

FIRE THROWS

Written by Rachel Dickstein
based on Sophocles' ANTIGONE

Dramaturgy by Morgan Jenness
Created in Collaboration with the Ripe Time ensemble

three EXCERPTS

*Text adapted from Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald's
translation of ANTIGONE*

Copyright Rachel Dickstein 2009

Ripe Time
135 Eastern Parkway 14D
Brooklyn, NY 11238
917-771-8450

Characters

Antigone who was (referred to as Antigone 1)

Antigone who is (referred to as Antigone 2)

Teiresias/The Seer

Creon

Chorus Leader

Ismene/ Chorus 1

Sentry/ Chorus 2

Haemon/ Chorus 3

Eurydice / Chorus 4

Chorus 5

Locations: The cave in which Creon has imprisoned Antigone.
 Where Antigone's memory leads.

All characters except Antigone 2 and Creon participate in Choral action. Chorus members play multiple roles: citizens of Thebes, echoes of Oedipus, extensions of Antigone herself in more heightened imagined sequences. Video projection facilitates the transformation of the space from reality to memory/ dream. Creon appears both on video and live in the space. Teiresias is solely on video. Antigone 2's voice is amplified.

EXCERPT 1

Audience enters to find ANTIGONE 1 AND 2 moving in a slow, meditative dance on stage. We hear sounds of breath and voice echoing as if in a small narrow chamber. Lights dim. Music shifts.

Audience enters to find Antigone (1) and (2) moving in a slow, meditative dance on stage. We hear sounds of breath and voice echoing as if in a small narrow chamber. Lights dim. Music shifts.

The actor who plays ANTIGONE 2 stops and watches ANTIGONE 1. ANTIGONE 1 grabs the air around her as if twisting rope and pulling it toward her, an abstraction of her own suicide. ANTIGONE 2 circles her. A2 closes her eyes as if remembering her own death, played out in front of her. Writing starts to appear on the walls, echoes of ANTIGONE's own words from the story.

Action/ risk/ reckless/ memory/ brother/ childhood/ break/ rules/ enforce/ stop/ history// shadows/ cave/ glare/ dazzled/ ambition/ truth/ prison/ chains/ underground/ passion/ fire // dare/ mad/ condemned/ death.

The words and phrases cross the surfaces of the space, as if emerging from ANTIGONE 2's memory, layers and layers of words build. ANTIGONE 1 "completes" her death, freezing in a pose of release. The words fade.

ANTIGONE 2: *(watching A1)*

Here she is - in an underground cave, with a mouth open towards the light; she has been a prisoner only a few hours, but it feel like a lifetime. Her legs and neck are chained so that she cannot move and can only see what is right in front of her. Above and behind her a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoner a screen with shadows of puppets and other selves yet to be discovered.

(to audience) You may have heard of me.

Antigone

I wanted to bury my brother.

To end the cycle of violence.

To honor my father, my family.

And was told I couldn't.

A simple desire.

That made me act.

And I was punished.

A death. A small death in a small cave.

Nothing more.

(looking towards A1)

I thought that was how I could control my story - to die.

A martyr for a cause.

But what did my sacrifice achieve?

I suppose if I had lived, I wouldn't be Antigone

I'd be some other Cassandra, living in a vacuum of my own inaction

Instead, I have existed for 2,400 years

the residue of a story, traces of action and inaction

some idea of strength –
A shell penetrated by meaning.
So small, but I had the power to change fate -- like a god.

Music. Lights dim. ANTIGONE 1 is moved to action. The chorus members emerge from the walls/floors. Music grows as a choral movement sequence begins, led by ANTIGONE 1.

Vocalists (and A2) sing:
I dared.
If I must die,
Surely this is no hardship:
Can anyone living, as I live,
Think Death less than a friend?
You smile at me
But it may well be
A fool convicts me of folly.

ISMENE emerges from the chorus to join ANTIGONE 1. The chorus listens. ANTIGONE 2 closes her eyes, remembering.

ANTIGONE (1,2):
Ismene, dear sister

ANTIGONE (1):
You would think that we had already suffered enough
For the curse on Oedipus:
I cannot imagine any grief
That you and I have not gone through. And now -
Have you heard King Creon's new decree.

ISMENE:
I have heard nothing: I know
That two sisters lost two brothers, a double death
In a single hour; and I know that the Argive army
Fled in the night; but beyond this, nothing.

