

The Light Ambiguous

Reading the Second Stasimon of Sophocles' *Antigone*

Occurring just before the physical center of the play, *Antigone's* second stasimon is marked by vivid imagery and enigmatic gnomic statements on man's earthly condition. It begins with a formulaic opening to a makarismos: εὐδαίμονες οἷσι κακῶν ἄγευστος αἰών.¹ By the end of the song, it is apparent that *no one* exists who fits this criterion; no one is ἐκτὸς ἄτας.² The presence of this ode in such a vital position in the play draws attention; its marked departure from the optimism of the chorus's first two songs elicits analysis. This paper will explore the relevance of this ode as a response to the action of the play and its importance in shaping the play's overall interpretation, especially in its treatment of crucial themes and motifs. In addition, I will look into the continuity of the choral voice in the *Antigone* and the chorus' level of consciousness in qualifying, reversing, or otherwise problematizing their statements throughout the play.

The ode is organized in two strophic pairs. The first strophe makes a generalized statement about man's relationship to "ATH and the antistrophe follows with a paradigmatic example: the Labdacids. Specifically, "ATH is that force, sent from the gods, which shakes the δόμος and does not cease to hound that family through the generations,

¹ 583: "Happy are those for whom life is without taste of evils." All translations in this paper are my own; the text is from Lloyd-Jones & Wilson's OCT, unless I make note of textual variations. All line numbers refer to Sophocles' *Antigone*, unless otherwise noted.

² 614 & 625: "free from ruin."

until the final destruction of the δόμος. This description of "ATH is presented in a chiasmic structure, emphasizing the opposition of "ATH in the house to individual happiness in life. No human action is mentioned as a cause for "ATH; instead, the emphasis is on the effects of "ATH on the whole family (585: γενεᾶς ἐπὶ πλῆθος³). As such, "ATH is specifically linked to natural mechanisms of destruction, like earthquakes (584: σεισθῆ) and storms (587-8: δυσπνόοις...θρήσσησιν), which destroy houses relentlessly, and often without cause. It is impersonal and unavoidable. Already in this first strophe, the chorus has characterized the human victims of "ATH as just that – victims – and by doing so, they avoid committing themselves to a single cause of destruction. The refusal to take sides overtly, but rather to censure everyone in the most ambiguous way possible behind a mask of vaguely-referential gnomic truths, is characteristic of *Antigone's* chorus; this is increasingly evident through the rest of the second stasimon.

The image of a stormy sea is familiar to the play already. In Creon's opening monologue, he employs the image by equating the city with a ship: ἄνδρες, τὰ μὲν δὴ πόλεος ἀσφαλῶς θεοὶ / πολλῶ σάλω σεισαντες ὥρθωσαν πάλιν⁴... ἥδ' ἐστὶν ἡ σώζουσα καὶ ταύτης ἔπι / πλέοντες ὀρθῆς τοὺς φίλους ποιούμεθα.⁵ This at first glance appears to be an amenable response to the parodos' relief at victory and peace. Like the chorus, Creon describes the city, formerly shaken by the gods, now righted by them. However, Creon relies on a conception of a "ship of state" that, when properly steered, will save those living within it. He then goes on to equate himself with the city, and so the ship that will be its

³ The emphasis here on γένος, evokes not only the whole family/race, but also an idea of future generations.

⁴ 162-3: "Men, after shaking the affairs of the city with much tossing, the gods securely right it again."

⁵ 189-90: "This [city] is our savior and sailing upon it we rightly make friends."

savior. The chorus also uses the sea-storm image in its first stasimon, as the first aspect of destructive nature that man conquers with his technical ingenuity: τοῦτο καὶ πολιοῦ πέραν / πόντου χειμερίῳ νότῳ / χωρεῖ, περιβρυχίοισιν / περῶν ὑπ' οἴδμασιν.⁶ The first stasimon goes on to praise the skill of man in harnessing and overcoming the harsh realities of nature and his surpassing intellect, especially in the forming of laws and societies. It downplays the agency of gods in favor of praising the wonder that is man. Death alone is unconquered by man's skill. What then has changed for the chorus between the first and second stasima? Why have they forgotten Creon's promise of safety within the polis? By the present song, man's agency, even his presence, has been completely left out of the image: there is no ship, no city, merely the devastating violence of the sea.

