

The Role of the Chorus in Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Antigone*

By

LINDSAY GEDDES MARTIN

Diploma in Public Accountancy, McGill University, 1991

Diploma in Education, McGill University, 1988

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1977

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Department of CLASSICAL, NEAR EASTERN AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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ABSTRACT

The Chorus in the *Ajax* are both soldiers and sailors, completely dependent on their leader, Ajax, and strongly affected by developments in the action. They provide commentary on Ajax directly, by ascribing various adjectives to him, and by contrasting his former and present states, and indirectly, by remaining loyal to him. They are used to express various emotions, such as anxiety and distress, melancholy and despondency, excitement and joy, grief and mourning, and they generate tension and a sense of danger during much of the play. The respect and concern they show toward Tecmessa, their steadfast support of Ajax, and their involvement in a dangerous situation not of their making make them a sympathetic Chorus. Their description of Ajax's grieving mother in the first stasimon, their illogical excitement in the second stasimon, and their attempts at mediation between Teucer and the Atreidai do not emanate from their personality but exist for dramatic purposes. Although they do not unify the two parts of the play, they mold our assessment of Ajax.

The Chorus in the *Antigone* are pious, elderly men, who embody community wisdom and show deference to power. Their support of Creon, however, is not whole-hearted, but because they fear him, they do not speak candidly. Toward Antigone, they are both sympathetic and critical, but differences of age and gender prevent a close association with her. In their songs they introduce or develop ideas which often impart a certain sense of disjunction, because the connection to the previous episode is not immediately apparent. Nevertheless, the ideas are relevant to important themes in the play. The Chorus also convey various emotions, such as joy and thanksgiving, marvel and horror, pessimism (about human powerlessness in relation to the gods), apprehension and (false) hope. Their lyrics are suggestive of secondary meanings, which are often applicable to Creon, but of which they are not fully cognizant. Their relationship to Antigone creates interest because we wonder why, other than their fear of Creon, they are not more supportive of her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: The Role of the Chorus in the <i>Ajax</i>	8
Chapter Three: The Chorus in the <i>Ajax</i> : Issues of Interpretation	39
Chapter Four: The Role of the Chorus in the <i>Antigone</i>	59
Chapter Five: The Chorus in the <i>Antigone</i> : Issues of Interpretation	93
Chapter Six: Conclusion	122
Bibliography	132

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Chapter One

Introduction

Anyone with even a superficial knowledge of Greek tragedy knows that in every tragic play there is a Chorus. This is probably its most distinctive feature, certainly from our perspective, because choruses are completely alien to modern drama. They even seem a strange phenomenon in modern productions of Greek tragedy. When the Chorus first begin to speak or chant together, they may appear a bit ludicrous and may also raise at least a few titters in the audience.

For the ancient audience, on the contrary, there was nothing unusual about choruses in tragedy. They played an important part in Greek religion and culture. Many significant public and private events were honoured with choral performances. Choruses were used to celebrate victories in battle (paean) and athletic competitions (epinician) and to mourn the dead (lamentation). They were used as well for other social and religious purposes. They also were mandatory in ancient comedy and satyr plays. The Great Dionysia included a day of competition for dithyrambic choruses, representing the ten tribes of Attica. There were twenty choruses of fifty singers, ten composed of men and another ten of boys. It is uncertain whether tragedy evolved from the dithyramb, but the lyrics of tragedy, in terms of style, meter, and dialect, were influenced by the non-dramatic choral tradition.¹

The importance of the Chorus is made clear by how productions were mounted. A magistrate appointed a wealthy citizen, called a *choregus*, to recruit and maintain at his own cost men for the Chorus, who were then trained by the poet. Such an appointment, known as a “liturgy”, was considered an important civic honour. Choruses, therefore, were the point of departure for the presentation of plays. Another indication of their importance is how frequently they supplied the play’s title. The *Persians*, the *Suppliants*, the *Eumenides*, the *Women of Trachis*, the *Phoenician Women*, and the *Bacchae* are examples of eponymous choruses.

Greek tragedy was not a static art form but underwent a rapid change in the last half of the fifth century. For the Chorus, there was an evolution from a major to a minor role, as the actors' roles became progressively more developed. In Aeschylus, the songs of the Chorus are long and complex. One could almost describe his tragedies as songs mixed here and there with dialogue. In two of his plays, the *Eumenides* and the *Suppliants*, the Chorus play a central role in the action. The lines given to the Chorus in Sophocles are more limited, although there is considerable variation. In the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*, approximately a quarter of the lines are delivered by the Chorus, while in the *Women of Trachis* and *Philoctetes*, only a sixth. But Sophocles is credited with increasing the number of the Chorus from twelve to fifteen (and also with introducing a third actor). Aristotle (*Poetics* 1456a25) praised Sophocles for treating the Chorus as an actor who participates in the action. His choral technique, however, did not remain fixed. In the later plays, there is a greater integration of the Chorus with the actors, most notably in the lyric dialogue. In Euripides, the Chorus are less an independent character than in Sophocles.² The Chorus are often ignored for long periods of time and there is a movement of the choral odes toward becoming *entr'actes*.³ In some of his plays, however, such as the *Medea*, the *Women of Troy*, and the *Bacchae*, the Chorus are a more integral part of the drama than in most of Sophocles' dramas.⁴ The tragedian Agathon, who features as a character in Plato's *Symposium*, was known for his diversionary odes (*embolima* or "inserts"), which were entertaining but had little to do with the play (Aristotle 1456a30).

The Chorus wore identical masks and costumes and had three modes of address: speech, "chant", and song. When speaking in iambic trimeter, the meter of dialogue, they were represented by their leader, the coryphaeus. The entire Chorus sang melic anapests but probably "chanted" non-lyric anapests, although there is uncertainty about the manner of delivery. It may have been something between speech and song. Lyrics were sung by the entire Chorus in

unison, as a rule. Some songs, however, must have been divided between semichoruses or individual chorus-members.⁵

The meter of the lyrics are extremely varied. Little is known about how members of the ancient audience would have reacted to the different meters. It is generally agreed that dochmiacs showed agitation, that when one actor sang and a chorus-member or another actor spoke, attention was being drawn to the heightened emotion of the singer, and that a mixture of various types of meters denoted an increasing intensity of feeling.⁶ Other than these conjectures, little else can be affirmed about the different meters. Efforts to show a relation between particular meters and content remain speculative.⁷ Other than dochmiacs, there were no particular meters to indicate joy and happiness, no meters exclusively for sadness and lamentation.

The music of the choral songs was probably a simple melody. It was produced by an *aulos*, a reed-instrument. Except for tambourines in the *Bacchae*, there is no mention of percussive instruments, but the words used of the playing of the *aulos* suggest that it could produce a staccato and percussive rhythm. Occasionally, a small harp or lyre accompanied the singing.⁸ Each syllable was likely sung to a single note and there probably was no harmony or counterpoint.⁹ Many of the songs are dirges, paeans, and hymns. These types of songs would have been familiar to the original spectators from choral performances at other events.

Choral lyrics usually have an overall antistrophic structure, which means that the meter of one stanza (strophe) is duplicated by the meter of the following stanza (antistrophe). A song may consist of a number of these strophic pairs. Sometimes the last pair is followed by an epode, a single stanza whose meter is not repeated. Astrophic lyrics also occur, although less frequently than strophic pairs.¹⁰ The melody of the strophe and the antistrophe would not have been identical, because the rising and falling pitch accents of the words would not have occurred in the same spot.¹¹

The Chorus also danced while singing the lyrics. Apart from the limited information about choral dancing provided by some vases showing dramatic choruses, nothing of the choreography has survived.¹² Each member of the Chorus had a definite position in the orchestra. One type of movement was a march in rectangular formation. Although some scholars have expressed their doubts, it seems fairly certain that during the strophe, the Chorus usually moved to the right around the circular orchestra, to the left during the antistrophe, and stood stationary for the epode.¹³ Miscellaneous evidence suggests other, more complicated movements. There was an energetic dance, which involved leaps with foot crossing, as in modern ballet.¹⁴ The Chorus also made various gestures while they danced. We know of a slapping movement to indicate happiness, sorrow, or anger, and another involving the tensing of the hand and bending it away from the body, which was used in many different situations.¹⁵

The songs divided the play into episodes. It was usual that prior to a song, those on stage would exit and after it was over, one or more characters would enter. Sometimes, however, characters remained on stage during a choral lyric. Unlike the actors who would come and go, the Chorus remained present, staying in the orchestra from the time of their entry, usually occurring after a short prologue, to the final lines of the play. It is rare for a Chorus to leave and reenter, as occurs in the *Ajax*.

The Chorus are normally detached somewhat from the action so as to provide commentary on it from the perspective of ordinary men or women.¹⁶ By "ordinary", I mean that they seem more like the members of the audience than the central characters of the play may seem. Whatever the extent of their detachment, it does not imply that they are unconcerned about the events they witness. On the contrary, they are usually most interested in what happens, because almost always they are personally affected by the developments. The presence of the Chorus is generally acknowledged by the actors, who often address them instead

of each other, as one might expect. In some ways, they are an internal audience of the action, representative of the audience outside the drama.¹⁷

In my thesis, I shall be examining in detail the role of the Chorus in two plays of Sophocles: the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*. While the exact dates of their productions are not known, they are most certainly to be classed among the earliest of his extant tragedies. There is general agreement that the *Ajax* is the earlier of the two. Although the dating of the *Women of Trachis* is a long-standing problem, the play is almost certainly an early play also and is now generally thought to have been written before the *Antigone*.¹⁸

I shall treat all major issues related to the Chorus in these plays. These will include the nature of their character, its impact on the lyrical passages, their involvement in the action, and their understanding of the major characters and how it influences our response to them. In interpreting the odes, I shall also look at the themes which they introduce or develop, and the emotional impact of their songs. In Chapters Two and Four, I shall offer my interpretation of the role of the Chorus in the *Ajax* and the *Antigone* respectively, proceeding from the parodos through to the concluding lines, as if the plays were being performed. In Chapters Three and Five, I shall discuss major and minor issues which I have identified, arguing for or against what other scholars have had to say about these issues. In Chapter Six, I will summarize my viewpoints about the issues raised, and indicate the similarities and differences of these two choruses.

The Greek text used will be the 1990 Oxford Classical Text, edited by H. Lloyd-Jones and N.G. Wilson. When I quote from the Greek, the English translation given will be that of H. Lloyd-Jones, as appears in the new Loeb edition (1994) of Sophocles. If I translate a passage myself, I shall indicate that it is my translation. The English equivalents of individual words and short phrases (four words or fewer), however, may be either my own translation or that of

H. Lloyd-Jones, but I shall not record which is which, because approximately half are my own and the frequent designations would prove tedious to read.

Since my topic is the role of the Chorus in the two plays, I shall focus my attention on them and issues related to them. I shall not, of course, ignore the major characters but shall not study their speeches in any detail. In light of my topic I did not endeavour to read all scholarship in English and French relating to these two plays, which in any case would have been an enormous undertaking. I concentrated primarily on scholarship which dealt with the Chorus – their role as a character in the action, the significance of their odes and lyrical exchanges with other characters. This concentration is reflected in my bibliography.

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- ¹ A. Brown, *A New Companion to Greek Tragedy* (London: Croom Helm, 1983) 62.
- ² B. Zimmermann, *Greek Tragedy: An Introduction*, T. Marier, trans. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991) 24.
- ³ Brown, *Companion*, 63.
- ⁴ J. Ferguson, *Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1972) 20.
- ⁵ Brown, *Companion*, 61.
- ⁶ R.W.B. Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) 5.
- ⁷ C.P. Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1987) 8.
- ⁸ Ferguson, 21.
- ⁹ Brown, *Companion*, 193.
- ¹⁰ Brown, *Companion*, 193.
- ¹¹ Ferguson, 21.
- ¹² The "Basle Dancers" is the only vase from the fifth-century to show a chorus. O. Taplin, "The Pictorial Record", *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, P.E. Easterling, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997) 70.
- ¹³ Ferguson, 21-22.
- ¹⁴ Ferguson, 22.
- ¹⁵ Ferguson, 22.
- ¹⁶ Brown, *Companion*. 62.
- ¹⁷ Brown, *Companion*, 63.
- ¹⁸ P.E. Easterling, *Sophocles, Trachiniae* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982) 23.

Chapter Two

The Role of the Chorus in the *Ajax*

From the beginning of the prologue where Odysseus tracks down Ajax to the final scenes where Teucer spars, first with Menelaus, then with Agamemnon, with the corpse of the hero on stage, Ajax dominates the play. The concerns of all the characters revolve around him. Odysseus, Menelaus, and Agamemnon are his intended victims; Athena foils his attack and brings about his humiliation; Tecmessa and the Chorus are dependent on him; the messenger brings news of his past actions and a warning about his present situation; and Teucer must defend him after his death. Ajax himself has four long speeches as well as a kommos with the Chorus and Tecmessa. The character of Ajax emerges as the central issue of the play. Given all we know about him from others and what he himself says, how are we meant to see him? A great warrior, worthy of admiration and deserving of a hero cult? A man of the past whose ideals are too rigid, too concerned about honour and esteem, to function in a polis where cooperation and compromise are necessary, in contrast to Odysseus? A betrayer rather than an upholder of the heroic code because in resentment of the awarding of Achilles' armour to Odysseus he tries to assassinate his own army's leaders, and then abandons his war-bride, son, parents, and war comrades? Before making a judgment we must consider and evaluate everything we learn about him. The state of Ajax in the play moves from an initial delusion, where he mistakes animals for men, to a shameful realization of what he has done, a dread of mockery from others, and a desire to end his life. He then perceives the changeability inherent in the world to which he is unwilling to adapt, and shortly thereafter kills himself. But his story is not yet finished. In the final episode, after all the bickering and sniping, through the intercession of his former enemy, the dead Ajax receives the right of burial, an acknowledgement at least from Agamemnon of the dignity due to him as a human being, but also a tacit recognition of his greatness, in spite of his faults. Certainly we feel a sense of loss at

the close of the play when Teucer makes arrangements for his burial and the body is carried off the stage accompanied by his family and friends as if in a funeral procession. Although none of the other characters fully understands the mind of Ajax and why he kills himself, except perhaps Athena, the “one who knows” (13), who remains, however, somewhat inscrutable and never reappears after the prologue, they do supply necessary background information for a final assessment of Ajax. And among these secondary characters are his own comrades in war, the men who make up the Chorus.

Their identity and character are revealed in the parodos. They refer to Ajax as ἄναξ twice (166, 190) and so are clearly under his leadership. They take their emotional cue from him, happy when he faring well, anxious and fearful when he is assailed by troubles. This strong emotional attachment to their leader, however, does not imply equality but rather utter dependence and a distance in status between them and him. This is an arrangement they fully accept and approve, for “small” men and “great” men need each other if both are to prosper. This close bond of dependence will have an important impact on their involvement in the action because the animosity from the army and its leaders, Menelaus and Agamemnon, which besets Ajax, is also directed against them.

Immediately after the parodos, they are addressed by Tecmessa as “helpers from the ship of Ajax, belonging to the race of the sons of Erechtheus who arose from the earth” (ναὸς ἄρωγοὶ τῆς Αἴαντος, | γενεᾶς χθονίων ἀπ’ Ἐρεχθείδων: 201-202). Possibly their identity as sailors with an ancestry associated with Athens would have elicited sympathy from the original audience, many of whom served in the Athenian navy, but the point should not be pressed too far, since their characterization is by no means wholly positive. Later, Ajax greets them as “dear sailors” (φίλοι ναυβάται: 349), when he is first revealed sitting in his tent, and a little later as the “race helpful with seafaring skills” (γένος ναΐας ἄρωγὸν τέχνας: 357). On one

occasion, however, Ajax calls them “shield-bearing men” (ἄνδρες ἀσπιστῆρες: 565), and on another, “comrades” (ἑταῖροι: 687). Therefore, they are both sailors who manned the fleet that brought Ajax from Salamis to Troy ten years before, as well as soldiers who have since been fighting under his leadership. Their association with the sea is hardly surprising for men who lived on an island. Although there are only two references to their role as soldiers, their participation in the war as fighters is clearly implied by both their strong attachment to Ajax and their fear that any retribution taken by his intended victims will be taken against them as well. Neither of these attributes would be credible if they were simply non-combatant sailors.

As to their character, they are sympathetic for several reasons. The dangerous predicament they find themselves in is not of their doing or is beyond their control; they have had to endure drudgery and toil during the long campaign in Troy away from home; they exhibit genuine empathy towards Tecmessa; and they show loyalty to and concern for Ajax, even if this attachment is also self-serving. But they are at times uninformed, dim-witted, and often unable to comprehend events fully. Certainly their understanding of Ajax is limited because they fail to recognize his heroic aspirations and ideals, a code of behaviour which does not seem to motivate them. In the parodos they are confused about Ajax’s slaughter of animals, vacillating between thinking that his attack on the cattle is mere malicious rumour and believing it was provoked by an angry god. If the latter, they are unsure about which god brought on Ajax’s delusion while not even considering the actual instigator, Athena. Later, when Tecmessa tells them that Ajax has come to his senses, they equivocate about his mental condition, sometimes describing him as sane, sometimes as suffering from a god-sent sickness. About the character and motivation of Odysseus, they are wrong until the final scene where they acknowledge his wisdom and humane defense of Ajax. They are never able or willing to speak frankly of the troubled situation of Ajax. They make no mention of his intended attack on the Atreidai and Odysseus, nor do they speak directly about his intention to kill himself when in the

first episode he has clearly resolved to do so. In interpreting what the Chorus say, therefore, it is important to keep in mind their lack of understanding, perception, and candour.

Parodos 134-200

The parodos is made up of two metrically distinct sections: 134-171 in anapests, as the Chorus march into the orchestra; 172-200 in lyric meters, arranged into a strophe, antistrophe, and epode.¹ The strophe pair is mainly dactylo-epitrite and the epode, with the exception of the first line (192) in dactylic hemiepes, is iambo-choriambic.² The first section would most likely have been chanted and may or may not have been accompanied by a “flute”. The lyric section would have begun after the Chorus had taken up a position in the orchestra and would have been sung and danced. Consequently, the original audience would have noticed, aurally and visually, a difference between the two sections but how marked it was cannot be determined with any certainty.³

The parodos is addressed to Ajax, who is in his hut and not visible, but the reason for the Chorus’ entry is not given until the end of the antistrophe and further elaborated in the epode. They want Ajax to come out and dispel the ugly rumours about him and win back his reputation. There has been a leap in time since the end of the prologue because they mention the stories that Odysseus has been spreading. These presumably occurred after the prologue, in accordance with Athena’s instructions in line 67, and are not the reports of other men which Odysseus mentions in his first speech and which the Chorus erroneously attribute to him. It is noteworthy that the Chorus do not mention the intended assassination of the Greek leaders, which would have been included in the rumours they had heard.⁴ It is evidently something too horrible for them to contemplate. Another clue that time has passed is furnished by references to night; in the prologue Odysseus refers to “this night” (νυκτὸς ... τῆσδε: 21), while the Chorus in the parodos talk of “the night just ended” (τῆς νῦν φθιμένης νυκτὸς: 141).