ANTIGONE (1):
I thought so. And that is why I wanted you
To come out here with me.

ANTIGONE (2) , Antigone (1):
There is something we must do.

ISMENE:
What do you mean?

ANTIGONE (1):
Listen, Ismene.
Creon buried our brother Eteocles
With military honors, gave him a soldier's funeral,

And it was right that he should; but Polyneices,
Who fought as bravely and died as miserably, –
They say that Creon has sworn

ANTIGONE (1 and 2):
No one shall bury him

ANTIGONE (1):
No one mourn for him,
But his body must lie in the fields, a sweet treasure
For carrion birds to find as they search for food.
That is what they say, and our good Creon is coming here
To announce it publicly; and the penalty for burying him-

ANTIGONE (1):
Stoning to death / in the public square!

ANTIGONE (2) (echoes)
Stoning to death in the public square!

ANTIGONE (1):
There it is, and now you can prove what you are:
A true sister, or a traitor to your family.

ISMENE:
Antigone, you are mad! What could I possibly do?

ANTIGONE (1):
You must decide whether you will help me or not.

ISMENE:
I do not understand you. Help you in what?

ANTIGONE (1):
Ismene,
I am going to bury him.
Will you come?

ISMENE:
Bury him! You have just said the new law forbids it.

ANTIGONE (1):
He is my brother. And he is your brother, too.

ISMENE:
But think of the danger! Think what Creon will do!

ANTIGONE (1):
Creon is not strong enough to stand in my way.

ISMENE:

Ah sister!

Oedipus died, everyone hating him

For what his own search brought to light, his eyes

Ripped out by his own hand; and Jocasta died,

His mother and wife at once: she twisted the cords

That strangled her life; and our two brothers died,

Each killed by the other's sword. And we are left:

But oh, Antigone,

Think how much more terrible than these

Our own death would be if we should go against Creon

And do what he has forbidden! We are only women,

We cannot fight with men, Antigone!

The law is strong, we must give in to the law

I beg the Dead to forgive me, but I am helpless. I must yield to those in authority.

ANTIGONE (1):

If that is what you think,

I should not want you, even if you asked to come.

You have made your choice, you can be what you want to be.

But I will bury him; and if I must die,

I say that this crime is holy.

ANTIGONE (1 and 2):

I shall lie down

With him in death, and I shall be as dear

To him as he to me

ANTIGONE (2):

It is the dead,

Not the living, who make the longest demands:

We die for ever . . .

ANTIGONE (1):

you may do as you like,

Since apparently the laws of the gods mean nothing to you.

ISMENE:

They mean a great deal to me; but I have no strength

To break laws that were made for the public good.

ANTIGONE (1):

That must be your excuse, I suppose. But as for me

I will bury the brother I love

ISMENE:

You are full of fire when you should be cold with fear.

ANTIGONE (1):

Perhaps. But I am doing only what I must.

I am not afraid of the danger; if it means death,
It will not be the worst of deaths- death without honor.

ISMENE:
I think you're mad.

ANTIGONE (2):
You are full of fire.
I heard his shout of triumph turn to a scream;
He fell and the earth struck him.
My brothers
Face to face
Mirroring each other's matchless rage,
storming in fury
the shock of death

Music. The following choral passage is spoken line by line by one chorus member at a time, at first to the audience, then to each other, building to a crescendo.

CHORUS LEADER:
Polyneices,

CHORUS 2:
A wild eagle screaming
Insults above our land,

CHORUS 3:
His wings their shields of snow,

CHORUS 5:
His crest their marshalled helms.

CHORUS LEADER:
Against our seven gates in a yawning ring

CHORUS 4:
The famished spears came onward in the night;

CHORUS 5:
But before his jaws were sated with our blood,

CHORUS 3:
He was thrown back; and as he turns, great Thebes-

CHORUS 5:
No tender victim for his noisy power-

CHORUS (ALL):
Rose like a dragon behind him, shouting war.

Music and vocals surge. WAR SEQUENCE - MOVEMENT: ANTIGONE 2 watches ANTIGONE 1 cross downstage as choral action infuses the stage with a danced abstraction of war. ANTIGONE 1 walks through the landscape, seeing the battle between her brothers play out.