The antistrophe moves from the generalized truth to the specific example. In addition to the requisite metrical echo of the strophe, the antistrophe phonetically and thematically echoes the strophe, especially notable in the comparison between 585: οὐδὲν ἐλλείπει γενεᾶς ἐπὶ πλῆθος ἔρπον⁷ and 595: οὐδ' ἀπαλλάσσει γενεὰν γένος, ἀλλ' ἐρείπει.⁸ The repetition of γένος emphasizes the ambiguity of the term, which refers both to race and to generation. "ATH is depicted as inherent to humankind, while at the same time inherited within a single family across time.⁹ Interestingly, although the human cause of the punishment of the Labdacids is well known (Laius' disregard of the Delphic oracle), again human agency is neglected in favor of a vivid depiction of the effects of "ATH on the

⁶ 334-7: "This [the power of man] advances across the grey sea even in the wintry south-wind, sailing under the engulfing swells."

⁷ 585: "Nothing [of "ATH] ceases to creep upon the whole of the race."

⁸ 595: "Nor does generation release generation, but [someone of the gods] hurls..."

⁹ Benardete 1975 (II), 26: Benardete notes the ambiguity in this terminology and uses it to unify the first strophic pair with the second; however, the tension is present already in the first strophic pair alone, as my translations above (notes 7 & 8) show.

δόμος and its associated γένος. It is notable here that the chorus makes a mistake, or at least assumes something that does not come to pass. They claim that light, a thinly veiled metaphor for hope, is now stretching over the *last* roots in the house of Oedipus, which neglects Ismene's eventual survival, her escape from the inevitable ruin of her house. In a way, this gives some credibility to the chorus' presence as an intra-dramatic figure; they only know what they have been told and Creon has just said that he will kill both Antigone and Ismene. However, their neglect of Ismene also recalls Antigone's rejection of Ismene from the family: οὐτ' ἄν κελεύσαιμ' οὐτ' ἄν, εἰ θέλοις ἔτι / πράσσειν, ἐμοῦ γ' ἄν ἠδέως δρώης μέτα¹⁰...εἰ ταῦτα λέξεις, ἐχθαρῆ μὲν ἐξ ἐμοῦ, / ἐχθρὰ δὲ τῷ θανόντι προσκείσῃ δίκη.¹¹ If Antigone is right that Ismene's choice excludes her from the family, she no longer shares in any hope or ruin attached to it.

That the chorus refers to the Labdacids and Oedipus specifically in this antistrophe confirms a natural assumption that the end of this δόμος is not only the subject of this ode, but the focus of the play as well. However, the presence of Creon alone on stage with the chorus at this point creates an ironic foreshadowing of the destruction not only of the house of the Labdacids, but of Creon's family as well. This ode emphasizes the intentionally ambiguous reference when it describes the irrevocable cycle of destruction, the pains falling upon pains, unalleviated by future generations. The chorus' phrasing is echoed by Creon as the messenger tells him of the deaths of his son and wife: τί δ' ἔστιν αὖ κάκιον ἐκ κακῶν ἔτι;¹²...σφάγιον ἐπ' ὀλέθρῳ, / γυναικεῖον ἀμφικεῖσθαι μόρον.¹³ He recognizes

¹⁰ 69-70: "I would not ask for you, not even if you would wish to act later, you would not work alongside me with pleasure."

¹¹ 93-4: "If you say these things, you will become my enemy, and as an enemy to the dead, you will pay the penalty."

¹² 1281: "What other evil is there, from the evils already?"

these deaths as the end of his house, just as the death of Antigone is the end of the Labdacids. In addition, this ambiguity of reference emphasizes the universality of "ATH, the general and impersonal truth of it with which the chorus began the strophe. It is not just the house of Oedipus, nor just the house of Creon, but all houses, all families that are affected by inevitable and inescapable ruin hurled down by the gods.

The chorus' insistence that οὐδ' ἔχει λύσιν¹⁴ from the cyclical inheritance of evils marks a reversal of their view in both the parodos and, to some extent, in the first stasimon, both of which are at least superficially positive and hopeful. In the parodos, the chorus sings in relief that the attack of the seven against Thebes has failed and that their city has seen a dawn victorious and free from war. This ode is narrative, and emphasizes a particular motif – the light of the sun – that in this case symbolizes the hope and transparency of a new day. Notably, the song also follows a day-long arc from the rising of the sun through the nighttime dances of a Bacchic chorus. The parodos employs the motif of the sun's light as a symbol of hope, especially tied to the polis: ἀκτίς ἀελίου, τὸ κάλ- / λιστον ἑπταπύλω φανέν / Θήβα τῶν προτέρων φάος.¹⁵ The first antistrophe of the second stasimon brutally destabilizes this symbolism. The light (598: φάος) stretches itself over the last roots (597-8: εσχάτας... ῥίζας) of the house of Oedipus, but it is now cut down by φουνία κοπίς/κόνις¹⁶ and λόγου τ' ἄνοια καὶ φρενῶν Ἐρινύς.¹⁷ The three nominatives,

¹³ 1291-2: "My wife's slaughter, her death placed upon this ruin!"