Although the parodos is linked with the prologue by its subject matter – the night attack of Ajax – there are significant differences in its treatment. First, there is a change from the full knowledge of Athena who describes how Ajax, intending to kill the Greek commanders, was deluded by her and unknowingly slaughtered cattle instead, to the uncertainty of the Chorus, who are unsure whether the attack on the animals actually happened. Second, there is an abrupt change in mood, from the reflection of Odysseus about Ajax’s humiliation and the admonitions of Athena to live without arrogance and conceit, to the confusion and anxiety of the men from Salamis. Third, the focus on the affected party of the night attack shifts from Odysseus, who has been saved by Athena’s intervention, to Ajax’s war comrades, whose fate, so dependent on their leader, is still uncertain.

The anapests begin with Ajax’s patronymic and place of origin, both of which may seem ordinary forms of address and of no particular interest, but will be shown to be of symbolic importance in the play. Telamon, the father of Ajax, will be mentioned twice in the latter’s first speech, and then again in his second and fourth speech. He will be shown as exerting a great psychological influence on Ajax who strives to live up to the heroic achievements of his father, and as a result cannot envisage himself returning home in disgrace. Salamis, which will be apostrophized in the first stasimon, and implied in the third, as the Chorus imagine their homecoming but do not name the island, will be closely linked with its illustrious inhabitant, standing firm, like it, when beaten by “waves”. It will also come to represent the life of peace and pleasurable pursuits, the opposite of wartime, with its toils and hardships.

The utter dependence of the Chorus on Ajax is then quickly established when they claim that their mood, whether of joy or trepidation, arises from how Ajax is faring.

σὲ μὲν εὖ πράσσοντ' ἐπιχαίρω
 σὲ δ' ὅταν πληγὴ Διὸς ἢ ζαμενῆς
 λόγος ἐκ Δαναῶν κακόθρους ἐπιβῇ,

μέγαν ὄκνον ἔχω καὶ πεφόβημαι
 πτηνῆς ὥς ὄμμα πελείας. 136-140

When you prosper, I rejoice. But when the stroke of Zeus assails you, or a quick-spreading rumour voiced by evil tongues comes from the Danaans, I am greatly anxious and am fearful, like the troubled glance of the winged dove.

Of the two possible conditions – Ajax is doing well or is in trouble – the second is described in greater detail because it reflects the present situation. Its underlying cause, according to the Chorus, is either of divine origin, with the implication that the attack did occur, or attributable to malicious gossip, leading to the opposite conclusion. Throughout the parodos, one cause for the trouble is cited, then the other, then the first and so on. This seesaw thinking, which I shall detail, gives the parodos its rhythm, and also underlines the confusion of the Chorus. For the remainder of the first section they refer only to the second cause, slanderous reports. “Great clamours” (μεγάλοι θόρυβοι: 142) are besetting them. “Such are the whispered words which Odysseus is putting together and carrying to the ears of all” (τοιούσδε λόγους ψιθύρους πλάσσων | εἰς ᾧτα φέρει πᾶσιν Ὀδυσσεύς: 148-149).⁵ They tell the absent Ajax: “You are being disturbed by noise” (θορυβῇ: 164). Only at the beginning of the lyric section do they re-introduce the idea of a divine intervention, wondering whether it might have been Artemis or Enyalios⁶. Nonetheless, immediately after the name of Artemis, they make an apostrophe: “O powerful rumour, you that are mother of the shame I feel” (ὦ μεγάλα φάτις, ὦ | μήτερ αἰσχύνας ἐμὰς: 173-174). Their naming Artemis Tauropolos⁷ as a possible instigator of the attack on the cattle is logical, given her connection to bull-tending, as is their suggesting Enyalios, because of Ajax’s association with war. The reasons they posit for a conjectured divine anger would be based on an intimate knowledge of Ajax from their many years of service with him, and would thus reveal traits of his character. He is thought capable by them of showing a haughtiness and independence of character, already apparent in his encounter with

Athena, as well as a penchant for impiety, which foreshadows the specific examples later given by Calchas, as quoted by the messenger. Earlier, however, he did promise Athena “golden offerings” for his supposed revenge on the Greek leaders (92-93), and thus is not always forgetful of the gods.

The supposition of divine interference is stated in the antistrophe: Ajax could “not have been in his right mind” (οὔποτε γὰρ φρενόθεν: 182) if he did carry out the attack; “a godsent sickness must have come (upon him)” (ἦκοι γὰρ ἄν θεία νόσος: 185). The theme of sanity and sickness is first broached by Athena: δυσφόρους ἐπ’ ὄμμασι | γνώμας βαλοῦσα: 51-52, “casting upon his eyes mistaken notions”; ἄνδρα μανιάσιν νόσοις: 59, “the man with frenzied sickness”; τήνδε ... νόσον: 66, “this sickness”. This theme will be a refrain of the Chorus in the following episode and the first stasimon. They then revert to the other explanation to which they stay committed for the rest of the parodos, and make several references to it: εἰ δ’ ὑποβαλλόμενοι | κλέπτουσι μύθους οἱ μεγάλοι βασιλῆς: 187-188, “But if the great kings are trumping up charges and spreading false stories”; μὴ μὴ ... κακὰν φάτιν ἄρη: 190-191, “do not, do not ... win an evil name”; πάντων βακχαζόντων | γλώσσαις: 198-199, “they all run riot with their tongues”. In the final transition they express an ambiguous wish: “May Zeus and Phoebus avert the evil rumour of the Argives” (ἀπερύκοι | καὶ Ζεὺς κακὰν καὶ Φοῖβος Ἀργείων φάτιν: 185-186). Most likely the Chorus are asking the gods to dispel the effects of the slander against their leader but their words could also be interpreted as a request to gods not suspected of manipulating Ajax’s behaviour to erase the bad reputation he has gained consequent to his mania-induced attack. The Chorus were not witnesses to the event and could not be expected to know whether it happened or not, and if it did, whether Athena, who was an unwavering ally of the Greeks, had a hand in it. Nevertheless, from the outset, we associate them with confusion and mistaken suppositions, mental shortcomings which anticipate

further uncertainties and errors on their part. Their reliability is questioned, especially because we are already superior to them in knowledge.

In contrast to their confusion over the night attack, the Chorus are shown to be men with definite opinions about social structure and the common soldier. They draw a sharp distinction between the leaders, “the noble spirits” (μεγάλων ψυχῶν: 154), and the small men (βαίῳς: 160, μικροτέρων: 161). These are interdependent and in need of each other if both are to “prosper” (ὀρθοῖθ’: 161). There is no indication that this extreme hierarchy applies only to the army and not to the political life at home as well. These men are not radical democrats, but recognize different and well-marked roles for the high- and low-born. The small without the great make “a precarious protection of a tower” (σφαλερὸν πύργου ῥῦμα: 159), which may mean either a guard for a tower or more probably a tower of defense.⁸ If the latter, there may be an allusion to wall-building in which large and small stones are used. In any case, without the help of Ajax they are defenseless before the verbal attacks on him. The word for “great” occurs nine times in the parodos⁹, a quality clearly associated with Ajax, but the adjective is also used to describe their anxiety (139), the rumour (173), and the Greek leaders (188). This is not a world of half measures and mediocrity, but of largeness and extremes (the word occurs twenty-seven times in the rest of the play),¹⁰ and Ajax is greater than his “great” enemies; he is the greatest of the great. Three of the four superlatives of the word in the play describe Ajax himself and it is the one adjective most descriptive of him: great in stature, in fighting prowess, in recognition by others, in temper, in hate, in resolve to abide by his own conception of himself. Concomitant to the Chorus’ division of society between “the great” and “the small”, the leaders and the followers, is the bird imagery. In describing their present fearful state, they liken themselves to the nervous glance of a fluttering dove, a bird associated with timidity. The

common warriors left by themselves “warble like flocks of birds” (παταγοῦσιν ἅτε πτηνῶν ἀγέλαι: 168) and would be cowered to silence by the arrival of a great eagle, such as Ajax.

As was noted above, the Chorus have fixed ideas also about the common soldier. In addition to their remarks about “warbling” and “cowering”, they make other, equally unflattering statements, some of which are perceptive and applicable to any time or place, others grossly exaggerated or erroneous. These common men “exult with insolence” (καθυβρίζων: 153) over the troubles of their superiors, and their envy is directed only at “the rich or those in power” (τὸν ἔχονθ’: 157). They are so lacking in sense that it is impossible to teach them to restrain themselves from slandering “the haves”, or to respect the leaders. So immoderate are they that they “clamour” (164); their “insolence rushes along fearlessly in the wind-swept glades” (ὕβρις ᾧδ’ ἀτάρβηθ’ | ὀρμᾶται ἐν εὐανέμοις Βάσσαις: 196-197),¹¹ likely implying, because of the idea of fire provided in the previous line, that their malicious talk is spreading quickly, like a fire fueled by winds. They, together with the leaders (“all”), “run riot with their tongues in grievous fashion” (πάντων βακχαζόντων | γλώσσαις βαρυάλγητ’: 198-199). This final phrase is striking because of the strong language and it includes a unique adverb, βαρυάλγητα¹², and a unique verb form (if the oldest manuscript tradition is accurate), βακχάζω.¹³ Characterizing their comrades-in-arms as envious, insolent, taking pleasure in the troubles of others, and frenzied, isolates the Chorus from the rest of the army and emphasizes their attachment to Ajax. They are unaware, however, that they are describing men of the same status as themselves and that they too, in vilifying Odysseus and later, the Atreidai, partake in the same behaviour.

The parodos with its combination of confusion and certainty, the one over the night attack, the other about the folly of the common warrior and the desirability of a rigid social hierarchy, serves to reveal the personality of the Chorus. It is also made dramatic and effective

because they are personally affected by the immediate situation. The Chorus' unswerving loyalty to, and dependence on, Ajax, as well as their unheroic nature, are firmly established, and their mood is encapsulated in the final line: "for me, distress stands firm" (ἐμοὶ δ' ἄχος ἔστακεν: 200). The parodos, addressed as it is to Ajax, and concluding with a command to him to come out and defend himself, creates an expectation that he will emerge from his hut at the beginning of the first episode, but his re-entry is retarded for another one hundred and fifty lines. One final point to note is that the reasoning at the end of the antistrophe and in the epode supporting the command is highly ironic. The Chorus command Ajax: "Do not, do not, my lord, remain thus in your huts by the sea and win an evil name" (μὴ μὴ, ἄναξ, ἔθ' ᾧδ' ἐφάλοις κλισίαις | ἐμμένων κακὰν φάτιν ἄρη: 190-191). They tell him that by remaining hidden, he is "letting the flame of ruin flare up to heaven" (ἄταν οὐρανίαν φλέγων: 195). If he had only remained there after the awarding of Achilles' arms, there would have been no "evil name" nor "flame of ruin" (nor a story).

Kommos 201-262

Tecmessa, rather than Ajax, whose entrance is expected, enters and engages in a kommos with the Chorus. They identify her by her patronymic and describe her as valiant Ajax's spear-won bride whom he holds in honour (211-212), but her actual name is not given until line 331. Since she does not figure in any extant literature before Sophocles, she may have been new to the story and if so, her entrance would have created suspense.¹⁴ The kommos is composed of three sections of melic anapests (201-220; 233-244; and 257-262), the first of which is shared by Tecmessa and the Chorus while the second and third are sung by Tecmessa alone. The intervening strophe and antistrophe are sung by the Chorus in a meter of iambic, dactylic, choriambic, and perhaps ionic rhythms, but the scansion remains problematic.¹⁵

In the kommos information is exchanged: the Chorus are informed that Ajax did in fact make a deadly assault on the animals and they learn, as do the spectator and reader, that he has recovered from his mental illness. Tecmessa is apprised that the cattle slaughtered by Ajax came from the common herd and that herdsmen were also killed. During the exchange, the two participants exhibit mutual respect and sympathy, qualities which characterize their relationship for the entire play. They both salute one another with a descriptive address (201-202; 209-213). Tecmessa includes the Chorus with herself in “those who care for the house of Telamon from far away” (οἱ κηδόμενοι | τοῦ Τελαμῶνος τηλόθεν οἴκου: 203-204), by using the first person plural, while the latter refer to Tecmessa, because of the affection Ajax has for her, as one who speaks about their leader with knowledge.

The initial reaction of the Chorus to the confirmation of the rumours is given in the strophe. In respect to the news which they call “unbearable” and “inescapable” (224), they still blame the “great” (or “miserable”)¹⁶ Danaans (225) whose “loud rumour magnifies it” (τὰν ὁ μέγας μῦθος ἀέξει: 226). They do not ascribe any guilt or responsibility to Ajax, but only comment that “an unapproachable fate holds him in its grasp” (τὸν αἶσ’ ἄπλατος ἔσχει: 256). The mood of anxiety and fear they created in the parodos continues. They use the verb, φοβοῦμαι, twice (229, 254) to describe their feelings. In a moment of pessimism and foresight, they predict that Ajax will die (229-230), not at his own hands, but rather, as they specify in the antistrophe, in “a death by stoning” (λιθόλευστον Ἄρη: 254). This prediction corresponds to Tecmessa’s earlier warning to the Chorus. When they are about to hear of the night slaughter, she says: “For the disaster you shall learn of is as bad as death” (θανάτῳ γὰρ ἴσον πάθος ἐκπέυση: 215). But Ajax’s imminent death is only a momentary insight and their prediction of a public killing will be soon forgotten when they behold their leader’s suicidal mood, and all

notions of death, self-inflicted or imposed, will be completely abandoned in the second stasimon.

After Tecmessa's description of Ajax's killing of the captive flock in the camp and his abuse of two rams, the Chorus, in the antistrophe, confirm their cowardly nature by announcing their desire to escape. First, they wish to cover their face with a veil, either out of shame or, more probably, for concealment, and steal away, or as they say in a striking periphrastic expression, "to commit a theft with the feet" (ποδοῖν κλοπὰν ἀρέσθαι: 248). Then they want to occupy the rowers' bench and leave by sea. The second stage of escape is linked verbally to the threats the Atreidai are assailing them with, or literally, "rowing" (ἐρέσσουσιν: 251) to them. Such threats must stem from Ajax's intention to kill Agamemnon and Menelaus who presume his men shared in the plan, but the Chorus say nothing about this. By their silence they implicitly link the threats to the night attack which Tecmessa has just recounted.

Of note also in the kommos are the epithets used to describe Ajax. The Chorus call him "impetuous" or "raging" (θοόριος: 212); "glowing" (αἶθονος: 223) which reflects his fiery disposition, and is the same word they used of his iron dagger in the parodos (147); and "renowned" (περίφαντος: 229). The fullest characterization is given by Tecmessa who speaks of him as "the dread, the mighty Ajax, harsh in his might" (ὁ δεινὸς μέγας ὠμοκρατὴς | Αἶας: 205-206). The first adjective has a range of meanings but in this context signifies something akin to formidable, inspiring fear. I have already discussed the second. The third through its prefix is related to later descriptions of him. Ajax is called by the Chorus "harsh-tempered" (ὠμόθυμον: 885), and "harsh-minded" (ὠμόφρων: 930) and Ajax himself refers to his own "harsh manner" (ὠμοῖς ... νόμοις: 548) when he picks up Eurysakes. Although the Ajax of the play is the same man as the Homeric Ajax, the characterization is not the same. Both Ajaxes are big in stature and fierce fighters but in Homer he is never called harsh or hard because he never

commits an egregious act of brutality, such as he does in the play.¹⁷ Sophocles had to provide him with a temperament which would motivate him to such excesses.

Before the next kommos the Chorus, represented by the coryphaeos, engage in a dialogue with Tecmessa. They are shown to be rather dim-witted when they naively assume that Ajax must be happier, now that he is no longer subject to delusions (263-264). When Tecmessa mentions a double sorrow, that of Ajax and of those concerned for him, they are slow to understand. Added to this lack of mental acuity is their confusion about Ajax's state of mind, as they waver in their belief about his condition between sanity and sickness, although Tecmessa tells them that he is no longer sick (269, 274).

φρούδου γὰρ ἤδη τοῦ κακοῦ ... 264

for the trouble is now departed

... δέδοικα μὴ ἔκ θεοῦ

πληγὴ τις ἤκει. 278-279

I am afraid some blow from a god has struck him.

Τέκμησσα, δεινοῖς, παῖ Τελεύταντος, λέγεις

ἡμῖν τὸν ἄνδρα διαπεφοιβάσθαι κακοῖς 331-332

Tecmessa, daughter of Teleutas, terrible are the evils by which you tell us that the man has been driven mad.

ἄνθρωπος ἔοικεν ἢ νοσεῖν, ἢ τοῖς πάλαι

νοσήμασι ξυνοῦσι λυπεῖσθαι παρών. 337-338

It seems that either he is sick, or he is grieved by the thought of the sickness that afflicted him before.

ἄνθρωπος φρονεῖν ἔοικεν. 344

The man seems to be sane.

Their uncertainty carries on into the following kommos and beyond (355, 481-482) and combined as it is in this scene with mental slowness, the Chorus are shown as being overwhelmed by events which they are unable to understand.

Kommos 348-429

The long anticipated re-entry of Ajax occurs when the door of his hut is opened. Whether an *eccyclema* was used to expose the dead animals is not known, although it is widely accepted as most likely. It is doubtful whether the original audience could see into the hut. Even without the moving platform, it would be sufficient for dramatic effect that the Chorus can see into the interior,¹⁸ after the earlier detailed descriptions of the slaughter. Ajax has been heard in lamentation earlier from inside his hut (333, 339) and he begins the kommos with another wail. The metrical scheme used emphasizes the despair and anguish of Ajax, who sings the lyric parts, composed of iambics, choriambics, dactyls, and especially dochmiacs,¹⁹ the meter associated with strong emotion. In contrast, Tecmessa and the Chorus speak in iambic trimeters, indicating their calmer state as they try to console him. There are three strophic pairs, the second longer than the first, and the third longer than the second, as if Ajax were experiencing a crescendo of emotion. The strophe and the antistrophe of the first pair both end with two trimeters spoken by the Chorus. In the second pair, the strophe is interrupted twice by a single trimeter from Tecmessa and concluded with two trimeters from the Chorus, and the antistrophe likewise, except that Tecmessa and the Chorus switch parts. Finally, the strophe of the third pair is followed by two trimeters from Tecmessa, the antistrophe by two trimeters from the Chorus. Demonstration of the close bond between Tecmessa and the Chorus is a feature of the kommos. Their roles are identical – to give consolation to Ajax and bring him out of his despondency – and the symmetry of their lines in relationship to the second and third strophe pairs emphasizes their closeness and common purpose.