Music ends as chorus enacts the final slaying of Polyneices and Eteocles. The chorus members roll away from one another slowly, while CREON's speech begins. His speech is projected on video, an intimate close-up on his face. He speaks as if rehearsing his first address to the people of Thebes for television. We are watching the pre-edited "raw footage" – showing Creon working to form his public image, and voice.

CREON (on Video):

Ladies and Gentlemen: I have the honor to inform you that our Ship of State, which recent storms have threatened to destroy, has come safely to harbor at last, guided by the merciful wisdom of Heaven. I have summoned you here this morning because I know that I can depend upon you: your devotion to King Laios was absolute; you never hesitated in your duty to our late ruler Oedipus; and when Oedipus died, your loyalty was transferred to his children. Unfortunately, as you know, his two sons, the princes Eteocles and Polyneices, have killed each other in battle; and I, as the next in blood, have succeeded to the full power of the throne.

I am aware, of course, that no Ruler can expect complete loyalty from his subjects until he has been tested in office. Nevertheless, I say to you at the very outset that I have nothing but contempt for the kind of Governor who is afraid, for whatever reason, to follow the course that he knows is best for the State; If I saw my country headed for ruin, I should not be afraid to speak out plainly; and I need hardly remind you that I would never have any dealings with an enemy of the people.

These are my principles, at any rate, and that is why I have made the following decision concerning the sons of Oedipus: Eteocles, who died as a man should die, fighting for his country, is to be buried with full military honors, with all the ceremony that is usual when the greatest heroes die; but his brother, Polyneices, who broke his exile to come back with fire and sword against his native city and the shrines of his fathers' gods, whose one idea was to spill the blood of his blood and sell his own people into slavery- Polyneices, I say, is to have no burial: no man is to touch him or say the least prayer for him; he shall lie on the plain, unburied; and the birds and the scavenging dogs can do with him whatever they like.

This is my command, and you can see the wisdom behind it. As long as I am king, no traitor is going to be honored with the loyal man. But whoever shows by word and deed that he is on the side of the State, - he shall have my respect while he is living, and my reverence when he is dead.

EURYDICE: *(in the background on the video):*
Then what is it that you would have us do?

CREON (on Video):
You will give no support to whoever breaks this law.

Image of Creon freezes on screen. Shift to ANTIGONE 2 on the DL ladder. AI echoes her words. Words echo through space, layers of sound.

ANTIGONE 2/1:

The law -- the law --

God's law

Creon is not strong enough to stand in my way.

I will bury Polyneices.

If I must die, I say this crime is holy.

I shall lie down with him in death.

Music. Creon's image disappears. ANTIGONE 2 remembers the Burial. BURIAL SEQUENCE 1 – MOVEMENT: ANTIGONE 1 approaches the grave. The chorus pulses around her, activating the environment of expectation, need, drive. Echoed by the chorus, she begins to re-enact the burial of her brother. They dust the grave and spin dervish like. Suddenly they freeze in poses of startled listening. As they stop we hear a shout:

CHORUS (*vocalists sing/ as a shout*):

The dead man- gone

Dry ground not a sign

No trace of anyone

The dead man, a dust mound, a covered ghost-peace

Could it be that the gods have done this?

Music ends. A1 shrinks away.

EXCERPT 2

BURIAL ATTEMPT 2 – MOVEMENT: involves ANTIGONE 1, AND FULL CHORUS. Antigone 1 and 2 chorus members carry long sticks trailed with fabric. They cut through the air, and then magically appear crane-like, over the grave – a moment of peace and majestic beauty.

Accompanied by music, with choral text below as lyrics.

CHORUS (*song link here*): https://soundcloud.com/ripe-time-1/love-unconquerable?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

Numberless are the world's wonders, but none
More wonderful than man;
the sea yields to his prow, the holy earth is graven with his plow.

The birds and beast that cling to cover,
The lithe fish far in reaches of dim water,
Resigned to him; the lion on the hill
The wild horse and the mountain bull.

Words also, and thought, rapid as air,
Statecraft and skill that can deflect the spear
Of winter rain. He is secure from all wind but
in the wind of death he cannot stand

O clear intelligence, force beyond all measure
O fate of man, working both good and evil!
When the laws are kept, how proudly his city stands!
When the laws are broken, what of his city then?

The stick/fabrics vanish. Music ends. SENTRY carries in ANTIGONE 1. Enter CREON.