¹⁴ 596: "There is no release."

¹⁵ 100-2: "Beam of the sun, most lovely light of all those before which shone on seven-gated Thebes..."

¹⁶ 601-2: "Bloody cleaver," is in the OCT, which makes very little sense without stretching the meaning of κοπίς to some kind of harvest instrument; Griffith follows the manuscript tradition "bloody dust," which I prefer, as it evokes the image of a corpse covered by dust as well as a dust storm which would hide the light of the sun.

¹⁷ 603: "Mindlessness of word and the Fury of the mind."

either as a triple subject or in some kind of apposition, create a fascinating juxtaposition, which associates physical destruction with psychological and intellectual ruin. At the same time, their action in destroying the house of Oedipus down to its last roots recalls the ruinous *ἄθη* of the first strophe. In addition, the *Ἐρινός*, whether personified as an avenging deity or simply the impersonal manifestation of guilt, suggests – but carefully does not overtly accuse – a human error for which ruin is a punishment. Despite the textual difficulty here, it is apparent that whatever the *ἀκτις ἀελίου* illuminated, it was not a peaceful Thebes, reborn from civil war and fraternal strife. Instead, the light foreshadowed the destruction of not one, but two venerable families of Thebes.

This reversal can also be seen as the play proceeds to use the metaphor of light not as a symbol of hope, but as a marker of the end of life. Antigone's final speech is marked by its use of "the last light" as a euphemism for death: *νέατον δὲ φέγ- / γος λεύσσουσαν ἀελίου, / κοῦποτ' αὔθις*.¹⁸... *οὐκέτι μοι τόδε λαμπάδος ἱερὸν / ὄμμα θέμις ὀρᾶν ταλαίνα*.¹⁹ In his final words, Creon coopts the motif: *ὅπως μηκέτ' ἄμαρ ἄλλ' εἰσίδω*;²⁰ in doing so (somewhat similar to Antigone in her final speech) he gives the light the status of hope; however, his hope is that death (no longer seeing day) would be an escape from the misery and wreckage that his life has become. Taken to its extreme, the *parodos* can be read as a painfully ironic foreshadowing of this "hope" for death, which is the only escape any mortal has from irrevocable evil and pain. Therefore, in the second *stasimon*, when the chorus problematizes the light of salvation and qualifies the hope of the rising sun, it marks a fundamental theme of the play as a whole. However, it is not clear in this ode that the

¹⁸ 808-10: "Never again will I see the new light of the sun." Or, more accurately, "[Look at me,] never again seeing the new light of the sun."

¹⁹ 879-80: "No longer is it right for wretched me, for my eyes to see this blessed light."

²⁰ 1332: "Would that I would see the day no longer!"

chorus has much conscious agency in this poignant statement; the progression of the choral songs seems reactionary rather than informed. Since the chorus has just witnessed the seemingly inexorable conflict between Antigone's exposition of the unwritten, divine laws and Creon's scathing denouncement of insubordination, their attention turns from the salvation they were promised in Creon's new regime to the pessimistic and inevitable destruction of the gods, to 'ATH and the inheritance of evils. Again, the chorus avoids overt partisanship in favor of universalized, generic truisms, which almost mockingly echo Creon's gnomic justification of his own authority and his optimistic statements about the rebirth of the polis from past troubles.