As can be seen from the above analysis, Ajax has the principal part in this kommos and the participation of the Chorus is limited. There are two observations to be made about their involvement in this scene. First, their loyalty to their leader is reinforced by Ajax's double mention of it. He says: "Dear sailors, the only ones among my friends who still abide by the rule of loyalty" (φίλοι ναυβάται, μόνοι ἐμῶν φίλων | μόνοι ἔτ' ἐμμένοντες ὀρθῶ νόμῳ: 349-350), and "you, you are the only guardians I see who will help me" (σέ τοι σέ μόνον δέδορ- | κα ποιμένων ἐπαρκέσοντ': 359-360). But they are his only support which is underscored by the repetition of, in one phrase, *μόνος* and, in the other, *σε*. Second, their efforts at providing comfort are woefully inadequate, not surprising given what we already know about them. Confronted with Ajax's despair, they resort to banalities. τί δῆτ' ἂν ἀλγοίης ἐπ' ἐξειργασμένοις; | οὐ γὰρ γένοιτ' ἂν ταῦθ' ὅπως οὐχ ᾧδ' ἔχοι: 377-378, "Why should you grieve over what is accomplished? It is impossible that things should be other than they are". ξὺν τῷ θεῷ πᾶς καὶ γελᾷ κώδύρεται: 383, "Every man laughs or laments according as the god gives." Or they issue commands which go unheeded. εὐφημα φώνει: 362, "Speak words of good omen". μηδὲν μέγ' εἶπης: 386, "Make no big boast". In this last command they are, without thinking, asking Ajax not to be Ajax. At the end of the kommos, the Chorus acknowledge their own inability to offer any remedy, when they say they can neither restrain nor guide his thoughts. Ajax is thus shown to be completely isolated when such men as these are his only supporters.

For the remainder of the first episode the role of the Chorus is minimal. Ajax, in two long speeches, repeatedly states his desire to die, which Tecmessa tries unsuccessfully to counter, by reminding him of his filial duty to his parents and to the mistreatment she and his son will suffer when he is dead. Although he gives no indication that her pleas have persuaded him in any way, he later reveals that he has been moved to pity (651-653). At the end of the

episode, Ajax, Tecmessa, and Eurysaces probably all retire into the hut so that only the Chorus are present for the first stasimon.. Certainly, a departure for Ajax seems required for the reflection on his circumstances which is made evident in his third speech.

First Stasimon 596-645

Composed of two strophe pairs (596-608; 609-620; and 624-634; 635-645) both of which are in iambic and choriambic meters,²⁰ the stasimon combines elements of remoteness and immediacy. Convinced that Ajax has gone inside his hut to commit suicide, they make no direct mention of it because it would be considered ill-omened²¹ and because, coincidentally, it is characteristic of them to avoid mention of unpleasant subjects. They nonetheless do allude to it by references to his sickness, by a description of his mother in lamentation for him as if he were dead, and by the mention of Hades (635) and his ruin (ἄταν: 643). The invocation of their homeland, Salamis, which is addressed at the outset and then later in the first antistrophe, and the glimpses of what Ajax used to be like, take us away, if only momentarily, from what seems to be the impending suicide. The imagined grief of his mother and the address to Telamon at the end of the ode partake in both elements; they take place in Salamis, away from the action of the play, but are related to Ajax's imminent death.

The first strophe begins with an invocation of Salamis which is said to be "famous" (κλεινὰ: 596), although its fame derives from a battle after the action of the play. It is also "conspicuous" (περίφαντος: 599), the same word they applied to Ajax (229) but with a difference of meaning ("renowned"), and "blessed" or "happy" (εὐδαίμων: 598), unlike "their wretched selves" (ἐγὼ δ' ὁ τλάμων: 600). Salamis, symbolic of peace and happiness, serves as a contrast not so much to their present predicament as to their general experience of war, summarized neatly in three points. It is of an interminable length, it wears one down, and death

is always lurking, the last point expressed in two lines with alliterations of epsilons and alphas and a play on words at the end:

κακὰν ἐλπίδ' ἔχων

ἔτι μέ ποτ' ἀνύσειν τὸν ἀπότροτον αἰδηλὸν Ἄϊδαν. 606-607

with the dark prospect of coming some day to the ruthless destroyer, Hades.

The subject of the first antistrophe is Ajax, as he was and as he is. Once mighty in war and capable of exploits requiring the greatest courage, he is now “difficult to cure” (δυσθεράπεντος: 609), “(another trouble) to wrestle with” (ἔφεδρος: 610), “pasturing his thoughts alone” (φρενὸς οἰοβώ | τας: 614-615)²², and “a great source of grief for his friends” (φίλοις μέγα πένθος: 615). On top of their day-to-day hardships, this is a litany of woes which will make their reversal of mood in the next stasimon all the more prominent. They also speak of him as possessed by a divine madness (611) and later in the ode refer to his mind-devouring sickness (625-626), his hopeless sickness (635), and his uncharacteristic temperament (639-640). Only in terms of sickness does Ajax’s intention to kill himself make sense to them and it is their way of speaking of the unspeakable.

The theme of the second strophe, the future grief of Eriboea, is closely tied to the unhappiness of Telamon, who is addressed at the end of the ode. The subject of Ajax’s grieving parents has already been twice broached: in the second speech of Ajax where he instructs his son to care for them in his absence; and by Tecmessa when she beseeches Ajax not to abandon his parents. Although the description of her grief does not emanate from the concerns of the Chorus, who have their own troubles and are unlikely to be thinking of her, it serves two purposes. It adds to the melancholy and despondency of the ode and functions as a formal lamentation for Ajax’s death before the fact. There will be little time for extended grieving after the event when the right of his burial becomes a contentious issue. The mother’s act of lamentation contains the conventional elements – wailing, self-beating, and tearing of hair, but

is vivid in its description. Words appealing to the sense of sight (παλαιᾶ ... ἡμέρα, λευκῶ ... γήρα, πολιδᾶς ἄμυγμα χαίτας) are mixed with words indicating sound. These include the three sorts of wailing she will make (the linus cry, the piteous cry of the nightingale, and the shrill-pitched notes of a dirge) as well as the heavy thud of hands striking her breasts.

The depths of hopelessness of the Chorus is apparent in the opening line of the second antistrophe where they openly speak of death. The formulation is at first impersonally stated (ὁ νοσῶν μάταν: 635, “the man who is hopelessly sick”) but the next line beginning with a relative clause indicates that it applies to Ajax. Their remark that he is of the noblest lineage echoes their leader’s earlier boast about his preeminence among the Greeks (423 ff.), both failing to include Achilles, probably not out of ignorance or *hybris*, but in order to heighten the contrast between past and present. His present state, described as “no longer firm in the temper he grew up in” (οὐκέτι συντρόφοις | ὀργαῖς ἔμπεδος: 639-640), contains a word for “nurtured”. Significantly, there are two other instances of “nurture” in the ode (σύντροφος: 624, ἔθρεψεν: 644). What the Chorus are doing is subtly contrasting Ajax’s former “nurtured” self to his present “sickness”, a restatement of the theme of the first antistrophe. As was mentioned earlier, the ode ends with an apostrophe to Telamon, whose sorrow, unlike Euboea’s, is only hinted at, befitting his stern character. The final phrase (644-645) is awkwardly expressed, possibly due to Sophocles’ desire to make a play on Ajax’s name with αἰὼν Αἰακιδᾶν. It is apt that the ode should end with Ajax who is the cause of their misfortune and their imminent, although short-lived, jubilation.

Second Stasimon 693-718

Between the first and second stasima, Ajax delivers his speech on time and change, often labelled his “deception” speech, which has generated much debate. For the purposes of my subject, the following remarks will suffice. There has been a change of emotion in Ajax since

his last appearance. He is calm and self-controlled, reflective about his present condition, less self-absorbed. Although he still intends to commit suicide, his words are ambiguous, causing both Tecmessa and the Chorus to believe he has changed his mind. The ambiguity is deliberate, perhaps because Ajax wishes to deceive (unless for most of the speech he is talking to himself),²³ but certainly because Sophocles wants Ajax for dramatic effect to die alone and the deception is a means of accomplishing this. The speech by itself constitutes an episode, which is unique in Greek tragedy, and the ambiguity in it is given greater impact by being framed by two stasima, the first of which supports one interpretation – he wants to die – and the second, that he wants to live.

The second stasimon is relatively short, composed of only one strophic pair, in iambic and choriambic meters,²⁴ and the Chorus are alone, Tecmessa and Ajax having exited. It is a song of joy before disaster, a dramatic device used by Sophocles in other plays in order to accentuate the reversal of fortune.²⁵ In mood it is the opposite of the first stasimon but the Chorus' joy is not completely logical. Believing, as they do, that Ajax has put aside thoughts of suicide, they would naturally be relieved, but their predicament is no better than it was after they learned from Tecmessa that Ajax had attacked the cattle. They may be slow-witted at times, but it is hardly imaginable that they would think that all their troubles had disappeared because of Ajax's supposed change of heart. Their absolute jubilation is for dramatic effect and not due to simple-mindedness. The function of the Chorus here is to create excitement, a break from the continuous gloom and suffering since the prologue. Since we do not share in their deception, however, we are mere witnesses to their rejoicing, not infected by it, and as they are carried away in a transport of joy, we are aware of the tragic irony of their song. Even if some of the original audience were puzzled by Ajax's ambiguous words, since they would have only heard the speech once, they knew how the story ended and would have been suspicious of the Chorus' joy.

They begin, not with the specific reason for their rejoicing which is delayed until the antistrophe, but with their emotional state. In the opening line (693) they use two highly descriptive verbs, “shiver” (ἔφριξ) and “soar” (ἀνεπτόμαν), both in the aorist, indicating a sudden emotion of no set duration²⁶ and the noun, ἔρως, in the unique sense of joyous rapture. Their ebullience is conveyed by the call to Pan (ἰὼ ἰὼ Πᾶν Πᾶν, | ὦ Πᾶν Πᾶν: 694-695), with responsion of similar emotion in the antistrophe when they invoke Zeus (ἰὼ ἰώ, νῦν αἶ, | νῦν, ὦ Ζεῦ: 707-708) and their state of high emotion is of such intensity that they want to be inspired by Pan to dance Mysian and Cnosian dance-steps. For a chorus in an ode to wish to dance while they are already dancing is a sign of intense delight.²⁷ Apollo, associated with music and dancing, is also invoked as if one god of dancing could not satisfy their excitement, and the Chorus may be punning his name, ὁ Δάλιος (δῆλος), with his attribute, εὐγνωστος.²⁸ Four compounds with the prefix for “well” (εὐγνωστος, εὐφρων, εὐάμερον, and εὐνομία) highlight their well-being and euphoria.

The cause of their celebratory mood is specified at the beginning of the antistrophe: Ares has lifted the grief. But from whose eyes it has been removed is deliberately left vague and we are meant to assume both Ajax’s and theirs. The former grief suggests their new happiness, which is now expressed in an image of light and swift ships (νῦν, ὦ Ζεῦ, πάρα λευκὸν εὐ- | άμερον πελάσαι φάος | θοᾶν ὠκυάλων νεῶν: 708-710, “now, O Zeus, can the bright light of day shine upon the swift ships that glide over the sea”). When they mention that Ajax has undergone a change, particular words correspond to words used by Ajax in the prior speech: σέβων: 713, σέβειν: 667; ὁ μέγας χρόνος: 714, ὁ μακρὸς ... χρόνος: 646; ἀέλπτων: 716, ἄελπτον: 648; and possibly, ἔρωτι: 693, ἐρᾶ: 686. There may be another link in line 714. Many editors add the words, τε καὶ φλέγει.²⁹ Thus, time “extinguishes” and “kindles”, matching more closely time “bringing to birth” and “covering” of line 647, but the inclusion

would mean that there is a lacuna in line 702. The borrowing of words and ideas from Ajax's speech, without the Chorus understanding the context or the intention of the speaker, heightens the irony of the ode and is another instance of their inability to comprehend Ajax.

Epiparodos 866-878 and Kommos 879-973

After the second stasimon, a messenger arrives, not with the expected news of Ajax's suicide, but with instructions from Teucer. The Chorus have to call Tecmessa out, which requires the messenger to repeat some of what he has said and delays their search. The warning to keep Ajax confined within his hut for this one day creates a sense of urgency. The deception in tandem with the warning ensures the removal of the Chorus who split in order to cover more territory, half exiting right, the other half left. The stage is now left barren for Ajax's final speech, the absence of the Chorus a visual reminder that Ajax is completely alone at the end.

The re-entry of the Chorus, unique in Greek tragedy, constitutes a second parodos, although much shorter in length than the first. It is in iambic meters and because of its brevity is astrophic. It is reminiscent of the opening of the play, where Odysseus was also in search of Ajax. The Chorus are still divided into two half-choruses who enter from opposite sides. The polyptoton (πόνος πόνῳ πόνον φέρει: 866, "Toil brings toil upon toil.") which begins the epiparodos, and the three, following interrogatives (πᾷ πᾷ | πᾷ: 867-868, "where, where, where") suggest their labour by the alliteration. The two halves speak in a different manner to emphasize their split, one speaking periphrastically, the other using simple constructions until the final two lines (877-878), thus indicating the merging of the two groups.

The kommos between Tecmessa and the Chorus is made up of three distinct parts. The strophe and antistrophe (879-890; 925-936), sung by the Chorus only, are mainly in dochmiacs. Following these are two corresponding sections (891-914; 937-960), in emotional lyrics of various meters, sung by both, after which appear two other sections, one of 10 lines (915-924), the other of 13 lines (961-973), in iambic trimeter, spoken by Tecmessa only.³⁰ It may be

structured like a formal dirge, given the repetition of words and sounds in corresponding positions and lines. Examples are: the double τίς (879) and the double ἔμελλες (925); ὠμόθυμον (885) and ὠμόφρων (930); 891=937; the ἰώ of 893 and 939; the ὧμοι of 900 and 946; and double πᾶ (912) and the double φεῖν (958).³¹ After the strophe in which the Chorus suggests the background scenery of the search by naming fishermen, goddesses of (Mysian) Olympus, and rivergods of the Bosphorus as possible witnesses to the wanderings of Ajax,³² their role in the kommos is to engage in mourning with Tecmessa. This mourning would have been pronounced, in the original production, by means of the tone of voice used in the exclamations of grief, sorrowful postures and gestures, and the melancholy sound of the flute.³³

The Chorus' reaction to and explanation of Ajax's death provide comparisons to those of Tecmessa. Their initial reaction is to bewail the loss of any chance of going home and the danger to them. "Alas for my homecoming! Alas, my lord, you have killed me your fellow sailor" (ὧμοι ἐμῶν νόστων | ὧμοι, κατέπεφνες, ἄναξ, | τόνδε συνναύταν: 900-902). Later, they speak of their ruin (909) and are evidently afraid for their safety. Tecmessa's loss is, however, total (οἴχωκ', ὄλωλα, διαπεπόρημαι: 896, "I am gone, I am lost, I am utterly destroyed"). The long vowels in the personal endings of the perfect are suggestive of lamentation. Ajax was her entire world and her grief is acknowledged as greater by the Chorus (942-943). While the Chorus berate themselves for being deaf to, and ignorant of, Ajax, Tecmessa, even in her great sorrow, has the presence of mind to worry about burial (920 ff.) which will soon be of central concern in the play.

As for explaining the suicide, the Chorus signal out the awarding of Achilles' arms as the cause of the disaster (934-936), having made the vague observation about Ajax:

ἔμελλες, τάλας, ἔμελλες χρόνῳ
στερεόφρων ἄρ' ἐξανύσσειν κακὰν
μοῖραν ἀπειρεσίῳ πόνῳ 925-927

You were bound, unhappy man, you were bound in your obduracy to accomplish
in the end an evil fate of troubles infinite!

They do not speak of his pride or sense of dishonour which led to his murderous rage, and they think of him more as a victim of fate than as an agent of his own death. Tecmessa, with more insight, recognizes that Ajax wanted to die and his death is a matter between him and the gods, not between him and the Atreidai.

αὐτῷ δὲ τερπνός· ὦν γὰρ ἠράσθη τυχεῖν

ἐκτήσαθ' αὐτῷ, θάνατον ὅνπερ ἤθελεν.

θεοῖς τέθνηκεν οὗτος, οὐ κείνοισιν, οὔ. 967-968, 970

(my translation) a pleasure to him (was his death); for what he longed for, he got
for himself, the death he wanted. It is for the gods this man died, not for them,
no.

His death gave him “pleasure” (the word in Greek is very positive), because for him it was a noble act. Continued life would have been meant groveling before the Atreidai. But they did not drive him to suicide nor did the gods (the datives in line 970 are difficult to classify but they are not dative of agents), although the latter played a part. Earlier, when the Chorus wished the gods to avert the enslavement of Tecmessa and Eurysaces, she said that they would not be in this dire situation but for the gods (949-950).

After the kommos, Tecmessa is silent for the rest of the play, although she remains on stage except for a brief absence (990-1167) to fetch Eurysaces, and the participation of the Chorus in the action is reduced. It seems appropriate that the role of both of them, who depended so strongly on Ajax for support, should be diminished after his death.

Third Stasimon 1185-1222

Discussion of the role of the Chorus in the fourth episode will be delayed and combined with comments about their limited participation in the Exodos. Before this I shall look at the

third and final choral ode. It is a melancholy interlude between two debating scenes full of wrangling and insults and provides a necessary break. Tecmessa and Eurysaces, in supplication by the corpse of Ajax, are on stage. Although the issue of Ajax's burial is still unresolved, this is not the subject of the ode, which is a general anti-war lament with only a passing reference to Ajax and therefore not tied closely to the immediate situation. The sentiments expressed about the hardships of war and the delights of peace while conventional in thought are characteristic of this unwarlike Chorus and serve to broaden the perspective of the play.³⁴ The desire to escape from a difficult situation, which here is also the desire to return home, is frequent among tragic choruses.

In the stasimon there are two strophic pairs; the first set (1185-1191; 1192-1198) is largely in choriambics, and the second (1199-1210; 1211-1222), mainly in ionics, choriambics, and glyconics.³⁵ A sharp contrast is drawn between war and peace, Troy and Salamis. The specific privations of war experienced by the Chorus (the long years of service, the never-ending battle-toil, of the first strophe, the dew-drenched hair of the second strophe) frame the non-specific horrors of war (hateful weapons, death, toil, of the first antistrophe), and the pleasures of peace denied them (drinking, music, sleep, sex, of the second strophe). The final antistrophe begins with the loss of Ajax who used to be their bulwark and closes with an imaginary voyage home. The Chorus are largely concerned with themselves in this ode. Both the words, ἐμοὶ and μοι, appear twice (1187, 1200; 1202, 1212); ὅμοι, a near substitute for ἐμοὶ, once (1205). Three of the verbs are in the first person (1206, 1216, and 1222).