EXCERPT 3

CREON'S DECISION – MOVEMENT: CREON and CHORUS suddenly shift into a sequence representing Creon's journey to the cave and his findings once he arrives. Accompanied by music (lyrics below) as chorus movement sequence encapsulates the discovery of ANTIGONE hanging and HAEMON's suicide.

ANTIGONE 2:

Fate raises up,
And Fate casts down the happy and unhappy alike:
I go with Creon
To the outer plain where Polyneices is lying,
No friend to pity him, his body shredded by dogs.
He makes our prayers in that place to Hecate
And bathes the corpse with holy water,
Then he runs to the cave where I lay on a couch of stone.
I hear a voice
Grieving within the chamber
The air is full of wailing.

Music continues as a pulse. Eurydice's face appears on video, amplified across the space.

EURYDICE (*on video*):

I have heard something, friends:
As I was unlocking the gate of Pallas' shrine,
For I needed her help today, I heard a voice
Telling of some new sorrow. And I fainted
There at the temple with all my maidens about me.
But speak again: whatever it is, I can bear it:
Grief and I are no strangers.

EURYDICE waits for an answer. No one responds. Her image is burst into shards.

Creon enters bearing Haemon's body (or Creon enters alone accompanied by some echo of Haemon on video that captures his absence).

CREON:

Nothing you say can touch me any more.
My own blind heart has brought me

From darkness to final darkness. Here you see
The father murdering, the murdered son –
And all my civic wisdom!

Haemon my son, so young, so young to die,
I was the fool, not you; and you died for me.
Surely a god
Has crushed me beneath the hugest weight of heaven,
And driven me headlong a barbaric way
To trample out the thing I held most dear.

The pains that men will take to come to pain!

ANTIGONE 2:
The burden you carry in your hands is heavy,
But it is not all: you will find more in your house.

CREON:
What burden worse than this shall I find there?

ANTIGONE 1:
The Queen is dead.

CREON;
O port of death, deaf world,
Is there no pity for me? And you, Angel of evil,
I was dead, and your words are death again.
Is it true, boy? Can it be true?
Is my wife dead? Has death bred death?

ANTIGONE 2:
You can see for yourself.

CREON:
Oh pity!
All true, all true, and more than I can bear!
O my wife, my son!
O God, I am sick with fear.
Are there no swords here? Has no one a blow for me?

ANTIGONE 2:
Her curse is upon you for the death of both.

CREON:
It is right that it should be. I alone am guilty.
I know it, and I say it. Lead me in,
Quickly, friends,
I have neither life nor substance. Lead me in.

ANTIGONE 2:

You are right, if there can be right in so much wrong.
The briefest way is best in a world of sorrow.

CREON:

Let it come,
Let death come quickly, and be kind to me.
I would not ever see the sun again.

ANTIGONE 2:

All that will come
when it will
but we, meanwhile,
Have much to do. Leave the future to itself.

CREON:

I want to pray.

ANTIGONE 2:

The sky is deaf.

CREON:

Lead me away.
My comfort lies here dead.
I have killed my son and my wife.
Whatever my hands have touched has come to nothing.
Fate has brought all my pride to a thought of dust.

CREON collapses in the cave himself, alone, powerless.

Questions on voiceover swirl in the air and repeat across the walls of the space on video.

CHORUS (*recorded*)

Have you ever risked everything?
Have you ever been reckless?
How would things be different if you were more reckless?
When did you chose not to take a risk?
Do you remember breaking a rule?
Do you remember enforcing a rule?
When did you let something happen you knew was wrong?
How do you remember your own history?

ANTIGONE 2:

Underground, the prisoner was chained so that she could not move and could only see her own shadow. But once released, she sees beyond the shadows the fire throws against the wall, she sees the forms themselves – and as she rises, she gazes upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and she sees the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day. And she sees not mere reflections of herself, but she sees herself as she really is.

Music.

ANTIGONE'S DEATH – MOVEMENT: ANTIGONE 1 & ANTIGONE 2 join upstage, begin a sequence of unbinding their wrists, reaching toward the heavens, as Chorus faces them from downstage and joins in their gestures. Video image shifts, opening up the sense of space as if ascending to the sky. Antigones freed, the chorus watches as the Antigones ascend into a feast of radiant light.