The chorus echoes the motif of inexorable, inescapable determinism in the fourth stasimon: οὐτ' ἄν νιν ὄλβος οὐτ' Ἄρης, / οὐ πύργος, οὐχ ἀλίπτυποι / κελαιναὶ νᾶες ἐκφύγοιεν.²¹ It is notable that the chorus pointedly rejects their earlier statement about man's technical skill; *not even a ship* provides refuge from the destruction of the gods. In their closing responses to Creon's downfall, they eliminate any type of escape: οὐκ ἔστι θνητοῖς συμφορᾶς ἀπαλλαγὴ.²² The fourth stasimon is particularly of interest for this theme. The contents are three separate myths of noble or divine figures, imprisoned or otherwise having suffered; the two strophic pairs are seemingly only linked by a twice-repeated gnomic truth: Fate is inescapable. The ode is a response to Antigone's final words as she is dragged off to be entombed. She addresses the chorus directly and begs that they recognize her unjustified suffering at the hands of her own family and her own piety. She is asking for understanding, commiseration, consolation, forgiveness; these three stories are

²¹ 952-4: "Neither wealth, nor War, not a fortress, nor storm-beaten black ships can escape it."

²² 1338: "There is no escape for mortals from disaster."

the old men's only response.²³ Certainly, the motif of imprisonment, however veiled, is relevant to Antigone's very present situation; however, the non-physical idea of escape from evil, from ἄθῆ and irrevocable destruction, superimposes itself on physical entrapment. In a way, Ismene already sets up the pessimistic view of inevitability when she asks Antigone in the prologue: τί δ', ὦ ταλαῖφρον, εἰ τάδ' ἐν τούτοις, ἐγὼ / λύουσ' ἄν εἴθ' ἄπτουσα προσθείμην πλέον.²⁴ But in its progression through the stasima, the chorus goes much beyond Ismene's resigned defeat in the face of her own ineffectual femininity. The chorus is once again reacting to the previous scene, but in a way that obliterates agency and individual efficacy. They do not seem to be telling Antigone anything that Ismene had not already told her, and Antigone herself has not accepted overtly and explicitly, but they refuse to identify a specific reaction. As they simultaneously admonish and comfort Antigone, tangentially exhort Creon, and universalize and generalize their warning from the obscurest realms of mythology to the various dramatis personae and to the audience before them, they avoid doing any of these things.

In this first strophic pair, the chorus reacts to the situation they have watched unfold and constructs their observations in terms of ἄθῆ, which is left pointedly undefined. At its most basic level, ἄθῆ is a type of reckless harm; however, as a theme of ruin for both individuals and families, it resonates with the epic tradition and earlier tragedy. In the *Iliad*, ἄθῆ is the feature of two key allegorical passages. In book 9, Phoenix offers Achilles a parable in which ἄθῆ brings failure to men, but the daughters of Zeus, personified Prayers, follow behind her and offer relief for men: ἡ δ' Ἄτη σθεναρή τε καὶ

²³ I have written at greater length on the fourth stasimon in my MA thesis and used some of the material for this analysis, although the focus is different.

²⁴ 39-40: "Oh wretch, what use, if things are at this point, for me to attempt to release or tighten more?"

ἀρτίπος, οὐνεκα πάσας / πολλὸν ὑπεκπροθέει, φθάνει δέ τε πᾶσαν ἐπ' αἶαν / βλάπτουσ' ἀνθρώπους· αἱ δ' ἔξακέονται ὀπίσσω.²⁵ The image of ἌΤΗ is one of headlong, and seemingly causeless, destruction, which is common to all men, but the parable includes the reassurance that this ruin can be moderated or at least relieved by prayer. In his "apology" in book 19, Agamemnon offers another tale of personified ἌΤΗ, who is likewise seen as universally and irrationally destructive: πρέσβα Διὸς θυγάτηρ Ἄτη, ἧ πάντας ἄᾶται, / οὐλομένη.²⁶ ἌΤΗ is in this case sent, or rather inflicted, upon Agamemnon by the agents Zeus, the Fates, and Erinys. If causality exists, it is that ἌΤΗ caused the blindness or misjudgment that prompted Agamemnon to take Achilles' war-prize Briseis, but Agamemnon certainly does not claim that ἌΤΗ was sent for any reason that exists in himself. Crucial to this passage is the connection between ἌΤΗ and the mind: οἳ τέ μοι εἰν ἀγορῇ φρεσὶν ἔμβαλον ἄγριον ἄτην;²⁷ it is a mental state of mindlessness, of misjudgment and it is imposed on humans by immortals.