In the opening sentence which also constitutes the first strophe, two features are to be noted which are distinctive in this ode: repetition, of construction in this case (πολυπλάγκτων ἐτέων ἀριθμός: 1186, δορυσσοήτων μόχθων ἄταν: 1187-1188), and a summary phrase (δύστανον ὄνειδος Ἑλλάνων: 1191, "sad reproach for the Hellenes"). Part of the effectiveness

of this ode comes from the abundance of repeated words or words with common roots and the short one-line phrases, giving it the power of simplicity. Examples of repetition include τίς (1185, 1215 twice), κεῖνος (1195, 1198) and ἐκεῖνος (1199), πόνοι (1197) and πόνων (1197), τέρψιν (1201, 1204) and τέρψις (1215), ἐννυχίαν (1204) and ἐννυχίου (1211), ἐρώτων (1205 twice), Τροίαν (1190) and Τροίας (1210), ἄπαυστον (1188) and ἀπέπαυσεν (1205), and πολύκοινον (1193) and κοινὸν (1196). In addition, there are two epexegetic infinitives (1201, 1204). The other summarizing phrases, reflective of the uncomplicated thinking of the Chorus, are found in lines 1197 (“O toils which beget toils.”), 1198 (“For that man destroyed mankind.”), and 1210 (“reminder of miserable Troy”).

The garlands, wine (by a synecdoche from *kylikes*), flute-music, sweet repose, and love-making, symbolizing the pleasures of home and for which they yearn in the second strophe, are elements of a fifth-century Attic symposium, yet the anachronism is not too marked since many desires remain constant. Their imagined homecoming at the close also contains an anachronism since Salamis was not captured by Athens until the time of Solon in the early sixth century. While few in the original audience would have noticed these historical inaccuracies, all would have caught the patriotism at the end of the ode where the Chorus imagine saluting Athens. Whether they were also aware of the irony outside of the illusionary world of the drama, that while the Chorus was singing about their desire to behold sacred Athens, the members of that Chorus were singing in Athens in a play which was a part of a religious festival, is uncertain but doubtful. It is the sort of observation that modern readers are more prone to make.

Fourth Episode 974-1184 and Exodos 1223-1420

After the third kommos, Teucer arrives and when the death of Ajax is confirmed to him by the Chorus, he shares three lines (981-983) with them in expressing his grief, which is like a mini-kommos. One of the functions of this Chorus is to engage in exchanges of emotions with

the actors in the play (two kommoi with Tecmessa, one with Ajax and Tecmessa). These emotional exchanges give expression to misery and sorrow and heighten the suffering in the play.

In the debate scenes between Teucer and the Atreidai, the Chorus assume a new, although minor, role as mediator. After Menelaus has charged Ajax with being insubordinate and fiercely insolent, they do not defend their leader but, having conceded that Menelaus has spoken wisely about some matters, ask him not to disrespect the dead by denying burial rites. This is the man, along with his brother, they have been vilifying throughout the play (251, 619-620, 946-948, 955-960). When Agamemnon has spoken for the first time and Teucer has not yet replied, they tell both of them to show moderation. They presume Teucer will adopt the same style as he did with Menelaus, but he has just been grossly insulted by Agamemnon and he is trying in his own way to prevent the corpse of Ajax from being left exposed. On Odysseus' entry, they express the hope that he has come to settle the dispute, a man whom they pictured, the last time they mentioned him, as laughing at their "frenzied sorrows" (957) and about whom they have learned nothing new to account for their more positive estimation. One could argue that it would not be characteristic of the rather timid Chorus to be confrontational and boldly stand up for their dead leader but more natural for them to cower in fear, as it were, before the big eagles. But the dynamics of the play have changed. The interest now lies in the confrontation between Teucer and the Atreidai. If the Chorus were to side with Teucer or make their own pleas, it would detract from the one-to-one conflict and diffuse the tension. It is more effective dramatically that the Chorus act as conciliators, which is the traditional role for choruses in such quarreling scenes.

The final lines of the play, as is usual, are spoken by the Chorus. Its thought is commonplace: mortals learn many things from experience but what the future holds no one can tell. Its banality is reflective of play closures rather than of the character of the Chorus. It is a

tag that is of limited significance to this play and could as easily be placed at the end of any other tragedy and it may be merely a sign that the play has ended. Although they have witnessed the destruction of Ajax, they can hardly be said to have learned a great deal from it. But the final sentiment is more applicable. What they could not have foretold was the restitution of Ajax through the intervention of Odysseus.

Summary

In terms of the number of their lines alone (342), which represents about a quarter of the play, the Chorus have a significant role. In addition to presenting the parodos, epiparodos, and three stasima, they engage in three kommoi. Because of their dependence on Ajax and the danger to them because of his attempted assassination of the Greek leaders, they are much involved in the action, assuming the role of another actor in their interactions with Tecmessa and Ajax, but they do not change the course of events. They had nothing to do with the night attack which occurred a little before the prologue and set off the plot. They are unable to dissuade Ajax from his resolve to end his life. They do not influence the decision of Agamemnon to grant the right of burial to the corpse. Their participation in the action is greater in the earlier scenes, up to the discovery of their slain leader, after which other characters enter and their involvement lessens.

In the lyric meters of the two kommoi with Tecmessa not only do they vent their sorrow, giving expression to the suffering which Ajax has caused, but they also voice their dread of what is going to happen, generating suspense and a feeling of danger. In the kommos with Ajax, they and Tecmessa accentuate the dire emotional state of Ajax by speaking in iambic trimeters while he sings mainly in dochmiacs. The Chorus are used to create a change of mood, even contrast. After the prologue with its mixture of fear, horror, and pity, the parodos creates anxiety and worry. After the gloom and lamentation of the first stasimon, followed by the ambiguous, philosophical speech of Ajax, the second stasimon's joyous excitement is the

opposite in mood of the earlier stasimon, as is its rapturous abandonment in contrast to the self-control of Ajax. Between the bickering and ad hominem attacks of Teucer with Menelaus and Agamemnon, the melancholy and longing of the third stasimon is an interlude whose appeal is universal and not narrowly focused. The absence of the Chorus when they exit to search for their leader is used to emphasize how alone Ajax is at the end.

The Chorus are consistent as a character in the parodos and episodes, except their role as mediator is more conventional than indicative of their personality. They are repeatedly shown as loyal, dependent, fearful, unwarlike, concerned for themselves but empathetic towards Tecmessa, lacking in perception, and ineffectual, and are recognizably human and generally sympathetic. Ajax, on the other hand, whose nature is opposite to theirs in many ways, creates admiration, rather than sympathy. The character of the Chorus is also evident in the odes, but at times stretched to fit the situation. For example, the absolute joy of the second stasimon is more for dramatic effect than character-driven. True, they are deceived about Ajax's motives but it is improbable they would have forgotten the danger they are still in at this moment. In the first stasimon, their description of the lamenting Eriboea is pertinent to Ajax's declared intention to kill himself, but unlikely to be of primary concern for them. The subject of the third stasimon, while consistent with their character, is not consistent with a character involved in the action. While the question of burial and by implication, their fate, are still undecided, they stand back from the immediate issues, a convention in Greek tragedy, and instead sing about the deprivations and destruction of war.

Although the Chorus are limited in understanding, they do help us evaluate Ajax, by the specific words and phrases they use of him, by providing brief descriptions of what he used to be like which contrast with his present behaviour, and by their faithful support of him which attests to his leadership and ability to engender loyalty, qualities which are not dramatized. Because they are shown in the parodos as being at times confused, erroneous, or unforthright,

characteristics which continue afterwards, we are alerted at once to their imperfect knowledge and perception and are forced to recognize that what they say about Ajax will be incomplete and inadequate.

¹ This form of parodos is unique in Sophocles although it resembles the parodos of the *Antigone*, where anapests alternate with lyrics. It is used by Aeschylus in the *Persae*, the *Suppliants*, and the *Agamemnon*, and therefore suggests a relatively early date for the play.

² H.A. Pohlsander, *Metrical Studies in the Lyrics of Sophocles* (Leiden: Brill, 1964) 5-6.

³ Gardiner, 55.

⁴ The messenger from Teucer reports that the army was aware of Ajax's plot against them (725-726).

⁵ The abundance of sibilant sounds in the Greek is strongly suggestive of whispering.

⁶ A third candidate is Ares, if the adjective, χαλκοθώραξ, of line 179 is sufficient identification. See the commentary of Kamerbeek, *Ajax*, 55-56 for a defense of this position and the distinction between Ares and Enyalios.

⁷ See J.C. Kamerbeek, *Ajax*, H. Schreuder, trans. (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1953) 53-54 for information on the Attic cult of Artemis Tauropolos which most likely was orgiastic, suggesting the frenzy of the attack.

⁸ W.B. Stanford, *Sophocles, Ajax* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1981) 79.

⁹ On "greatness" see Stanford, *Ajax*, xxvii, note 37.

¹⁰ I determined the number of times μέγας appears in the rest of the play by means of a computer word search per the "Thesaurus Linguae Graecae". Stanford noted only twenty other occurrences.

¹¹ I include them in the designation, "enemies", and do not think the term refers only to the hostile leaders.

¹² F. Ellendt, *Lexicon Sophocleum* (Berlin, 1872) 118.

¹³ Stanford, *Ajax*, 87.

¹⁴ Gardiner, 57-58.

¹⁵ Pohlsander, 8.

¹⁶ Lloyd-Jones and Wilson express doubt about the authenticity of μεγάλων in the text and have suggested μελέων as a possibility.

¹⁷ Stanford, *Ajax*, xxviii.

¹⁸ Stanford, *Ajax*, 107.

¹⁹ Pohlsander, 9-13.

²⁰ Pohlsander, 15-17.

²¹ Both Stanford, *Ajax*, 136 and Gardiner, *Sophoclean Chorus*, 66 make this point.

²² An apt description of Ajax's solitary thinking. οιοβώτας is a unique word (Ellendt 520).

²³ Arguments for this reading (Ajax means to kill himself, but is not deceiving Tecmessa and the Chorus because he is not addressing them) are given by B.M.W. Knox, "The *Ajax* of Sophocles", *Sophocles, A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966) 29-61, a reprint of his article in *HSCP* 65 (1961), 1-37. M. Sicherl, "The Tragic Issue in Sophocles' *Ajax*", *YCIS* 25 (1977), 67-98, believes too that Ajax is intent on suicide and not deceiving anyone but does not think that he is soliloquizing. See also O. Taplin, "Yielding to Forethought. Sophocles' *Ajax*", *Arktouros: Hellenic Studies Presented to Bernard M.W. Knox* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979) 122-129. He thinks Ajax is describing events after his death where time and change still operate.

²⁴ Pohlsander, 17-18.

²⁵ *Antigone*, 1115-1152, *Trachiniae*, 633-662, and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 1086-1109, are other odes before disaster.

²⁶ Stanford, *Ajax*, 151.

²⁷ *Antigone*, 151-153, *Trachiniae*, 216-221, and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 1093-1094, are three other examples of a Sophoclean chorus referring to its own dancing.

²⁸ A.F. Garvie, *Sophocles, Ajax* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1998) 194.

²⁹ Garvie, Kamerbeek, and Stanford retain the second verb. Pearson and the editors of the 1990 O.C.T. do not.

³⁰ Pohlsander, 19-21, and Garvie, *Ajax*, 209.

³¹ For the above analysis see Garvie, *Ajax*, 209.

³² Kamerbeek, *Ajax*, 180.

³³ Stanford, *Ajax*, 177.

³⁴ According to F. Budelmann, one of the functions of the Chorus in the second part is to extend the scope of the play. This is accomplished by a twofold development. First, there is a lessening of the division between the Chorus and the Greek army, so they become more representative and not merely Ajax's men. Second, they reach out to the spectators by references to "mortals" (1166, 1416, 1418), "Greeks" (1196), and "humankind" (1198), so that Ajax becomes a lesson to all who look at and contemplate his life and death. See F. Budelmann, *The Language of Sophocles: Communal, Communication and Involvement* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000) 231-244.

³⁵ Pohlsander, 22-24.

Chapter Three

The Chorus in the *Ajax*: Issues of Interpretation

Since the nature of the Chorus in the *Ajax* is not particularly controversial, they have not attracted the same attention as the choruses of the *Antigone* and the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. There are nevertheless issues related to the Chorus about which there is disagreement. These touch upon fundamental aspects of the play, such as its unity and the character of Ajax. In the discussion to follow, I have identified two major and three minor issues.

Major Issues

1) Unity Provided by the Chorus

Problem: Is the *Ajax* composed of two distinct parts which are not sufficiently alike to give the play unity? Related to this question is another: does our interest wane in the second part? The first part is concerned with the fall and death of Ajax while the second is about his burial. Although most scholars would concede that there are two parts, where the division lies is not easy to determine. It would seem at first glance that the death of Ajax ends the first part and the epiparodos begins the second, but the ensuing kommos between the Chorus and Tecmessa and even the mourning of Teucer are more related to his death than his burial. These sections may, however, belong to neither part and be transitional.¹ Certainly the arrival of Menelaus signals a marked change. His bickering with Teucer and later that of Agamemnon are different in tone from what has transpired previously. Furthermore, the characters have changed. Apart from Athena and Odysseus in the prologue and the messenger of the third episode, all the lines until Teucer's arrival are spoken (or sung) by Ajax, Tecmessa, or the Chorus. When Teucer enters, Ajax is already dead, Tecmessa is silent, and the participation of the Chorus in the action diminishes.

Scholarly Opinion: Burton sees an ABA pattern in the three choral odes and believes the Chorus help unify the play by the similarity of the lyrical sentiments in the first and third.

According to him, both odes are reflective, as the Chorus stand back from the immediate events. In the first they make no comments about Ajax's bitter words to Tecmessa nor her appeals to him. Because they fail to distinguish between his initial delusion and the suffering he undergoes when it passes, their references to sickness apply not only to his suicidal mood but also to his earlier, deluded state. Therefore the relevance of the ode extends to the whole play as it has progressed up to this point and does not pertain merely to the impending suicide. In the third they do not mention the quarrel between Teucer and Menelaus nor, as a result, comment on the moral issue of Ajax's guilt. In addition, no reference is made to the arrival of Agamemnon which they anticipated earlier (1163). Furthermore, both odes are melancholic in mood and resemble each other in content: longing for home, weariness of war, and the prospect of death.²

Gardiner, while she too agrees that the third ode echoes the first, maintains that the Chorus create the play's dramatic unity, but for a different reason from that given by Burton. Although their physical presence provides technical unity, it is their continual concern about the present circumstances and their fear about the future which produce a steady atmosphere of danger and sustain the tension of the drama. From the parodos through the kommoi to the final confrontation and resolution, they continually generate suspense by their apprehensions. Even in the third stasimon, three-quarters of which is about the miseries of men fighting in a foreign land, the now leaderless Chorus are addressing their very present troubles, maintaining the mood of uncertainty, and possibly even heightening the suspense of the moment. Without commenting on the Chorus per se, she also notes that there are twenty-six entrances and exits in *Ajax*, more than in any other Sophoclean play, which would prevent the original audience from losing interest in the play after the death of Ajax.³

My View: The first and the third stasimon do share the same mood and certain themes, namely war-weariness and the ever-looming possibility of death, but there are enough differences between the two to obviate a close association and disprove Burton's ABA

designated pattern for the choral odes. With the exception of its first strophe, which includes an apostrophe to their home, Salamis, and a brief description of their long, life-threatening military service in Troy, the first stasimon is about Ajax: his past and present conditions, the mourning he will cause his mother and father, his “hopeless sickness” (635), which is worse than death, his present behaviour which is uncharacteristic of his innate temper. In the third stasimon, however, there is only a passing reference to Ajax, at the beginning of the second antistrophe: “And before my shield against nocturnal fear and arrows was mighty Ajax. But now he is made over to a hateful god” (καὶ πρὶν μὲν ἐννυχίου δαί- | ματος ἦν μοι προβολὰ καὶ | βελέων θούριος Αἴας· | νῦν δ’ οὗτος ἀνεῖται στυγερῷ δαί- | μονι: 1211-1215). The Chorus are here concerned about themselves, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, rather than Ajax. Moreover, the later ode’s curse against the imagined inventor of war and the pleasures associated with symposia have no counterpart in the earlier ode.

Burton’s observation that the Chorus in these odes stand back and reflect upon less immediate issues applies only to the latter, which indeed does not pick up any issues from the preceding debate between Teucer and Menelaus. In fact, the reflections about the hardships and privations of war are not only pertinent to this Chorus but to all those who have ever fought in war, thus giving this ode a universal appeal and widening the scope of the drama. On the contrary, the first ode is very much anchored in the action. Rather than being reflective of the general circumstances from the beginning of the play onwards, it is largely, but not exclusively, concerned with the immediate situation. The first strophe (described above), the characterization of the former Ajax (612-613, 616-617), and the indirect reference to the awarding of Achilles’ arms (619-620) do relate to remoter events. But the same cannot be said of the specific terms they use for his current state: *δυσθεράπευτος*: 609, “difficult to cure”; *φρενὸς οἰοβώτας*: 614-615, “pasturing his thoughts alone”; *νοσοῦντα φρενοβόρως*: 625-626,

“sick with a mind-devouring illness”; ὁ νοσῶν μᾶτᾶν: 635, “the man who is hopelessly sick”.

These expressions describe Ajax’s recent suicidal disposition in which he has been deaf to their and Tecmessa’s appeals for moderation and concern for his family. The frenzy that induced him to attack the herds was only temporary; they have been told by Tecmessa that it has passed.⁴ Naively believing that one who has recovered from an “illness” should feel better, they cannot comprehend his present pain and gloom. Thus they liken his current condition to another sickness, but one which is different from the earlier delusion. The imagined lamentation of Eriboea as if Ajax were already dead, and the “hard to bear” news for Telamon of his son’s ruin (ἄτᾶν) are closely tied to our expectation of Ajax’s imminent suicide. It is not unreasonable to suppose, after he has clearly and repeatedly spoken of his desire to die, that he is performing the deed as this ode is being sung.

There are, therefore, marked dissimilarities between the two odes in content and focus as well as in closeness to the immediate action. In mood and, to some extent, in content there is a resemblance between them, especially when contrasted with the second ode. The differences, however, predominate over the similarities, with the result that their ability to unify the play is nullified. Even if they were more alike, the two odes alone would not sufficiently offset the disunifying elements stemming from the new characters, the lowered tone of language, and the new theme of burial.

