all this to the *Antigone* may be briefly stated. In the first place Creon as king of Thebes⁴⁷) is under no obligation to bury Polyneices since Polyneices had died in battle as a foreign invader (on this cf. especially the parodos). Normal procedures of *anairesis* would require the surviving Argives to bury Polyneices since he had been part of their army, and Creon's only obligation in terms of *anairesis* would be to allow the Argives to recover their dead, including Polyneices, once they had conceded defeat.

Normal *anairesis* is never an issue in the play however, since

44) On the arrogance of Rhesus see V. J. Rosivach, "Hector in the *Rhesus*," *Hermes* 106 (1978) 59–60. At *Troad.* 734–38 Talhybius warns that Astyanax may not be buried if Hecuba antagonizes the Greeks; the threat suits well the brutal character of the Greeks as they are portrayed in the *Troades*; the other Trojan males have been left unburied (cf. *Troad.* 599–600, 1083).

45) The scholiast to Soph. *El.* 1488 interprets Electra's order there (*πτανὼν πρόθεσ ταφεῦσιν ὧν τόνδ' εἰκὸς ἐστὶ τυγχάνειν*, 1487–88) as bidding Orestes to expose Aegisthus' corpse to dogs and birds of prey. Sophocles' text is hardly so specific, but if the scholiast's interpretation is correct, Electra's savage command may be taken as an index of how much she has been brutalized by her sufferings.

46) See above, note 27.

47) My concern here is with the civil dimension of Creon's actions, and I do not mean to deny that he has familial obligations to bury Polyneices, obligations which are confirmed in the course of the play by the fact that Creon personally buries Polyneices rather than turning the task over to another. Even if Creon the king is expected to allow the burial, there is no reason why as king (rather than as relative) he should perform the burial himself.

Polyneices is, more than simply a foreign invader, also a domestic traitor. At least in terms of Sophocles' play his action in bringing a foreign army against his native land is a totally unjustified, and unjustifiable, treasonous act⁴⁸), and Creon's refusal to allow his burial in the native land he had attacked therefore falls squarely within the framework of accepted Athenian practice which requires that the corpses of traitors and temple robbers be cast out unburied⁴⁹). Indeed Creon's references to Polyneices' intention to destroy the temples of the Theban gods (199 ff., 284 ff.) may well be also a device meant to suggest that Polyneices is guilty of impiety towards the city's temples as well as of treason, and thus doubly deserves the punishment which he receives.

The matter is not quite so simple however, for the refusal to allow Polyneices' burial has another side. The language used in connection with the refusal, particularly *αἰμισθέν* (206, part of Creon's initial prohibition of burial), the numerous references to honor⁵⁰), and above all the precise form of punishment, exposure to carrion bird and beast (29–30, 205–6), place Creon firmly within the tradition of the Homeric warriors and their successors in Attic tragedy who expose the corpses of their enemies as a form of mutilation, thereby further humiliating them and punishing them

48) In the *Phoenician Women*, for example, Polyneices justifies his attack on Thebes on the grounds that he had been unjustly kept from the Theban throne by Eteocles (*Phoen.* 473 ff.). By contrast no one ever suggests that Polyneices was anything but wrong in attacking Thebes in the *Antigone*.

49) The claim made e.g. by Knox (*Gnomon*, 49 [1968] 748) that refusing burial in Attica implied allowing burial elsewhere seems something of a quibble. The state's power stops at its own frontier, to be sure, and it usually could not prevent burial in another country. Still, as noted earlier, the language used to describe the practice (verbs of throwing) implies little respect for the bones once they were cast out, and casting out is in fact often specifically linked with non-burial (see above, notes 3 and 4), whether or not the command is enforceable, while there is no text suggesting that the state expected the cast out bones to be buried abroad. Creon does differ from Attic practice, however, in one important respect: he casts the body out of the physical city of Thebes but not *ἔξω ὄραν*, outside its territory, though there may be a dramatic reason for this as Hester has suggested. On this whole point see further Hester (above, note 1) 20–21.

50) Not burying Polyneices is a way of dishonoring Polyneices while burying Eteocles is a way of honoring Eteocles (21–22, 194 ff.). To bury Polyneices would be to honor him too. But putting him on a par with Eteocles and erasing the distinction between the two would have the effect of dishonoring Eteocles since it would deprive him of the preferential treatment which he deserves. Hence the necessity of not burying Polyneices if one is to preserve the honor of Eteocles. (The argument is found in its essentials at 514–20). Preserving Eteocles' honor is important since he is the friend of the city. Failure to preserve his honor would mean a loss of honor for the city.

even after their death. Creon's motive in not allowing the burial would thus be readily comprehensible to an audience familiar with the literary tradition, but the action would also no longer be acceptable in the fifth century. As we said earlier, the other characters in Attic tragedy who prohibit burial are all portrayed negatively, and Creon is no exception. On the one hand Creon is an epic character, and he functions as one in refusing burial to Polyneices, but on the other hand he is also a character in a fifth century play, and the course of the play will show that his refusal was wrong.