However, in Aeschylus, ἌΤΗ's role is complicated in its association with the Erinys, as a type of punishment for error, or possibly a symbolic representation of guilt; it is not in itself a cause of blindness and misjudgment, but coupled with retributive justice. Thus, consider Clytemnestra's justification of the murder of Agamemnon in *Agamemnon*: καὶ τήνδ' ἀκούεις ὀρκίων ἐμῶν θέμιν· / μὰ τὴν τέλειον τῆς ἐμῆς παιδὸς Δίκην, / Ἄτην Ἐρινύον θ', αἴσι τόνδ' ἔσφαξ' ἐγώ.²⁸ There is an appositive affinity between ἌΤΗ, Erinys, and

²⁵ *Iliad*.9.505-7: "And ἌΤΗ is strong and sure-footed, on account of which she outstrips all by far, she overtakes men in the whole earth, causing them to fail; and Prayers bring easement from behind."

²⁶ *Iliad*.19.91-2: "ἌΤΗ is the oldest daughter of Zeus, who blinds all, destructive."

²⁷ *Iliad*.19.88: "They (Zeus and Moira and Erinys) threw ἌΤΗ into my mind in the assembly."

²⁸ *A.Ag.*1431-3: "And you hear this also, this law of my oaths: by the penalty exacted for my child, by ἌΤΗ and Erinys, for whom I killed him..."

punitive justice. In this way Clytemnestra excuses herself not as a murderer, but as an agent of the divine, just as Agamemnon cast himself as a hapless victim of ἌΤΗ in the *Iliad*. However, there is acknowledgment in this particular definition that human choice or action in some way elicits the retributive ruin embodied by ἌΤΗ.

In Aeschylus' own treatment of the house of the Labdacids, *Seven Against Thebes*, ἌΤΗ is absent, while the chorus focuses on Erinys as the avenging god who destroys houses and forebodes evil. The second stasimon on Erinys has particular resonance with the second stasimon of *Antigone*, with its opening strophe: πέφρικα τὰν ὠλεσίοικον / θεὸν οὐ θεοῖς ὁμοίαν, / παναλαθῆ κακόμαντιν / πατρὸς εὐκταίαν Ἐρινὺν / τελέσαι τὰς περιθύμους / κατάρας Οἰδιπόδα βλαψίφρονος· / παιδολέτωρ δ' ἔρις ἄδ' ὀτρύνει.²⁹ For the purposes of comparison with the *Antigone* ode, I make special note of the epithet "house-destroying" for Erinys and the classification of Oedipus as "mind-struck." The association of ἌΤΗ and ἘΡΙΝΥΣ with the destruction of both the mind and the home is a crucial connection between this earlier lyric and Sophocles' ode. In addition, there is parallel emphasis in this ode on the inheritance of this destruction between generations in a house: ὦ / πόνοι δόμων νέοι παλαι- / οἷσι συμμιγεῖς κακοῖς³⁰ ... τὰ δ' ὀλοὰ †πελόμεν'† οὐ παρέρχεται.³¹ This destruction differs significantly from the type of ruin described in Homer or in *Agamemnon* – the blindness of a single mind or the punishment for a human action. However, Sophocles does not merely mimic Aeschylus. While Aeschylus tells a straightforward trajectory of destruction from Laius to Oedipus and finally to Polynices and

²⁹ A.Th.720-726: "I shudder at the house-destroying goddess, unlike other gods, true prophet of evil: This Erinys, prayed for by a father will execute the very-wrathful curses of mind-struck Oedipus; and child-murdering strife urges her on."

³⁰ A.Th.739-41: "Oh, new pains of the house mixed together with ancient evils!"

³¹ A.Th.768: "These destructive things, once they have come to be, do not pass away."

Eteocles and the self-annihilation of the family's house and name, Sophocles manages to tell the same story, while ambiguously referring to the house of the Labdacids, the family of Creon, and the inevitable ruin inherent to the human condition.