The sense of danger continually generated by the Chorus does provide tension and a certain cohesion to part of the play. In the parodos they are anxious and worried about the veracity of the reports of Ajax’s night assault: “loud clamours beset us, tending to our discredit” (μεγάλοι θόρυβοι κατέχουσ’ ἡμᾶς | ἐπὶ δυσκλείᾳ: 142-143). In the first kommos with Tecmessa, they are fearful of death by stoning and in the kommos with Ajax deeply disturbed that he wants to die and make the situation even worse. After Ajax’s farewell speech to Eurysaces, the

coryphaeus voices his alarm: “I am afraid when I hear you show this eagerness (for death)”

(δέδοικ’ ἀκούων τήδε τὴν προθυμίαν: 583). In the first stasimon they express their misery of having to deal with a leader stricken with a “divine madness” and allude to his imminent death.

The joy of the second stasimon, rather than creating hope for Ajax, heightens our sense of an impending disaster because we know, or at least suspect, that their optimism is based on a false appraisal of Ajax’s thinking. After the messenger reports that Ajax must be confined to his hut for the present day if he is to survive, the exit of the Chorus increases the urgency of the danger to Ajax’s life. In the second kommos with Tecmessa, they express gloom about their future:

ὦμοι ἐμῶν νόστων | ὦμοι, κατέπεφνες, ἄναξ: 900-901, “Alas for my homecoming! Alas, my lord, you have killed (me)”; ὦμοι ἐμῶς ἄταξ: 909, “Alas for my ruin”. They also voice their dread about the “ruthless” sons of Atreus (946-948) and these men’s and Odysseus’ exulting and laughing over Ajax’s death (955-960), thus anticipating the coming confrontations.

Although Tecmessa, aware of the need to act quickly before being prevented by the Greek leaders, is the first to broach the subject of burial (920 ff.), the Chorus reintroduce the theme.

When they see Menelaus arrive, they command Teucer: “Do not speak for long, but think how you are to bury the man” (μὴ τεῖνε μακράν, ἀλλ’ ὅπως κρύψεις τάφῳ | φράζου τὸν ἄνδρα: 1040-1041). Afterwards, however, the tension of the play lies in the debates in which the

Chorus do not participate and which in fact they try to moderate. What generates suspense at this point is whether Ajax will be granted the right of burial; the Chorus play no part in the decision. In addition, the third stasimon does not add to the tension but is a momentary reprieve from the action. It does not create uncertainty about what is going to happen to these men, but rather conveys melancholy as they lament about the hardships of war and their longing to go home. Granted, their fate is still undecided and bound up, although not explicitly stated, with

the issue of burial, but our interest does not lie with the fate of the Chorus and we do not wonder at the end of the play where they will go and what their lot will be.

As I said at the beginning of the previous chapter, Ajax dominates the play, and it is this dominance which gives the play unity. After he dies, his corpse remains on stage and its presence is all the more marked from 1168 until it is carried off at the play's close, by being accompanied by Tecmessa and Eurysaces in supplication. This tableau is a strong visual reminder of what lies behind all the vituperation and arguments of the second part. The question of his burial is important, both in terms of proper respect for the dead and as a mark of recognition of his greatness, however flawed, and his worth for cultic worship. It therefore sustains our interest (as do, to a lesser extent, the frequent exits and entrances in the second part). Although his future veneration is not made explicit, there are "hints at the heroization of Ajax in cult" in Teucer's instruction to Tecmessa and Eurysaces to attend to the corpse as supplicants (1168 ff.).⁵ Just before this, the Chorus may also be suggesting cultic worship when they refer to "the dank tomb that shall ever be remembered by mortals" (βοροῖς τὸν αἰμνηστον | τάφον εὐρωέντα: 1166-1167). His burial is not a separate issue from his downfall, but rather both are parts of the same dramatic structure which is the portrayal of his character in action.⁶

2) Usefulness of Chorus in Our Assessment of Ajax

Problem: I stated in Chapter Two that the character of Ajax emerges as the central issue of the play. In what way do the Chorus help us to evaluate his character? Do they assist us in understanding him or do they determine in any way how we feel towards him?

Scholarly Opinion: Burton maintains that the Chorus are of no use in helping us to understand the moral issues raised by the play for several reasons. He says that they have little insight into their leader's motives and find him an enigma to a great extent, a burden to be borne rather someone they understand. They never acknowledge his crime of planning a murderous

assault on the Greek chiefs when his honour was slighted in the awarding of Achilles' arms to Odysseus. He considers that their main function is to increase the pathos of the play by contrasting his former glory to his present ruin and by remaining loyal and devoted to him when he is alienated from himself and the companionship of his peers.⁷

Winnington-Ingram characterizes the Chorus as limited in perception, even obtuse, but he thinks that at times they unwittingly help us understand Ajax. After the delusion of Ajax has passed and he cannot bear to live in humiliation and as a object of mockery, the repeated attempts of the coryphaeos to determine whether the suicidal Ajax is sound of mind, while lacking interest or importance in themselves, get the audience or reader to think about Ajax's state of mind. He suggests that in the first stasimon they reveal things about Ajax which are beyond their comprehension. His reasoning is as follows. They first contrast Ajax who is "difficult to cure" (609) and "dwelling with a heaven-sent madness" (611) with the mighty Ajax who set out from Salamis. They then refer to Ajax as now "pasturing his thoughts alone" and "a great grief to his friends" (614-615), but the distinction between "then" and "now" is left vague. There is the implication that Ajax who once was inside the community is now outside of it. He used to be a fierce warrior, bringing happiness to his friends. Now he has withdrawn from society and is deaf to his friends, in communication only with his sick mind. When the change happened is suggested in the next lines, which are an allusion to the awarding of Achilles' arms. Yet what they say in the final antistrophe is not the same. There they claim he no longer "abides in the temper with which he grew up." In the previous episode, however, they said he was speaking from his own mind, not another's (481-482) when he alluded to suicide, and Ajax himself told Tecmessa that she could not correct his "character" (*ἦθος*: 595), which is nothing else but his innate temper. They are unwilling to accept that he is sane when he desires his own death, but if he is mad and his character is unchangeable, then in some sense he has always been mad.⁸

Gardiner sees the Chorus, not as obtuse and imperceptive, but as reliable and credible observers of Ajax's mind after he recovers from his initial delusionary state. She offers two reasons for their ability to judge Ajax. First, they are competent arbiters of heroic standards of behaviour because they respect the hierarchy of great and small men, which they make clear in the parodos. Later they even approve Menelaus' fairly harsh rules of governing. Second, their long service to Ajax and shared Salaminian/Athenian origins enable them to comment in a knowledgeable way on Ajax's character. Their knowledge applies not only to his previous condition and conduct before the awarding of the arms and the attack on the chiefs, but also to his present state. Because the latter is entirely inconsistent with the former, they become convinced that he is suffering from an illness. This illness relates to his brooding on his woes and allusions to suicide, not to the delusions he suffered when he assailed the animals. Moreover, Gardiner argues, the Chorus are used to show how unheroic Ajax's actions are. They suffer the consequences of his death; they are abandoned in Troy with no means to return home. His desertion of them is made clear when they first look upon the corpse and charge him with killing them. They elaborate the loss of their homecoming in greater detail in the final stasimon. They describe in the first stasimon the grief Ajax is inflicting on his parents by his dark, self-absorbed, sick thoughts. Throughout the play they imply that, although their leader was great once, he no longer is. His recent conduct is in no way admirable and there is no glory at all in his suicide since he abandons his war-bride and son, his parents and comrades.⁹

My View: The Chorus, because of their long association with Ajax, are in a position to speak of certain aspects of his character with authority and absolute credibility. To the several, previously mentioned adjectives which the Chorus apply to Ajax (θείριος: 212; αἴθωνος: 223; περίφαντος: 229; ὠμόθυμον: 885; ὠμόφρων: 930) two others can be added: δυστράπελος: 913, "hard to turn," "unmanageable"; στερεόφρων: 926, "stubborn-hearted." Both adjectives

draw attention to his obduracy and inflexibility. There is no doubt that all these epithets, in conjunction with μέγας, the single most frequent term, are giving us an accurate sketch of his nature. Even in the parodos when they are still unconvinced that the reports about his night attack are truthful, they do concede that Ajax may have not given the appropriate sacrificial honour to one of the gods. The acknowledged possibility that he failed to reward divine help reveals that they, who have known him for a long time, believe that he is capable of arrogant self-sufficiency and impiety. The reported words of Calchas later corroborate that he has earlier in fact committed such acts of *hybris*. It is noteworthy that these qualities for the most part pertain to Ajax both in the past and the present, supporting the comment he himself makes about his unchangeable character.

Nevertheless, their understanding of Ajax only goes so far. In the parodos they claim he could not have been in his right mind if he did make the murderous attack on the beasts. Partially right, in that he was deluded by Athena into thinking he was attacking the Greek chiefs, they are also wrong, because it was he who hatched the plot. The desire to assassinate his enemies came “from his own mind, not another’s” (481-482). They are completely deceived by him when in his speech on time and change, he announces his intention to go down to the sea for purification and to escape the goddess’ anger through sacrifice. Not being witnesses to his suicide, they do not know with what spirit of defiance he dies or that he calls upon the Erinyes to exact punishment, not only on the Atreidai but on the entire army. They say of his death that he was bound “to accomplish in the end an evil fate of troubles infinite” (ἐξάνύσσειν κακὸν | μοῖραν ἀπειρεσίων πόνων: 926-927) and in the final stasimon that “this man is made over to a hateful god” (οὗτος ἀνεῖται στυγερῷ δαίμονι: 1214-1215). Both comments portray him as the victim of some outside force, which is an erroneous characterization of his final act. They simply do not comprehend how his excessive – one might almost say maniacal – allegiance to

the heroic code, when he is slighted and dishonoured by the judgement of the arms, led to the attempted assassination and then, after he realized his great humiliation, to his suicide. That public recognition of his worth and honour and his own self-esteem are more important to him than anything – family, friends, comrades, community – is beyond their understanding. So in terms of the moral issues involved in Ajax's downfall, the Chorus are of no help, because they do not recognize any guilt on his part nor do they perceive that he is driven by a code of behaviour that he has pushed to the extreme.

In spite of Tecmessa's news that Ajax is no longer "sick", repeated several times (257 ff., 269, 274 ff., and 306), the Chorus are reluctant to accept her diagnosis and eventually become convinced that he is once again afflicted with an illness. This error is significant, not because it is another instance of the Chorus' limited understanding, which was already apparent in the parodos, but as Winnington-Ingram correctly observes, it forces us to consider whether Ajax's thinking is sane, especially because the Chorus keep bringing it up.¹⁰ They believe that his ruin began with the judgement of arms, a belief asserted before (616 ff.) and after his death (934-936). The inference that the Chorus at the end of the first stasimon are unknowingly suggesting a different time-frame for the start of his "sickness" is, I think, a little too convoluted and subtle, at least for a spectator. But when we learn in the messenger's speech that Ajax has already twice displayed haughty pride, we begin to realize that "his thinking beyond the human level" (761) goes back a long way and is a part of his innate temper. In a deeper sense, the Chorus are right. Ajax is "sick", but has always been so, or at least from the time he set out from Salamis, because his true self includes an excessive pride and self-sufficiency, an unwillingness to recognize his mortal limits, which the awarding of the arms unleashed. By their confusion over delusion and sanity, the Chorus, in spite of their "obtuseness", have supplied us with a vocabulary to understand the mind of Ajax.

While the Chorus do not fully understand Ajax and find him difficult to deal with, they still remain steadfastly loyal and devoted to him. Their concern for his well-being and unwavering support have an enormous influence on how we feel about Ajax and offset to a remarkable degree the negative impression caused by his actions. A quick review of what he does will make this repulsion evident. Ajax, feeling slighted and cheated when Achilles' arms are given to Odysseus, harbours such resentment that he plots to assassinate the Greek chiefs and would have been successful but for the intervention of Athena who deludes him into mistaking animals for men. He slaughters many beasts, killing the herdsmen as well; he takes sadistic pleasure in his deeds of carnage and even treats the goddess with some condescension. Upon recovery from his state of delusion, he remains unrepentant, feeling humiliated only because his intentions were frustrated. Shortly afterwards, he kills himself, invoking a curse on the entire army, and abandoning his war-bride and son, his parents and comrades. What a monster we think! Yet to our surprise this is not our final evaluation of him and we even feel pity towards him.

How has this happened? It begins in the prologue when Odysseus takes pity on his deluded rival (121 ff.) but is continued by the Chorus in the parodos where they stress the positive qualities of Ajax.¹¹ He is a "noble spirit", an "eagle", and the Ajax they know would never have slaughtered tame, helpless animals. Their complete dependence on him, which they willingly accept, and their anxiety and worry for his reputation attest to his character and ability as leader. In the first two kommoi, the tones of grief to which the Chorus contribute, inspire, temporarily at least, a strong feeling of pity and compassion for Ajax.¹² The sadness and dejection of the first stasimon, which includes the grieving of his parents, and the contrast between his former illustriousness and present abject state add to the pathos of Ajax's situation. In the third kommos the mourning of the Chorus for their fallen leader contributes to our sense that with his death something of importance has been lost. In short, the Chorus "sustain our

sympathy and admiration for Ajax even at his worst.”¹³ They, of course, do not do this single-handedly. Tecmessa, because of her love and devotion to him, and to a lesser extent Teucer, because of his mourning and brotherly affection, also help us see Ajax in a more positive light. To engender such feelings as these he must, we surmise, be endowed with admirable qualities, in addition to those of military might and prowess.

Another important reason for our feeling pity for Ajax is the Chorus’ blindness towards his guilt. They never mention his thwarted attack on the Greek chiefs and it is not until the arrival of Menelaus that we hear of it again.¹⁴ The result is that Ajax is seen more as a victim who is deluded by Athena into committing degrading acts of butchery, rather than as the instigator of his own downfall owing to his uncontrollable, criminal passions. His frenzy appears to be something imposed on him instead of generated within and merely redirected. They surmise in the parodos that he must have been a victim of an angry god if in fact he performed the act of carnage and a little later fear that a blow from a god has struck him (δέδοικα μὴ ἔκ θεοῦ | πληγὴ τις ἤκει: 278-279). Even their characterization of his later mood as a sickness reinforces the impression that he is not at fault for his thoughts and actions but subject to a malevolent force which he cannot overcome.

They may complain about the difficulty of dealing with him but they never reproach him for anything he does. Nor is he ever criticized by Tecmessa. This silence, if you will, on their parts shapes in a subtle way our positive appraisal of him. Although the Chorus suffer because of him, they are not used in the play to show that his death was unheroic and a shirking of his responsibilities as a leader, nor are they used to emphasize the fact that he deserts his comrades and leaves them stranded and vulnerable in a foreign land. He does abandon family and friends but I believe his death has a certain nobility in it, however extreme his sense of personal honour on which it is predicated. Rather than pointing attention to his failings, their function, as I have indicated above, is to create sympathy for him through their loyalty and concern and by what

they do not say. One of the fascinating aspects of this play is its ability to induce admiration for Ajax in spite of much evidence that seems to condemn him.

Minor Issues

3) Self-referentiality in the Second Stasimon

Problem: What is the purpose of the Chorus' reference to their own or other people's dancing (self-referentiality) while they are dancing themselves? Is it to heighten the mood of jubilation or is it a reminder of their role as ritual performers in the religion of the polis? Choral self-referentiality, which also includes references to maenads, pipes, and Dionysiac frenzy, is present in four of the seven extant plays of Sophocles. These occur in the second stasimon (693 ff.) of the *Ajax*; in the parodos (152-154), the fourth stasimon (963-965), and the fifth stasimon (1146-1152) of the *Antigone*; in the choral song (216 ff.) and second stasimon (640-643) of the *Trachiniae*; and in the second stasimon (896) and the third stasimon (1086 ff.) of the *Oedipus Tyrannos*.

Scholarly Opinion: Henrichs argues that choral self-referentiality reminded the original audience that the Chorus were not only characters in a play but also performers of rituals, which were integral to the religion of the polis. He notes that the choruses in Sophocles who comment on their own performance are all assigned Dionysiac identities. Although he examines only choral references to dancing, he acknowledges that choruses in their dance-songs also perform such rituals as prayer, lament, supplication, and divination. He believes, therefore, that ritual self-referentiality in Attic drama is widespread. When the Chorus refer to dancing, they never step out of the drama, but always locate the reference within the dramatic context.

Consequently they do not break the dramatic illusion but integrate their choral performance in the orchestra with the imaginary rituals referred to in the action of the play. The tragic Chorus through self-referentiality enabled the audience to cross the boundary between the Chorus as tragic character and the Chorus as ritual performer, between the drama and the religion which

the drama is celebrating. In regard to the reference to dancing by the Chorus in the *Ajax*, Henrichs observes that at the height of their excitement they take on a dual identity. They are both characters in a drama (Salamian sailors) and performers of the choral dance. Their double role is reflected in the dual identity of Pan whom they summon. The Athenian Pan was connected to the battle of Marathon; the Arcadian Pan to the battle of Salamis. Furthermore, Pan is closely associated with Dionysos with the result that the Chorus is here linked to Dionysiac enthusiasm. Henrichs also remarks that the Chorus project to a more distant and unspecified setting the dancing which they mention. Similar shifts occur in the other examples of choral self-referentiality in Sophocles as well as in Euripides.¹⁵

Heikkilä in looking at the references to dancing in Sophocles does not consider whether they reveal the Chorus as performers of rituals in honour of Dionysos, but he does make the following points. The references to dance only appear in passages expressing joy and gratitude. (*Oedipus Tyrannus* 896, where the Chorus, worried about the falseness of oracles, question if they should dance any longer, is the exception that proves the rule.) They emphasize and explain the physical aspect of the Chorus' high emotions and produce a contrast to the preceding and subsequent action. The joyous dances represent false hopes and misconceptions. The descriptions of the dances may also have served to point out dramatic irony and allude to future disasters. Although it is not known what the "Mysian and Cnosian dances" of the second stasimon of the *Ajax* entailed, there is some evidence to suggest that they were weapon dances which induced a frenzied joy in the celebrants. Their mention would thus have imparted additional information to the audience about the emotional state of the Chorus and the weapons themselves may have been a reminder to the audience of Ajax's sword, the weapon he used to kill the animals and the one on which he will shortly fall.¹⁶

My View: It is impossible to determine with any certainty how the original audience would have reacted to these choral references. There is no dispute that choral dancing was a

major element in all Attic drama and an important part of Greek religion since it was performed in other cultic and festive settings. As a result, even without the explicit references to dancing or other rituals, the audience would be well aware that the drama they were watching was a part of a religious festival. Henrichs acknowledges that there is always a context within the drama for these references. Therefore, the audience may not have given any particular thought to the “dual identity” of the Chorus when self-referentiality does occur, and if they had, I am not sure what this would have added to what they already knew. Henrichs thinks the audience would have enjoyed a more “integrated experience”.¹⁷ Whatever may be the case, choral self-referentiality was not common in tragedy. It is rare in Aeschylus; it occurs in some of the extant plays of Sophocles and in a few of the surviving plays of Euripides. If it supposedly increased the audience’s enjoyment, it is odd that there are not more instances of self-referential language.

