

Beyond Hegel & Schlegel: An Ambiguous Reading of Sop Antigone

Antigone has spoken more to the modern imagination than any other Greek tragedy except perhaps his Oedipus the King. Yet the question is often raised, rarely resolved: Who is right, Antigone or Creon? Who is wrong? The orthodox view of the 19th century German philosopher Schlegel makes Antigone right and Creon wrong, granting that Antigone disobeys the decree, but in obedience to a higher (divine) law. (See quotes #1-3; contra #4). The 18th century German philosopher Hegel maintained, however, that both were wrong and both right: Antigone stood for family, love, blood and the gods below, while Creon stood for the state and the

Neither tradition satisfactorily explains Creon and Antigone. How can two mutually opposite interpretations survive for two centuries? Probably both are wrong. Ismene shows the ambiguity of Antigone, who supports the family but rejects her living family, Creon and Ismene, and this is highlighted by the animal metaphors used about Antigone. Creon defends his principles so violently that he undermines them. We need to focus on the ambiguity of both Antigone and Creon, shown in the language: in the ode to man (#11), *deinos* can be both *terrible* and *divine* and words at 73-74 (#12) speak of a *tyche*. Is this latter an oxymoron? The ambiguity extends to Ismene (#13): after Creon sets her free (771) we hear nothing more of her, so her choice of life was actually death, and #14 shows Ismene as a kinswoman only in words, contrasted with Antigone who sees herself as a kinswoman in deeds.

The ambiguity of this play is inherent in Greek tragedy; it is central to Greek tragedy and to Greek religion, just as in Dionysos worship, with its free wandering (the women in the hills) and eating raw food. These Dionysiac transgressions were strictly controlled, once a year at the festival. Tragic figures burst forth into the everyday life of the polis as well, but on a stage and only once a year. These tragic figures show us part of ourselves. The ambiguity of transgression is central to religion, as Sir James Frazier comments on the failure of early people to distinguish the dividing line in human action. *"The tragic hero attacked by forces but showing the foundation on which order is built. Tragic heroes show (more than Ismene*