The second strophic pair continues the theme of inescapability, but turns its attention to the power of Zeus. Zeus' power is described as awesome, to be sure, but it is wondrous and beautiful, not the chaotic destruction of nature in the first strophe.³² It is unavoidable and unaging throughout time, recalling Antigone's advocacy of the timeless and unwritten laws of the gods: οὐδὲ σθένειν τοσοῦτον ὥομην τὰ σὰ / κηρύγμαθ' ὥστ' ἄγραπτα κάσφαλῆ θεῶν / νόμιμα δύνασθαι θνητὰ γ' ὄνθ' ὑπερδραμεῖν. / οὐ γάρ τι νῦν γε κάχθές, ἀλλ' αἰεί ποτε / ζῆ ταῦτα, κούδεις οἶδεν ἐξ ὄτου ῥάνη.³³ The linguistic echoes between these passages are pointed; I note especially 455: ὑπερδραμεῖν || 605: ὑπερβασία; 454: ἄγραπτα κάσφαλῆ || 607: ἀκάματοι; 453: σθένειν || 604: δύνασιν; 456: νῦν γε κάχθές || 608: ἀγήρως δὲ χρόνω. Obviously, these are not exact parallels, but the resonance is evocative. Again, the chorus has shifted from their confidence in man and his skill in the first stasimon to a reverent, cowed regard for divine power in this ode. Perhaps Antigone's advocacy of divine laws has inspired this inspiration. However, the chorus has an image of the gods' power that differs greatly from Antigone's. For Antigone, the divine νόμιμα dictate human action, specifically in regard to the responsibilities between family members. For the chorus, the divine is a force which is at once unavoidable and inexplicable; it is linked to the destructive force of nature and madness; in this second

³² Dodds 1951, 49-50: Dodds employs the juxtaposition in this ode to convey what he calls "the beauty and terror" of the archaic Greek sense of the divine, especially related to the concept of "ATH.

³³ 453-7: "I did not think that your pronouncements were so strong that they could overpower the unwritten and steadfast laws of the gods, inasmuch as you are mortal. For gods' laws are not something now and yesterday, but they live always, and no one knows whence they appeared."

strophe, it is specifically described as sleepless (605: τὰν οὐθ' ὕπνος αἰρεῖ ποθ'), which marks it as non-human, not subject to the frailties of mortality.

The antistrophe emphasizes that hope is an illusion: ἀ γὰρ δὴ πολὺπλαγκτος ἔλ- / πὶς πολλοῖς μὲν ὄνησις ἀνδρῶν, / πολλοῖς δ' ἀπάτα κουφονόων ἐρώτων.³⁴ Hope can be a benefit, but it is also equated with ἀπάτα, deception, and both are associated with some deficiency of the mind (light-headed desire). I see this as a reiteration of the chorus' statement in the first antistrophe, which problematized the hopeful tone of the first half of the play with the recognition of divine ruin. Perhaps superficially, this can be seen as a sympathetic response to Creon's condemnation of Antigone, which is the unexpected outcome of Creon's salvation through polis. However, if it is, it is a fundamental misunderstanding of Antigone's actions and intentions, since she never hopes for "salvation" of any kind – not from Creon or her family or even the gods – merely the anti-climactic release of death after familial duty and a hard life have been completed. In fact, this ode does not give any assurance that her death has meaning beyond the irrevocable ruin that is both common to all mankind and that follows Antigone in particular as a member of her hereditary house.

Both the strophe and antistrophe end with gnomic statements about the nature of man's life. In the strophe, the chorus universalizes impermanence. Again, timelessness is emphasized, linking this gnomic νόμος with Antigone's divine νόμιμα: τό τ' ἔπειτα καὶ τὸ μέλλον / καὶ τὸ πρὶν ἐπαρκέσει / νόμος ὁδ'· οὐδέν ἔρπει / θνατῶν βίωτος πάμπολυς

³⁴ 615-7: "For wide-wandering hope is an advantage to many men, but to many others it is the deceit of light-headed desires."

[βιότῳ πάμπολις] / ἐκτὸς ἄτας.³⁵ Textual difficulties make it unclear what exactly does not creep upon the lives of mortals. What is clear is that the life of man is inescapably, universally not free from "ATH. The antistrophe links the illusion of hope to the idea of the divine as the source of "ATH and reiterates its association with the human mind: τὸ κακὸν δοκεῖν ποτ' ἐσθλὸν / τῷδ' ἔμμεν ὄτῳ φρένας / θεὸς ἄγει πρὸς ἄταν.³⁶ This statement seems more explicitly than any others so far to refer to Creon. Creon's entire justification for his rule depends on his conviction of what is right for the polis and his defense of his own judgment as the best and least corruptible guide for such a city, so perhaps this is a subtle suggestion by the chorus that he might have overreached. However, the chorus maintains its position of sympathetic neutrality, or even detachment from the central dialectic(s) of the first half of the play. Notably, in the episode which directly precedes the second stasimon, Creon suggests the application of "ATH to his own house, when he equates both Ismene and Antigone with "ATH: σὺ δέ, ἢ κατ' οἴκους ὡς ἔχιδν' ὑφειμένη / λήθουσά μ' ἐξέπινες, οὐδ' ἐμάνθανον / τρέφων δὺ' ἄτα κάπαναστάσεις θρόνῳ.³⁷ Creon himself does not actually admit that his action is wrong until after the exit of Tiresias when he tells the chorus: τὸ τ' εἰκαθεῖν γὰρ δεινόν, ἀντιστάντα δὲ / Ἄτη πατάξαι θυμὸν ἐν δεινῷ πάρα.³⁸ Here once again, "ATH is associated with the mind (this time, θυμός).