It is also curious that all the major references to dancing in Sophocles occur in odes of joy which come before a catastrophe. The simplest deduction from this fact is that, rather than drawing attention to the ritual performance of the Chorus, they are used to heighten the mood of ecstatic happiness in order to offer a strong contrast to the coming disaster. It seems to me quite natural to speak of dancing in a context of joy and celebration, thereby reflecting and emphasizing the jubilation. No other reason is necessary for the reference. There would have been enough to occupy the attention of the audience during the second stasimon, without their reflecting on the ritualistic identity of the Chorus. Ajax had just uttered his “deception speech” and probably they would still be contemplating the ambiguities in it and conscious of the ill-founded hopes of the Chorus, knowing that the story of Ajax ends in his suicide (a frequent subject both in black-figure and red-figure vase painting). Moreover, if Sophocles had wanted to draw attention to the religion of the polis with these choral references, why is it that all the rituals so mentioned bring no help from the gods? Henrichs thinks that “the device of choral self-referentiality thus serves to articulate the fragility of ritual remedies, but also their centrality

to the life of the drama and the life of the audience.”¹⁸ I think that the moral lesson the audience of the *Ajax* would have more likely drawn from the Chorus’ illusory jubilation is: listen carefully before you “leap”. If attention was being directed to the rituals and they were shown to be so inefficacious, members of the audience could have rightly asked, borrowing a phrase from the Chorus of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*: “Why should I dance?”¹⁹ Religious practices would have been seen to be questioned rather than their importance reinforced.

The points made by Heikkilä, although not novel, are sound and focus on the dramatic function of these references in the play, which I believe is the most useful way of looking at them. His tentative conclusion that the dances named in the second stasimon involved weapons is interesting. If it is true, these imagined weapons would have given the ode a further complexity. I am not sure what additional impact the mention of these dances would have had on the audience’s understanding of the Chorus’ mood since their opening words (ἔφριξ’ ἔρωτι, περιχαρὴς δ’ ἀνεπτάμην: 693, “I thrill with longing, and leap up in my delight!”), and their two invocations (ἰὼ, ἰὼ), particularly to Pan, god of the dance and associate of Dionysos, make clear their almost frenzied excitement.

4) Suicide and the First Stasimon

Problem: Are the Chorus aware that Ajax intends to kill himself when they sing the first stasimon?

Scholarly Opinion: Kamerbeek believes they do not fully comprehend the situation. According to him, they think that his frenzy has still not gone away and appear not to realize that Ajax intends to kill himself. Because they are ordinary people they fail to see the absolute demand put on Ajax by his heroic ethics. If they knew he was going to commit suicide, there would be no background against which the hero could be contrasted and they would have to either try to dissuade him or remain inactive (as they are doing).²⁰ Winnington-Ingram holds a

similar but more nuanced view, which he supports by a different reason. He says that they are either unable to see or unwilling to say that Ajax is bound to kill himself. Because they are soon to be deceived into believing that he intends to live, they cannot now perceive his real intentions.²¹ Stanford claims that the imminence of Ajax's death is assumed but not explicitly stated because such a mention would be considered ill-omened.²² Burton does not address the problem as stated but he does think that the Chorus stand back from the tensions of the moment and make no particular reference to Ajax's suicidal mood. Since I have already commented on his interpretation of this ode, I include his opinion here for completeness but have nothing more to add to what I have already said. Gardiner thinks the question is not relevant to the dramatic situation. References to his death would be ill-omened, would involve future repetition, and lessen the dramatic tension because it is what we expect. Yet in spite of this omission they are still able to create a funereal mood.²³

My View: I have already argued in the previous chapter that the Chorus do allude to his suicide by the references to his "sickness", the mention of Hades and his "ruin",²⁴ and the description of his grieving mother. I argued also that the ode contains elements of immediacy and remoteness. I contended earlier in this chapter, that by "sickness" they mean his present state of mind, not his initial delusion or combination thereof. So I do not think that knowledge of his intention to kill himself prevents them from describing his former glory (Kamerbeek's "background") because there still exists in this ode a strong contrast between past and present, with his intention of suicide allusively equated with his present condition. Nor does this knowledge detract from the subsequent deception, because it is not made explicit. Even if it were, for them to move from apprehending the truth to being deceived then back to seeing clearly is not dramatically impossible.

Before the ode, Ajax has given numerous indications that he wants to die, and Tecmessa, in a long speech (485-524) appeals to him not to abandon her to slavery and his son to

mistreatment and not to leave his parents without support, by his death.²⁵ If the Chorus do not speak of it in any way (a valid interpretation but different from mine), there have been so many references to it that we have to assume they know of it. Perhaps Gardiner is right – the question is not important. What is important is that we have been led to expect his death and, although Ajax is out of sight during the ode, he is not out of mind. For the original audience he would have been almost present since he was only behind the doors of his hut. This expectation may shape our interpretation of the inexact terms the Chorus use to describe Ajax's state of mind with the result that opinions differ about their awareness of his intentions. This is an ode which contains ambiguity, preceding a speech of even greater ambiguity.

5) Sailors versus Soldiers

Problem: Are the men of the Chorus sailors or soldiers?

Scholarly Opinion: Burton believes that the Chorus are composed of sailors who do not share the dangers of warfare with Ajax, only the discomforts of bivouacing in a foreign land and the longing to return home and enjoy the delights of peacetime. They are addressed as “sailors”, “sea-faring men”, and “mariners skilled in the art of rowing” (201, 349, 357ff., and 565). Once they are called “warriors” (ἄνδρες ἀσπιστῆρες: 565) and once “comrades” (ἑταῖροι: 687), but there is no suggestion that they ever engaged in the actual fighting.²⁶

Gardiner asserts that they are soldiers because they are called “shield-bearing men” (565), are not associated specifically with the ships, and their fortunes are tied closely to those of Ajax. Although several times they are called “shipmates” or “seafarers”, this does not preclude their identity as warriors. Moreover, in Homer there is no distinction between rowers and fighters. If these men are not soldiers, she asks, where are Ajax's troops?²⁷

My View: Gardiner's arguments are the more persuasive. Their utter dependence on Ajax and the danger they feel they are in because of his actions imply a closer bond than that between Ajax and the sailors he set out with ten years ago. Although there was a difference between

rowers and hoplites in the fifth century, no such demarcation existed in the Homeric epics. The Chorus refer to themselves as Ajax's "fellow sailor(s)" (συνναύταν: 902). If Ajax is then both sailor and warrior, are not the Chorus also? Burton dismisses too easily the two references to their designation as fighting men, terms which seems puzzling if they are only sailors. The frequent forms of address connecting them to the sea, rather than to the war, emphasize their unwarlike nature (they compare themselves to doves in 140). They also are reminders of their and Ajax's common place of origin, the island of Salamis, thus underlining the duration and closeness of their friendship with him.

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- ¹ G. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1958, 1994) 42.
- ² Burton, 23-25, 36-39.
- ³ Gardiner, 71, 73-74. See 73, note 38, for her method of counting entrances and exits.
- ⁴ Gardiner, 64-65.
- ⁵ C. Segal, "Drama, Narrative, and Perspective in Sophocles' *Ajax*", *SEJG* 31 (1989-90) 401.
- ⁶ Kirkwood, *Sophoclean Drama*, 49.
- ⁷ Burton, 7.
- ⁸ R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980) 33-36.
- ⁹ Gardiner, 76-78.
- ¹⁰ For choral references to Ajax's sanity, see lines 278-280, 331-332, 337-338, 344, 355, 481-482, 611, 625-626, and 635.
- ¹¹ J. Davidson, "The Parodos of Sophocles' *Ajax*", *BICS* 22 (1975) 165.
- ¹² J. Poe, *Genre and Meaning in Sophocles' Ajax* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1987) 41.
- ¹³ Stanford, *Ajax*, li.
- ¹⁴ There are only two references to the murdered herdsmen: one by Odysseus (27) and the other by the Chorus (232). In contrast, the slaughtered animals figure prominently in the prologue and are mentioned several times afterwards. This imbalance lessens Ajax's crime, since it almost seems he has killed only cattle and sheep.
- ¹⁵ A. Henrichs, "Why Should I Dance?: Choral Self-referentiality in Greek Tragedy", *Arion* 3.1 (1994-95) 56-75.
- ¹⁶ K. Heikkilä, "Now I Have the Mind to Dance: The References of the Chorus to Their Own Dancing in Sophocles' Tragedies", *Arctos* 25 (1991) 54-60, 67.
- ¹⁷ Henrichs, 59.
- ¹⁸ Henrichs, 89.
- ¹⁹ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 896.
- ²⁰ Kamerbeek, *Ajax*, 127.
- ²¹ Winnington-Ingram, 35.
- ²² Stanford, *Ajax*, 136.
- ²³ Gardiner, 65-66.
- ²⁴ See Winnington-Ingram, 37 for his discussion on *atē*, which I have translated as "ruin." He claims that it does not refer to death but to the *nosos*. But since *atē* usually leads to death, it could easily refer to Ajax's imminent demise.
- ²⁵ For Ajax's references to death, see lines 361, 391, 395-397, 416-417, 473-474, 479-480, 550ff., and 581-582.
- ²⁶ Burton, 6.
- ²⁷ Gardiner, 52.

Chapter Four

The Role of the Chorus in the *Antigone*

The *Antigone* has two protagonists instead of a central character who dominates the play, as in the *Ajax*. Since the play is named after her and she conforms so well to the characteristics of a Sophoclean hero, Antigone is generally regarded as the hero.¹ These characteristics include her extraordinary determination and courage, unwavering belief in the justice of her cause, and refusal to yield. Such features set her apart from Creon, who does not rise above the human level, who eventually does yield, and whose faults, unfortunately, resemble all too many autocrats and dictators. Although Creon speaks almost twice as many lines as Antigone and she exits more than four hundred lines before the end of the play, the first, second, and fourth stasima are about Antigone and she features in the third, with the result that their roles have a more equal weight.

The play involves various types of conflict between the protagonists: polis/oikos, divine and human laws, rationalism/emotion, male/female. The protagonists, however, have very different concerns and do not speak the same language. They share no common values and are not interested in listening to one other. This gap between them is best articulated by Antigone:

ὥς ἐμοὶ τῶν σῶν λόγων

ἄρεστον οὐδέν, μηδ' ἄρεσθείη ποτέ,

οὔτω δὲ καὶ σοὶ τᾶμ' ἀφανδάνοντ' ἔφυ. 499-501

There is nothing to please me in your words, and may there never be, and just so my attitude displeases you.

They remain fixed in their positions, except for Creon who does give in but only late in the play, and they have only one major encounter. Complicating and obscuring the conflict is that neither protagonist is the proper defender of his or her cause. Antigone is obsessed with her family to the exclusion of almost everything else. Creon is a tyrant, who believes erroneously that he

represents the interests of the polis and accordingly tolerates no disobedience, however justified. It is not the case that they are equally wrong but that the issues are clouded. The Chorus become the protagonists' principal link and bridge the gap between their extreme positions to some extent. Although they are politically allied with Creon and disapprove of Antigone's action and therefore are not neutral, they never actively support him and show some sympathy for her, in contrast to Creon's unremitting hostility.

The Chorus are the ballast of the play. Creon is opposed by Antigone, Haemon, and Tiresias in three successive episodes. If the Chorus were also against him, trying to persuade him to show more flexibility and leniency, the forces arranged against him might have proved too strong. At the least, his position would appear more indefensible. Moreover, if the Chorus had defended Antigone's cause, the conflict between the two might have appeared too clear-cut. On the other hand, if the Chorus truly concurred with Creon and promoted his policies, they would have appeared extreme and immoderate, forsaking whatever credibility they have as representatives of Thebes. There would be no intermediary, however ineffectual, between the two sides, other than Haemon, whose role is perhaps relatively minor, though crucial.

The nature of the Chorus is established at the beginning of the first episode. First and foremost they defer to power. According to Creon (165-169), they have always shown loyalty to the past rulers (Laios, then Oedipus, and lately his two sons). He has summoned them apart from the rest (ἐκ πάντων δίχα: 164) because, presumably, they will give him the same support. They earlier indicated that they were old when they wondered why Creon had summoned them for "this assembly of elders for discussion" (σύγκλητον τήνδε γερόντων . . . λέσχην: 159-160). Later, we learn that they are members of the ruling class. Antigone calls them "rich men" (πολυκτῆμονες ἄνδρες: 843) and "rulers of Thebes" (Θήβης οἱ κοιρανίδα: 940) and Tiresias addresses them as "lords of Thebes" (Θήβης ἄνακτες: 988). Therefore, they are Theban elders

whose position of wealth and influence is evidently connected to their loyalty to the person in power.

As the play progresses, their reticence becomes apparent. When Creon informs them about his decree to prohibit burial for Polyneices, they say: νόμῳ δὲ χρῆσθαι παντί, τοῦτ' ἔνεστί σοι | καὶ τῶν θανόντων χάποσοι ζῶμεν πέρι: 213-214, "you have power to observe every rule with regard to the dead and to us who are alive." They do not say whether his policy is good or bad, only that it is his right to rule as he wishes. They refuse to take sides during the confrontation between Creon and Haemon. After both have spoken at length, they say to Creon: ἄναξ, σέ τ' εἰκός, εἴ τι καίριον λέγει, | μαθεῖν, σέ τ' αὖ τοῦδ'· εὖ γὰρ εἴρηται διπλῇ: 724-725, "King, it is proper, if he says anything that is to the point, that you should learn from him, and you (Haemon), from Creon; for true things have been said on both sides." They do not argue against the injustice of putting Ismene to death, but merely ask Creon whether he intends to kill both sisters. While their question indicates that they are more moderate than Creon and prods him to change his position, they save Ismene's life more by luck than anything else. Creon appears to have softened a little after the quarrel with his son and is thus more open to suggestion. Whether they would have made any plea for her if he had indicated that he still planned to kill both sisters cannot be known, but they remain silent when immediately afterwards Creon informs them how Antigone will die. Only when Tiresias gives proof of the gods' displeasure with Creon for his treatment of Antigone and Polyneices, do they at last advise Creon what to do.

How much they repress what they think out of fear of Creon cannot be exactly determined but it certainly appears to restrain them from speaking their mind. In his scenes with the guard, Haemon, and Tiresias, Creon is revealed as a man quick to anger and ready to suspect treason and insubordination on the flimsiest evidence. His brutishness is apparent in the harsh

metaphors he uses, derived from animal husbandry, metallurgy, and agriculture. The Chorus experience his wrath personally when they speak frankly about the seemingly divine nature of the first burial. Antigone believes they curb their tongues out of fear (505). Surely it is ironic when Creon says to the Chorus:

ἐμοὶ γὰρ ὅστις πᾶσαν εὐθύνων πόλιν
μὴ τῶν ἀρίστων ἅπτεται βουλευμάτων,
ἀλλ' ἐκ φόβου τοῦ γλῶσσαν ἐγκλήσας ἔχει,
κάκιστος εἶναι νῦν τε καὶ πάλαι δοκεῖ. 178-181

Yes, to me anyone who while guiding the whole city fails to set his hand to the best counsels, but keeps his mouth shut by reason of some fear seems now and has always seemed the worst of men.

This fear, however much it affects their behaviour, is operative not only during the action but possibly in some of the choral songs as well, since Creon may be present for the second, third and fourth stasima, and the kommos with Antigone. It is unlikely, however, that he is on stage for the third stasimon and following kommos since he probably leaves earlier to make arrangements for Antigone's imprisonment.

Given the fact that fear does act as a restraint on them, their relationship to Antigone is a bit problematic, but the broad outlines seem clear enough. As was said before, they show some sympathy for Antigone. They are tearful (803) when they first see her being led off to the cave to die and a little later acknowledge that her "respect (for her brother) is a noble kind of respect" (σέβειν μὲν εὐσέβειά τις: 872). But when she is first revealed as the perpetrator of the burial, they say that she was caught in an act "of folly" (ἐν ἀφροσύνῃ: 383) and after her speech on the unwritten and immortal laws, they call her the savage daughter of a savage father (471-472). They believe that her family is under a curse (594-597). They call both brothers "hated" (στυγεροῖν: 144), by which they probably mean that they are hated, not only by each other, but

by the gods as well.² The relationship, certainly from Antigone's point of view, worsens during the kommos. In the exodos they make no mention of her. In summary, they are not without feeling for Antigone but barely acknowledge the justice of her burial of Polyneices. They value their position in relation to Creon over their pity and lukewarm sympathy for a girl whose emotionalism and wilfulness they disapprove of strongly and whose family is marked for destruction. Furthermore, differences in age and gender obviate a close association between them.

Parodos 100-161

When the Chorus make their entrance, nothing of their personality is known but we learn some things about them in the parodos. Their identity as old men, however, would probably have been clear to the ancient audience by the masks and costumes they were wearing. The entry song is composed of two strophic pairs (100-109, 117-126; 134-140, 148-154) in similar meters. The first pair is strictly choriambic while the second pair, except for the beginning two-line enoplian period, is iambo-choriambic.³ Each strophe and antistrophe is followed by anapests (110-116, 127-133, 141-147, and 155-161) recited by the coryphaeoi. The anapests are a complement rather than contrast to the lyrics (excepting the final section), and the language of the anapests is less oblique. The last anapestic section, heralding the arrival of Creon, is part of the parodos in terms of meter, but in content, it looks forward to the following episode. It is as if the Chorus were in transition from the lyric mode to spoken dialogue, from reflection to interaction. Similar intermediary anapests occur after the first stasimon when the Chorus see Antigone being brought in under arrest and after the second stasimon when they signal Haemon's entrance.

The parodos provides a strong contrast to the prologue. There it is night (16) and the mood is anxious and unsettled as Antigone severs all ties with her sister and plans to defy Creon's decree and proudly die for it. Now the sun is dawning and the mood celebratory, as the

Chorus voice their jubilation that the city has been saved from the Argive army. The meter moves directly from spoken iambs to sung lyrics, without intervening anapests. Since they are unaware of any potential discord in the city, their happiness is not without irony. Their mood looks forward to the entrance of Creon who gives the impression of someone confident in his ability to govern. The events they recall, however, look back to the war that ended just before the prologue. The attack on the city, which almost seems like a civil war because of the enmity between the sons of Oedipus, is the background to the action of the play. That they will place great value on civil obedience and respect for the laws seems understandable in light of the danger to themselves and their city caused by family strife.