Yet Creon differs in an important respect from his epic and tragic predecessors. They were motivated on a strictly personal level, by the desire to obtain personal honor for themselves and to inflict dishonor upon their personal enemies. Creon, by contrast, is motivated by civic concerns, by a desire to honor the city's friends and to inflict dishonor upon her enemies (194 ff., 207 ff., cf. 514–20)⁵¹). In this he is but one more instance of a phenomenon common enough in fifth century Greece⁵²), the adoption to the state of the same competitive values which had characterized the Homeric warriors *et al.* as individuals. As the Homeric warrior was an *ego* seeking his own superiority and position of honor in a society of warrior *egos*, now the *polis* functions – or at least is perceived as functioning by those who act on her behalf – as the Homeric warrior did, seeking her own superiority and honor in a society of *poleis*⁵³). Significantly Creon expresses no personal hostility to Polyneices. Polyneices has done no personal harm to Creon, but he has attacked Creon's state, and so the state – or rather Creon acting on behalf of the state – will extract the competitive penalty from Polyneices, mutilation of his corpse by exposure after death.

So Creon's motive is "honor", the sense of superiority one may take from dishonoring one's enemy – or, in Creon's case, the city's enemy – after death. Like the others who refuse burial Creon too believes that enmities transcend the grave (522; cf. *Ajax*

51) For having the same friends and enemies as a sign of loyalty cf. Dem. 18.280, Isoc. 16.41 and, conversely, Lys. 12.51.

52) Or perhaps more accurately fifth century Athens since our sources for the period are all Athenian. See further A. W. H. Adkins, *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece* (New York, 1972) 133–39, for some examples.

53) This drive for the honor of one's own *polis vis-à-vis* other *poleis*, it should be added, exists side by side with and does not replace the personal drive for honor within one's own *polis*.

1372–73, Eur. *Supp.* 494), and like the others he too is subject to the same arguments that mutilation of the dead is impious and that it will not yield the glory which the mutilator expects (1029–30⁵⁴); cf. Eur. *Supp.* 528 ff., *Ant.* frag. 176 Nauck, vv. 3–5; Moschion, frag. 3 Snell, v. 1)⁵⁵).

It is not the arguments however, but a symbol which Sophocles uses to demonstrate the error of Creon's ways. Creon's punishment of Polyneices is to expose his corpse to scavenger bird and beast. As we mentioned earlier, the particulars of the punishment link Creon to the Homeric heroes who regularly treat the corpses of their enemies in this fashion. The link is emphasized in the beginning of the play as we are told twice, first by Antigone (29–30) and then by Creon (205–6), that Polyneices' body is to become food for dogs and birds of prey, and we are again reminded of the link later in the play when Haemon praises Antigone for not allowing her brother's corpse to be destroyed μήθ' ὑπ' ὀμηστών κυνῶν . . . μήθ' ὑπ' οἰωνῶν τινός (697–98)⁵⁶). All this is standard enough and does not differ significantly from, e.g. the exposure of Ajax' corpse (*Ajax* 1063–65, cf. *ibid.* 829–30). But with the arrival of Teiresias Sophocles transforms the symbol. The scavenger birds and beasts, the link with the Homeric heroes and the agents of Creon's mutilation of Polyneices, now become the mark of Creon's own failure as they carry their "food", shreds from the exposed corpse, into the city to pollute its altars and befoul its hearths (1015 ff.). Creon had exposed Polyneices' corpse as a gesture of support, to benefit the city. Now through the agency of the birds (and dogs)⁵⁷) Creon's intentions have been stood on their head. The city has not been benefited but harmed, and the physical pollution caused by the birds stands as a symbol for the spiritual corruption of the city by the very act which Creon undertook on its behalf. Creon, however, is not chastened. Rather he is moved to his ultimate impiety, again expressed through the symbol of scavenging birds (1039–41):

54) Teiresias implicitly accuses Creon of seeking to demonstrate his ἀλκή. Since ἀλκή is a desirable quality within the competitive value system, the censure here is quite similar to that of Lys. 2.8 which speaks of another misguided attempt to demonstrate εὐψυχία by refusing burial.

55) There is no mention, however, of the third argument, that such activity is barbaric.

56) There may also be an ironic reprise of the motif in the Guard's description of Antigone wailing like a bird by the corpse of Polyneices (422–257).

57) Reading ἐχθρα δὲ πάσα συνταράσσεται πόλις ἴδων σπαράγματ' ἢ κύνες καθήγγισαν κτλ. at 1080 ff.

τάφῳ δ' ἐκεῖνον οὐχὶ κρύψετε,
οὐδ' ἦν θέλωσι οἱ Ζηνὸς αἰετοὶ βορὰν
φέρειν νιν ἀρπάζοντες ἐς Διὸς θρόνους.

In summary then, Sophocles could have portrayed the exposure of Polynices either as an acceptable punishment for the public crime of treason or as an unacceptable form of private vengeance. Instead he has combined the two, portraying the exposure both as a civil punishment and especially as an “epic” act of vengeance executed on behalf of the state. Combining the two in this manner allows him to show, through the play’s denouement, that acts which were unacceptable when done for one’s personal benefit remain unacceptable even when they are performed in the service of the state⁵⁸).

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58) I would like to thank Prof. A. W. H. Adkins who kindly read an earlier draft of the first part of this paper.