³⁵ 611-4: "This law will prevail hereafter and in the time to come, as it did before this: universally, the life of mortals creeps not at all free from "ATH." Or, depending on the edition: "nothing great [universal] creeps upon the life of mortals free from "ATH." The sense of βίσιος as the subject, as it is in the OCT, contributes to a sense de-humanization and mindlessness; the latter gives a sense of humans as victims. Both interpretations seem to have merit for the chorus' statement.

³⁶ 622-4: "What is evil at one time seems good to one whose mind a god has led toward "ATH."

³⁷ 531: "And you, who against my house like a viper lurking, escaping my notice, you drink me dry; and I did not know myself, that I was nurturing two "ATHs, two uprisings against my throne."

³⁸ 1096-7: "To yield is a terrible thing, but so too is it for me to stand here and inflict my mind with terrible "ATH." I could make no sense of the OCT reading of line 1097: Ἄτης πατάξαι θυμὸν ἐν λίνῳ πάρα and so abandoned it in favor of Griffith's text; the apparatus is dense with variations.

The ode concludes with impermanence: *πράσσει δ' ὀλίγος τὸν [ὀλίγιστον] χρόνον / ἐκτὸς ἄταξ.*³⁹ This impermanence of fortune is the necessary counterpoint to the inevitability of ruin and so unifies the ode by rejecting its initial premise: no one is happy because no one exists whose life has not tasted evil, whose home or family escapes inevitable ruin, whose mind is free from ἄΤΗ. Hope is deceptive and fortune is a fleeting condition of a frail human mind. This truism recalls the oft-cited passage from Herodotus' account of Solon: *πρὶν δ' ἂν τελευτήσῃ, ἐπισχεῖν μηδὲ καλέειν κω ὄβιον, ἀλλ' εὐτυχέα.*⁴⁰ I do not have a single answer to the chorus' use of ἄΤΗ and Erinys in the second stasimon. ἄΤΗ seems to be at once the universal and preordained cause of evil and the inescapable punishment for it. It is both specific to certain people and their actions and families and at the same time seems to be a generalized, gnomic inevitability. Whatever it is, it is pervasive in the human condition, which does not exist long without it, and therefore it belies the existence of permanent happiness.

³⁹ 625-6: "[Man] fares only for the briefest moment free from ἄΤΗ."

⁴⁰ Herodotus.1.32.7: "Before he dies, refrain from calling him happy yet; rather call him lucky."

Bibliography

- Benardete, Seth. 1975. "A Reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*," in three parts. *Interpretation* 4:148-196, 5:1-55, and 5:148-184.
- Ditmars, Elizabeth van nes. 1992. *Sophocles' Antigone: Lyric Shape and Meaning*. Pisa.
- Dodds, E.R. 1951. *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley.
- Easterling, P.E. 1978. "The Second Stasimon of *Antigone*," in R.D. Dawe, J. Diggle, and P.E. Easterling, eds. *Dionysiaca*, 143-158. Cambridge.
- Griffith, Mark, ed. 1999. *Sophocles Antigone*. Cambridge.
- Kitzinger, Margaret Rachel. 2008. *The Choruses of Sophocles' Antigone and Philoktetes*. Leiden.
- Lloyd-Jones, H. and N.G. Wilson, eds. 1990. *Sophoclis Fabulae*. Oxford.
- Monro, David B. and Thomas W. Allen. 1920. *Homeri Opera I & II*. Oxford.
- Oudemans, Th.C.W. and A.P.M.H. Lardinois. 1987. *Tragic Ambiguity*. Leiden.
- Page, Denys. 1972. *Aeschyli Septem Quae Supersunt Tragoedias*. Oxford.
- Rohdich, Hermann. 1980. *Antigone*. Heidelberg.
- Scott, William C. 1996. *Musical Design in Sophoclean Theater*. Hanover.
- Tyrrell, Wm. Blake and Larry J. Bennett. 1998. *Recapturing Sophocles' Antigone*. Lanham.