The song is a celebration of the recent victory and borrows words and phrases from epic and the *Seven against Thebes*.⁴ The frequent references to the city, by name (three times), by the number seven (four times) and by association (Dirce, the dragon), give the song a patriotic air. It is a hymn of thanksgiving to various gods. The sun is credited for driving the Argive army into headlong flight. Ares, as he strikes down the enemy, is like a right-hand trace-horse (δεξιόσειπος), guiding the city on a safe course in its moment of peril. Glorious-named Nike shows the city favour in return for past worship (ἀντιχαρεῖσα). All the pantheon are seemingly deserving of honour for the victory since the Chorus plan to visit their temples and dance all nightlong. Dionysos merits special gratitude, fitting for the patron god of triumphant Thebes, by being called to lead the dances. Hymnic form is not strictly observed since only the sun is addressed and there are no patronymics. The song conforms to a rhapsodic hymn in recounting the divine favours the city has received and in concluding with a farewell, as the Chorus exhort forgetfulness of the war and look forward to nightlong revelry.⁵

In its recall of the recent war, the parodos is vivid and striking. There are numerous words appealing to the sense of sight. The ode begins with the “beam of the sun” whose

brightness is reinforced by a triple reference to light (φανέν, φάος, ἐφάνθη) and an epithet (χρυσέας ἀμέρας βλέφαρον: 103-104). The gold in the epithet is echoed later in χρυσοῦ καναχῆς (130) which combines sight and sound. The white shields of the Argives (106) are likened to an eagle's snow-white wing (114). "Pine-fed Hephaestus" (123) is a metonymy for the enemy's pine torches which might have burned Thebes had the enemy not been defeated. Capaneus is carrying a torch (πυρφόρος: 135) when he totters and falls to the ground.

Words suggesting sound are also frequent. The invading army "screams loudly" (ὀξέα κλάζων: 112) and approaches in "clanging gold" (130). When they are struck down from the top of the battlements, they are on the verge of "shouting forth victory" (νίκην . . . ἀλαλάξαι: 133). Before his fall Capaneus is breathing out "blasts" (ῥιπαῖς: 137) and as he hits the ground, "the earth resounds with a thud" (ἀντιτύπα . . . γῆ: 134). "The din of battle" (πάταγος Ἄρεος: 125) at the Argives' backs grows intense and Ares himself "strikes down hard" (στυφελίζων: 139) on them.

The image of the eagle to which the attacking Argive army is compared is also effective in conveying succinctly what the war was like, especially the terror. In addition to the "screaming" and "white wings" which have already been mentioned, the eagle/army "flies" (ὑπερέπτα: 113), "pauses over the houses" (στὰς δ' ὑπὲρ μελάρων: 117), "ringing round (gapes around) with spears that longed for blood" (φονώ- | σαισιν ἀμφιχανὼν κύκλω: 117-118), and departs before "his jaws had been glutted with our (Thebans') gore" (ἀμετέρων | αἱμάτων γένυσιν πλησθῆ- | ναι: 120-123). As can be seen, the expressions are both literal and metaphorical. Introduced in the anapests (112) after the first strophe, the eagle image and metaphor extends to the end of the first antistrophe where the bird of prey is unsuccessful in conquering the "serpent", associated with Thebes. The struggle between the eagle and serpent,

often represented in Greek poetry, recalls in particular the serpent held in the talons of an eagle in the *Iliad* (12.201).⁶

Although military terminology is included in the description of the attack (πολλῶν ὄπλων, ἱπποκόμοις κορύθεσσιν, λόγχαις, λοχαγοὶ, πάγχαλκα τέλη, λόγχας), the actual fighting between the Argives and Thebans is of course not narrated. The rout of the enemy from the perspective of the Chorus is due to divine intervention and the Theban soldiers' contribution to the military success appears negligible. Perhaps "the seven captains at the seven gates" are representative of the Theban and Argive armies but only the mutual slaughter of the brothers is specified. The Chorus neglect to mention any other loss of life on the part of the Thebans. The account, although impressive in its details, is selective and impressionistic. Because of the minimalization of the Theban presence, the real fighting that took place is only implied and the battle has been turned into a myth (which, of course, it is). The Argives are guilty of "boastfulness" (127), and "arrogance" (130) for which they are punished by the gods. By the similarity of language between line 127 and lines 1350-1351 of the closing anapests, the Argives' defeat foreshadows that of Creon. This tendency of the Chorus to remove themselves from the action and think in abstractions will occur in other choral odes.

The last image of the battle and its culmination is that of the sons of Oedipus killing one another (144-147). It is noteworthy that, although the blame for the war is clearly ascribed to Polyneices, who is allied with the "boastful" and "arrogant" enemy and started the war (Πολυνείκους ... νεικέων ἐξ ἀμφιλόγων: 110-111), there is no glorification of Eteocles. As was mentioned earlier, both brothers are called "hated" (στυγεροῖν: 144). The impropriety of their mutual slaughter is suggested by the reference to their common lineage, "born of one father and one mother" (144-145). The theme of a family turning in on, and destroying, itself, the latter recalled in detail by Ismene in the prologue (49-57), and embodied here in the deaths

of Eteocles and Polyneices, brings to mind Antigone, who has already risked her own death through her devotion to the unburied Polyneices.

First Stasimon 332-375

In the previous episode, Creon enunciates his general principles of governance. For him, the well-being of the polis is of the utmost importance. He disapproves of anyone who values a friend or family member above the interests of the polis and abhors its enemies. When the guard informs him that his decree has been violated, he suspects that the disobedience is the result of bribery from a faction opposed to his rule. The guard and Creon both exit and the Chorus are alone for the first stasimon. Made up of two strophic pairs (332-341, 342-352; 353-364, 365-375), as are all the odes in the play with the exception of the third stasimon, the ode is varied in meter. The first pair begins with aeolic elements (glyconics and choriambics) but finishes in dactyls and iambs. The second pair, except for the initial enoplian period extending over three lines, is iambic.⁷

Probably the best known ode in all of Greek tragedy, it is often anthologized because it can stand alone and still have a powerful impact. But it was written for this play and to take it out of context is to lose some of its meaning. The ode seems at first remote and disconnected from what has just transpired. For this reason it creates tension as we try to establish the links between what the Chorus are saying and what we know of the protagonists. The subject of the ode is man's δεινότης, a word which denotes qualities which range from "wonderful" and "ingenious" to "terrible", "strange" and "extraordinary". By "man", I mean that the Chorus are speaking about males (ἄνθρωπον, ἄνθρωπος) or think they are, since they presume that the burial of Polyneices, the immediate cause for the ode, was perpetrated by men. This creates irony since we know that it was Antigone who carried out the act. Apparently they have abandoned their earlier idea (278-279) that divine forces were responsible and have adopted Creon's belief that men, unknown as yet, were bribed to bury Polyneices in order to subvert Creon's rule.

The ode's link to the previous episode and the prologue becomes more and more apparent as the song progresses. At the very beginning a connection is made, although not obvious on a first reading. The word, δεινός, which appears twice in the first two lines (δεινὰ, δεινότερον) has already been used two times before, both in relation to the burial. When Antigone is about to leave to go bury her brother, she bids Ismene to let her and her rashness "suffer this awful thing" (παθεῖν τὸ δεινὸν τοῦτο: 96). The guard had been reluctant to report the burial because "serious matters make one very nervous" (τὰ δεινὰ γὰρ τοι προστίθησ' ὄκνον πολύν: 243). Another connection to the burial is made through a word for "skill" or "resource". In the first antistrophe, man rules over the mountain-wandering beasts by "skillful means" (μηχαναῖς: 349) and in the second antistrophe, δεινότης is called "the contrivance of art" (τὸ μηχανόεν τέχνας: 365). Ismene used the word ἀμήκανος twice (90, 92) in reference to her sister's plan because it lacked sufficient resources for accomplishment and therefore deemed "impossible", and once she applied it to herself (79) because she was without the means to commit such an act. The taming of horses and bulls by placing a yoke on their necks (ἀμφὶ λόφον ζυγῶ: 351) recalls (although it is unintentional on the part of the Chorus) Creon's words about rebels who refuse to acknowledge his power by putting their "neck(s) beneath the yoke" (ὑπὸ ζυγῶ λόφον: 291-292).

Clear references to what has gone before are established in the second antistrophe. The phrase "laws of the earth" (νόμους ... χθονός: 368) is an obvious reminder of Creon's decree (and burial rites), while its complement, θεῶν τ' ἔνορκον δίκαν (369), whether it means "justice men swear by the gods to obey" or "the oathbound justice of the gods", cannot help but suggest Antigone's defense for her action. Previously, she told Ismene that the gods honour the burial of corpses (77). The words also look forward to her coming speech on the unwritten, unfailing, and immortal divine ordinances which she claims commanded her action. The double

reference to the polis (ὕψιπολις· ἄπολις: 370) brings to mind Creon's political comments in both of his long speeches of the preceding episode. The use of "daring" (τόλμας: 371) to describe the man who consorts with evil echoes Creon's first remark when the guard tells him of the burial: τίς ἀνδρῶν ἦν ὁ τολμήσας τάδε; ("What man has dared to do this?" 248). The Chorus, therefore, are commenting about the burial, although with such abstraction that if the ode is read out of context, one would never suspect what occasioned it. They condemn the burial as an act of evil daring and of sabotage against the polis and want to avoid all association with the men responsible.

Although the two earlier uses of the word, δεινός, implied "terrible" and "formidable", its meaning for most of the ode is positive, which is why it is often referred to as the "Ode to Man". In recounting man's accomplishments the Chorus are praising the craft and ingenuity displayed. Perhaps there is a suggestion of a darker meaning in man's mastery over his environment when he "wears away" (ἀποτρύεται: 339) the goddess, Earth, as if he were committing an act of impiety. But he has little choice if he wants to survive. Not until the final antistrophe is the alarm sounded that man, in possession of this "clever something, the contrivance of art", does not always accomplish what is good but sometimes uses his resourcefulness for evil purposes. His ingenuity is without a moral compass, although for most of the song it has been shown as bringing him great benefits.

There is a rising movement in the ode culminating in the ὕψιπολις· ἄπολις (370) of the final antistrophe, itself echoing the earlier παντοπόρος· ἄπορος (360). These phrases appear particularly noteworthy because they are in responsion. The first strophe deals with man's ability to harness the natural world for his own use. He is able to cross the sea, even during the stormy weather of winter. He ploughs the earth with the aid of "mules" (ἰππεῖω γένει: 341) so it produces food for his sustenance. This reference to animals in the final line anticipates the

first antistrophe which is concerned with the capture of birds, beasts, and fish by woven nets, and the taming of horses and bulls. Accomplishments of a higher order are the subject of the second strophe. He has taught himself language, reasoning, a “disposition for living in regulated communities” (ἄστυνόμους ὀργὰς: 355-356), and shelter against the elements. In fact, he is all-resourceful, even discovering medicine for previously incurable illnesses. His ingenuity knows only one failure: he has found no means of avoiding death.

Most of the content of the final antistrophe I have already quoted or paraphrased but its central thought is this. “High in the city” is the person who is able to temper this “resourcefulness” by allegiance to the polis and by respect and piety to the gods. In and of itself, δεινότης, is a dangerous force, because without proper guidance it can be as destructive as beneficial. Such is the outline of the ode. The history of man’s evolutionary development may at first seem to be a digression and without relevance to the play. But these are the stages that are the prerequisites for life in the polis, now under threat by the defiance of the decree, or so the Chorus are implying. The road has been long and arduous. Therefore, the polis is all the more valuable and must be defended vigorously against anyone who is trying to destroy it.

The focus of the ode is on man and his accomplishments, with a warning that his ingenuity may be directed toward evil. Apart from the mention of θεῶν τ’ ἔνορκον δίκαν, the gods are largely absent. “Hades” is more a synonym for death rather than a divine being and Earth, “the oldest of the gods” (337-338), is a passive entity who must be ploughed to yield crops. This is significantly different from the parodos, where the gods play a major role in the victory of Thebes, and from the second and third stasima, where divine forces are seen to control humans. Man here is viewed as an independent agent. This double vision of humans, as agents and victims, will characterize the Chorus’ thinking about Antigone.

The Chorus are still unaware of the identity of the perpetrator and her motives. As a consequence, their comments about the relationship between the burial and man's ingenuity are bound to miss the mark. The absence of any footprints or markings in the earth, as reported by the guard, and the fact that Antigone performed the burial rite without being seen do suggest craftiness. On the other hand, certain facts do not fit. Antigone told Ismene to broadcast her deed, not remain silent about it (86-87), and she acted more out of courage and piety toward the dead than out of δεινότης, however the word is defined. Although their mention of "moving toward evil" is meant to apply to the men responsible for the burial, who the Chorus see as trying to subvert the polis, it suggests Creon, not Antigone. His refusal to let anyone bury Polyneices anywhere, even though he was a traitor, would probably have been considered excessive to members of the original audience. To emphasize the barbarity of the edict, there have been frequent references to the corpse left exposed as food for dogs and birds. He has already displayed intemperate behaviour, suspecting the guard of bribery without any proof, and threatening him with hanging. The reluctance of the watchmen to inform Creon of the deed and the relief of the guard, who was chosen for the task, that he was not put to death, are evidence of Creon's violent temper. In response to the coryphaeus' cautious supposition of divine intervention for the burial, Creon barely suppressed his rage and insulted him by saying that he was "foolish" (ἄνους; 281) as well as old. This unintended double reference by the Chorus to the protagonists whereby they comment about Creon while supposedly speaking about Antigone is a feature of the second and fourth stasima as well.

This stasimon has attracted much attention and further comments about it will be made in the following chapter. As a final point for the present discussion, it should be borne in mind that the Chorus are free to say what they think since Creon is not present. Although they do not know that a family member performed the deed, they voice no objection to or reservation about the decree. Creon has their full support.

After the stasimon, the Chorus announce in anapests (376-383) the arrival of Antigone, a “godsent portent” (δαίμόνιον τέρας: 376). Three observations are to be made. The Chorus are completely surprised that it was Antigone who performed the rites, an indication that they have thought of her as obedient and incapable of such boldness. She is like her father (δύστηνος: 379), foreshadowing the theme of a family doomed in the second stasimon. Finally, consistent with their stance in the previous ode, they disapprove of her action (ἐν ἄφροσύνῃ: 383), but they now know that a relative, not political discontents, buried the corpse.

Second Stasimon 582-625

In the previous episode, the Chorus remain silent as Antigone acknowledges with defiance that she did the deed and refuses to concede to Creon that a distinction should be made between her brothers. They speak only to announce Ismene’s entrance by a poignant description of her grief. Immediately followed by Creon’s likening her to a viper sucking his blood dry, their remark clearly indicates that they think differently from Creon about the sisters, showing sympathy in contrast to his unmitigated hostility. The imminent execution of Antigone and Ismene suggest to the Chorus the theme of a family destroyed by the gods. The two strophic pairs (582-592, 593-603; 604-614, 615-625) of this stasimon, in terms of meter, resemble earlier songs. The first pair, like the second pair of the first stasimon, begins with an initial period of three lines in one meter (here it is in dactylo-epitrite) and changes to an iambic rhythm. The second pair is mainly iambo-choriambic, the predominate meter of the second strophic pair of the parodos.⁸

The stasimon begins as if it were going to be about those who are happy and free from evils, but except for those to whom hope is a benefit (615-616), left vague, and the “small man” avoiding disaster (625), it is about quite the opposite sort of people.⁹ It paints a gloomy picture of human existence where self-deception and destruction, both from the gods and self-induced,

are prominent. The two gnomic utterances bring no comfort at all: wealth brings disaster (613-614) and evil seems good to those whom the gods are leading to disaster (622-624).

The second and third lines introduce the main theme: a family destroyed by the gods through *atē*. The destruction passing from one generation to another is emphasized by particular phrases and repetition of words: *γενεᾶς ἐπὶ πλῆθος ἔρπον, ἀρχαῖα ... πῆματα φθιτῶν ἐπὶ πῆμασι πίπτοντ', οὐδ' ἀπαλλάσσει γενεὰν γένος*. The importance of *atē* is evident by the word's appearing four times and the concept is given concrete expression through vivid images, most prominently in the Thracian sea-storm. The dire blasts of winds suggest the power of *atē*, while the darkness at the bottom of the sea and the dark sand stirred up, the destructive blindness it causes. The wailing headlands buffeted by gales are reminders of the suffering and lamentation *atē* brings in its wake. Other images connected to the concept are the bloody chopper (or dust) mowing down the last root of the family and a foot being burned in the fire. While the first strophe is meant to apply to the house of Labdacus, it is not named specifically until the first antistrophe, which gives the impression that this family is only one of many who have been destroyed by *atē*. Furthering the pessimism of the first strophic pair is the delay of any indication that the victims are guilty of any offence. Until the Chorus qualify the destruction as “folly in speech and the Erinyes in the mind” at the end of the first antistrophe, a phrase which is suggestive of both guilt and the manifestation of *atē*, the family members targeted appear to be the mere playthings of malicious gods.

In the second strophe, the origin for the family's troubles is clearly ascribed to human “transgression” (*ὑπερβασία*: 605) but the Chorus do not say whether this is manifested anew in each generation or whether the original “transgression” is responsible for the death of successive family members. The former explanation, however, would seem to be favored. The word recalls *ὑπερδραμεῖν* (455) and *ὑπερβαίνουσα* (481) of the previous scene, thus establishing a

connection to the violation of the decree and thus a new transgression. As well, the aphorism about the link between wealth and *atē* that concludes the strophe points to new crimes. The contrasts evoked in this strophe are remarkable. There is the “dazzling brightness” (μαρμαρόεσσαν αἴγλαν: 610) of Olympus and the sense of calm, instead of the murky darkness under the sea and the winds wrecking havoc. Zeus is in a position of absolute dominance and he is unassailable and ageless, the opposite of what is in store for humans who are struck down by a divine force and whose lives (αἰών, τὸν χρόνον) are of a short duration. The distance between mortals and the gods could not be greater.

The theme of *atē* is continued into the final antistrophe where the word appears twice. It is in fact the last word of the stanza, echoing (along with ἐκτός) the end of the preceding strophe, and giving the ode a ring structure, since the word appears in the second line. More examples of blindness or inability to see clearly are given. Men are deceived by “thoughtless longings” (617), they do not gain knowledge before they have suffered for their mistakes (618-619). We note that the source of the concluding aphorism is anonymous (ἐκ τοῦ: 620), indicating perhaps that the condition it describes goes a long way back, since the person who coined the aphorism is not known. It clearly states what happens to someone struck with *ate*. When the god leads *phrenes* to *atē*, then evil seems to be good.

The ode is intended by the Chorus to be a commentary on Antigone, whom they see as both an agent in her destruction and a victim of an inherited curse. Her family is named and the destruction of generations and troubles succeeding troubles fit her family history, recalled in the prologue (49-57). She and Ismene are indeed the last roots about to be extinguished since they are both unwed and under a death sentence. The Chorus, in referring to foolish speech and mental fury, are alluding to Antigone’s encounter with Creon where she showed her fierce determination and displayed haughtiness to Creon and pride at what she had done. This

characterization is of course biased, failing to take into account her love and devotion, but it is consistent with how they see the situation. The “transgression” through verbal echoes, as was shown previously, recalls her disregard of Creon’s law.

There is a loose connection to Antigone in the final antistrophe but a stronger one to Creon. The mistaking of “evil” for “good” (622) recalls the verse in the first stasimon which includes the same two words (367). On the other hand, Creon has shown even more autocratic tendencies, such as refusing to recognize the right of a sister to bury her brother, condemning both sisters to death although he knows Ismene did not participate, and disregarding the fact that they are both his nieces, one of whom is betrothed to his son. How the idea of “widely wandering hope” (615-616) that is the “deception of thoughtless longings” (ἀπάτα κουφονόων ἐρώτων: 617) applies to Antigone is not immediately clear. Do the Chorus think that she is deluded in thinking that she has brought Polyneices any benefit by burying him, or that her family will be reconciled in Hades? Possibly there is a pun at work, because ἄτη is in ἀπάτη.¹⁰ They might be saying that a god has led her to *atē*. As a result, she lost normal prudence and her mind was filled with “trivial Eros”, deceiving her into a bad act that she thought was a good.

In contrast, the phrase clearly applies to Creon. His belief that he can assert his will, however unjust, and bring peace and harmony to the polis, is clearly a deception and an illusion. Earlier words and phrases in the ode (“folly in speech”, “fury in the mind”, “transgression”) are also appropriate descriptions of his harsh and angry remarks to Antigone and Ismene and his intended punishment of them, as well as his intransigence in not allowing Polyneices any right of burial. The applicability of the stasimon to Creon is reinforced by the following choral anapests (626-630) which signal Haemon’s arrival. He is called the νέατον γέννημ’ (627) of Creon’s sons, or in other words, “the last root”. With his death and that of Eurydice, Creon’s family will also be destroyed through *atē*.

Third Stasimon 781-800

The Chorus during the exchange between Creon and Haemon assume the role of ineffectual moderator. They support Creon's speech in which he promulgates his views about the importance of sons obeying their fathers and the disgrace for men of being bested by women, and in which he calls Antigone an "evil woman". By referring to their age, which Creon earlier used against them as an insult (281), and by qualifying with the word, *δοκεῖς* (682), their understanding of what Creon said, they may be giving a hint of some minor disagreement with his opinions. They urge both to listen to one another but give no indication of whether they fully agree with Haemon, who said that Creon should show some flexibility and that Antigone's action has the full support of the city. When Haemon leaves they perceive the seriousness of his perturbed state of mind, unlike Creon, but do not press the point. They say nothing about Creon's plan to entomb Antigone in a cavern and escape pollution by leaving her a little food. Probably Creon leaves the stage at the end of the episode to prepare for Antigone's entombment but he may be present as the Chorus deliver the third stasimon. The shortest of the choral odes, it is composed of only one strophic pair. The meter is largely choriambic and most of its elements have appeared in earlier odes.¹¹

The stasimon is a hymn addressed to Eros, starting in the second person but moving to the third person in the antistrophe where it is equated to "desire" (*ἔμερος*: 796) and Aphrodite (800). It includes hymnic elements: invocation, listing of attributes and powers (unconquered in war, dwelling in many places, inescapable, maddening), anaphora (*Ἔρωσ ... Ἔρωσ, ὃς ἐν ... ὃς ἐν, οὐτ' ... οὐθ', σὺ καὶ ... σὺ καὶ*) and universal importance (neither the gods nor mortals are immune from it). It does not include, however, a request or a farewell.¹² Ring composition is evident in the similarity between the opening address (*Ἔρωσ ἀνίκατε μάχαν*) and the final phrase (*ἄμαχος γὰρ ἐμπαίζει θεὸς Ἀφροδίτα*). The verb that is used of

Aphrodite, “to sport or play with”, ends the ode on a disturbing thought. This force which can cause terrible harm (791-792) is the plaything of the goddess.

Its connection to the previous scene is unambiguous since the Chorus mention the quarrel that has just taken place (τόδε νεῖκος: 793) and perhaps make a pun on Haemon’s name (ξόναϊμον: 794).¹³ In addition, they use a word which featured prominently in the prior episode: φρένας (792).¹⁴ The “madness” of the person under the influence of Eros (790) recalls Haemon’s threatened suicide and his sudden decision never to see his father again. The ode brings to the fore a factor remaining largely in the background of the previous dispute. Haemon never expressed his feelings for Antigone because that would have weakened his argument. Creon did allude to them but in disparaging terms near the end of the scene by calling his son, “a slave of a woman” (756). Nevertheless, the reaction of the Chorus to the confrontation between father and son is limited in scope. They are right to see Haemon’s behaviour influenced to some extent by his desire for Antigone but by focusing on Eros, without considering the validity of what he said, and believing that it unhinges “just minds”, they discount his arguments, as if he were possessed and could no longer think straight.

The theme of Eros is directly related to both Antigone and Creon. She is brought to mind by the reference to the young girl whose soft cheeks inspire desire and to the beautiful bride whose glances conquer. Even though this is not a side of her we have seen, Haemon is in love with her, and according to Ismene, it was a good match (570). Creon is not alluded to in the ode but is connected to Eros in a negative way. He has tried to deny its power by breaking off the marriage engagement, and refuses to see the dire consequences of his son’s strong feelings for his intended bride, not believing the threatened suicide poses any danger. Because the ode is a hymn and the description of Eros general, not just specific to Haemon, we are also led to think

of Eros in a wider context – that is, as a fundamental element in human existence. The Chorus in fact make this explicit near the end of the antistrophe.

They remark that Eros “has its throne beside those of the mighty laws” (τῶν μεγάλων πάρεδρος ἐν ἀρχαῖς θεσμῶν: 798-799), a further claim for the power and universality of Eros, but a problematic phrase if the laws are understood to be those of humans. Eros more often creates disorder rather than upholds it; sexual desire is usually seen in opposition to laws rather than their partner. What they must mean by the “mighty laws” are the unwritten laws (so great and fundamental are they that they need not be written down), which include not only burying the dead, but also respect for parents. Haemon has just broken this last “law” because he has Eros operating within him. When the Chorus say that they are being carried “outside the laws” (θεσμῶν ἔξω: 801-802) in the following anapests, they are echoing the reference to the laws two lines earlier and comparing themselves to Haemon. He too, they think, does not respect the laws. But in his case, they are referring to the absence of filial piety; in theirs, compassion for a law-breaker. As a final point, it is to be noted that since the theme of love is associated with marriage, the ode looks forward to the many references to marriage in the kommos which immediately follows and to Antigone and Haemon’s later “marriage” in death.

Kommos with Antigone 801-862

At the core of the kommos are Antigone’s two strophic pairs (806-816, 823-833; 839-852, 857-871) which are concluded with an epode (876-882). The strophes and antistrophes alternate, first with the anapests (801-805, 817-822, 834-838), and then the short lyric stanzas (853-856, 872-875) of the Chorus. The first strophic pair is completely choriambic, the same meter as the previous stasimon. The second pair is iambo-choriambic with some dochmiacs, the latter meter highlighting Antigone’s agitation. The lyric stanzas are in iambic rhythms.

Switching from anapests to lyrics, the Chorus indicate their heightened emotion. Different analyses of the epode have been proposed but it is mainly in iambic and trochaic meters.¹⁵

We notice at once a change in both Antigone and the Chorus. Antigone lets down her defenses for the first time and appears vulnerable, no longer the young woman who was so sure of herself. Believing at first that the Chorus secretly approve of what she did, she elicits their sympathy with her opening words (806-816) and reveals her anxiety and sorrow at dying unwed, unmourned, and friendless, without any family. Being unwed as she goes to her grave is apparently her greatest regret, drawing attention to it forcefully in her first speech by the use of words related to marriage (ὑμεναίων, νυμφείοις, ὕμνος, ὕμνησεν, νυμφεύσω). She would never have spoken of her grief and fears to Creon, nor to her sister, whom she now thinks of as the enemy. Although it is dramatically necessary that she no longer appear determined to die, if her death is to evoke any pity, her lamentation is not entirely convincing. She does not think of Ismene, who by this time clearly matters nothing to her and has been forgotten by everyone. She refers repeatedly to the fact that she will never be married, but never mentions her betrothed. Some scholars think Sophocles wanted to show her completely alone at the end, to increase the pathos of her fate. I do not think her isolation a necessity for making her death moving, but even if it were, there are consequences for her character. The world she bewails leaving is bereft of people for whom she cares and thus it has only a tenuous grasp on her.

The Chorus are more sympathetic to her than they have been, at least in the beginning. They are in tears in spite of themselves (θεσμῶν ἔξω), when she is led out from the palace, and remark that she has earned glory and praise (817), that she has attained a certain god-like status (837) and that her action was a sort of piety (872). But their sympathy is limited, suggesting that she acted “of her own free will” (αὐτόνομος: 821). This description implies that she put her laws, the “laws of the gods”, above Creon’s. When Antigone says she is being mocked,

because the Chorus' condolence is half-hearted and without acknowledgement that what she did was right, they become more critical of her. In the lyric stanzas they charge her with extreme daring (853) and self-willed passion (875) and by mentioning her father's crime (856), they cause her even more grief. In their view, a ruler must be obeyed (873-874), a principle which she chose to ignore and for which she is now paying the consequences.

If Creon is present during the kommos, he may exert some influence on the Chorus' response to Antigone's words. Without being announced as re-entering, he speaks at line 883 and by his comment, it is evident that he has heard at least part of the exchange, indicating perhaps that he never left. But the Chorus have been bold enough to say that Antigone has won glory and praise (817, 837), which would seem to point to his absence. Even if he is on stage, it is difficult to believe that they admire her unreservedly but fail to say so, simply out of fear. It seems more likely that they are voicing their opinions, because what they say is consistent with their earlier criticisms of Antigone and their belief that she is under the influence of *atē*. They are opposed to her strong-mindedness and disapprove of her independence and disregard of the edict. When she mentions marriage, they say nothing about Haemon's impassioned defense on her behalf or his claim that her action has popular approval. Such remarks would have given her some consolation. Earlier, they expressed disapproval of the person (or group) who defied the decree. With such a disobedient subject, they do not want to "share their hearth or thoughts" (373-374). Therefore, with Antigone, they remain distant and, in so doing, force her to turn to elements in the landscape as her sole support.

A final point to be made about the kommos concerns Antigone's comparison of herself to Niobe. She introduces the analogy because their deaths in stone, although different, have a resemblance, and because they both hover between life and death (Niobe still weeps after she has been turned into stone, Antigone in the cavern belongs neither to the living nor the dead). Perhaps she also thinks that they are alike in their inconsolable grief. A further likeness may be

that, whereas Niobe mourned for her children, Antigone mourns for the children she will never have. When the guard noticed her at the grave site, he likened her to a mother bird making shrill cries at the loss of her chicks (423-425). While the Chorus grant that it is an honour to be thought of in the same company as someone with divine ancestry, they point out that the comparison is not entirely apt since Antigone, like themselves, is mortal and born to mortals. Their contrary view serves an important purpose. It reinforces the divide between them.

After Creon intercedes, Antigone delivers a long speech., part of which (904-915) has been thought by some to be a later insertion and not genuine, although Aristotle referred to the passage in question in the *Rhetoric* (1417a) and accepted it as part of the play. In the lines in dispute, she says she never would have acted as she did, for a husband or one of her children. Does the Chorus' following remark help decide the issue one way or the other? They call her words "the same blasts of the same winds of the spirit" (ἔτι τῶν αὐτῶν ἀνέμων αὐταὶ | ψυχῆς ῥιπαὶ τήνδε γ' ἔχουσιν: 929-930), echoing the words they used of Capaneus (ἐπέπνει | ῥιπαῖς ἐχθίστων ἀνέμων: 136-137). Without the lines, they would be reacting to the following: I am dying the worst death by far of my family; I am killed for shrouding my brother; Creon is taking me away unwed and deserted by friends; I have not transgressed divine justice; I have acted piously; if the gods approve of my death, I will forgive my executioners, if not, may they suffer the same fate. There is much here to which the Chorus would object. Her death, they would claim, is of her own doing. She did not act piously but contrary to the law of the polis. They would not be pleased to hear a death curse directed against their ruler. Although I think the words are consistent with her character and make clearer her life-denying obsession with her brother and family, what the Chorus say neither supports nor disproves the genuineness of the lines.¹⁶

Fourth Stasimon 944-987

As Antigone is led off to her entombment, the Chorus sing the fourth stasimon. There is a lull in the action between her final exit and the arrival of Tiresias, bringing news of the gods' displeasure and setting in motion the belated attempt by Creon to free the city from pollution. It is thus an interlude, as we wait for new developments, and the three stories that the Chorus recount are their final thoughts on Antigone. The stasimon is made up of two strophic pairs (944-954, 955-965; 966-976, 977-987), both of which follow a similar pattern, starting out in aeolo-choriambic meters and then changing to iambics.¹⁷

The stasimon is unique in that it is the only extant Sophoclean ode composed exclusively of mythological exempla. The first strophe is the story of Danaë, the first antistrophe that of Lycurgus, and the second strophic pair that of Cleopatra. Although precise interpretation of all the particulars is impossible, because the stories of Lycurgus and Cleopatra have different versions and it is not clear which version is to be understood, the main theme is unambiguous. Fate often brings terrible suffering and not even the high-born escape it. They express the first point twice: ἃ μοιριδία τις δύναμις δεινά: 951, "the power of fate is strange"; and καὶ ἐκεῖνα | Μοῖραι μακράϊωνες ἔσχον: 986-987, "even upon that woman, the long-lived Fates bore hard". The second point features in all three stories about suffering. Danaë is "of noble birth" (γενεᾷ τίμιος: 949), Lycurgus is a king (956) and therefore presumably not of low-birth, and Cleopatra is a princess and daughter of the north wind, tracing her ancestry back to Erechtheus (981-986).

We should not expect the stories to fit Antigone precisely. There are details in all three stories which differ from that of Antigone, but which the Chorus ignore. Nor can we apply basic arithmetic to the ode and say that because two of the three who suffered are innocent, the Chorus now believe that Antigone is being unjustly punished. They never remark on the

innocence or guilt of the victims. Analysis will be hopelessly convoluted if we think that they are talking in code and cryptically expressing their revised or repressed opinion of her. This is not to suggest that what they say and what can be inferred from what they say are one and the same thing. Ambiguity has featured in earlier odes in which the Chorus, intending to comment on Antigone, have inadvertently remarked on Creon. It gives the odes a richness, but it is probably the work of the poet, rather than the intention of the Chorus.

Imprisonment features in at least two of the stories (Danaë, Lycurgus) and parent/child violence in a different pair (Danaë, Cleopatra). It is not certain whether all three stories are united by these two elements. The story of Danaë most closely resembles Antigone's. She too has been taken away from the brightness of the sun (944-945), which recalls Antigone's sorrow at seeing the sun for the last time (808-809, 879), and confined in a "tomblike chamber" (τυμβήρει θαλάμῳ: 946-947), which expression echoes θάλαμον (804) and τύμβος (891), used earlier to describe Antigone's cavern. There is no mention that she was wrongfully imprisoned, like Antigone. Therefore, we ought to conclude that the issue of innocence or guilt is not an issue for them. Since for Antigone, there is no parallel to Danaë's impregnation by the golden stream of Zeus, they seem to be saying that what happens to both is similar, even though their fates are different. At the end of the strophe, they are merely making the point that fate is inescapable, and thus Antigone cannot avoid her destiny. The means, however, which the Chorus say are employed in the attempt ("wealth", "war", "fortification", and "black, sea-buffed ships"), do not apply to Antigone but are suggestive of a man in power, like Creon.

The story of Lycurgus is immediately connected to that of Danaë by the word, "yoked" (ζεύχθη: 955), since she was treated in the same rough way (κατεζεύχθη: 947). Nevertheless, his offending Dionysos by trying to prevent his female devotees from worshipping him is not apposite to Antigone, but bears a close resemblance to the actions of Creon, who in the following episode will be told that he is offending the gods. On the other hand, Lycurgus, like

Antigone, is confined in a rocky prison (957-958). Moreover, the description of his temperament (ὀξύχολος, κερτομίους ὀργαῖς, κερτομίους γλώσσαις) recalls their earlier observations about her “savagery” (471) and the “blasts of winds” (929-930) which come out of her. The “terrible (δεινόν), exuberant force of his madness” (959-960) is a reminder of both the first and second stasimon. “Terrible” was the word they used of man and, by implication, of the burial which inspired the ode. The “exuberant force of madness” (959-960) is like a “fury of the mind”, exhibited by those suffering from *atē*. The particulars of Lycurgus’ personal history may be different but his personality, according to the Chorus, is similar. But their observation that he came to know the errors of his way is unlikely to indicate a supposition on their part that Antigone also will repent. Certainly they have given no indication that they think she will yield in any way.

The third and longest myth has the least connection to Antigone or to Creon. There has been a movement away from Thebes during the ode. Danaë lived in Argos, Lycurgus in Thrace, and Cleopatra in further Thrace, on the shores of the Black Sea. As well, her history includes fantastical elements. Ares is a neighbour and she herself, the daughter of a god, has been raised in a cave, inhabited by her father’s storm winds. The focus of the story is as much on the blinded children as on Cleopatra, who is not introduced until the antistrophe. The moral seems to be that even the innocent may suffer a horrible fate and the gods do nothing to stop it. Ares sees the crime but does not interfere. Again, the Chorus do not blame or absolve anyone outright but the emphasis put on the children’s grisly blinding (ἄρατὸν ἔλκος, τυφλωθὲν, ἀλαδὸν, ἀραχθέντων) and their tears and sorrow (979-980), imply the cruelty and outrage which they undeservedly suffered. The καὶ in καὶ ἐκείνῃ (986) suggests that Cleopatra too did not do anything to warrant her fate. They are not exonerating Antigone by means of this myth, which involves innocent victims, for if that is what they are now thinking, they would not have

included the story of Lycurgus. That they are moved at least somewhat by Antigone's punishment is indicated by the repetition of $\hat{\omega}$ $\pi\alpha\hat{\iota}$ ($\pi\alpha\hat{\iota}$) (949, 987) but their sympathy goes only so far. The allusions to her temper in the second myth may be complemented by references to the wildness of Cleopatra (raised in a cave, fleet as a horse), perhaps reflective of Antigone's wild nature, which cannot be tamed by Creon. Furthermore, the shuttle as an instrument of crime may be a reminder of the rebellion of the female, since it is not a weapon a male would likely use. Creon has been particularly sensitive about being bested by a woman.

In addition to the unintended allusions to Creon already mentioned, there is the unjust, unnamed prisoner of Danaë, her father, Acrisius, who is eventually killed by Perseus, foreshadowing the punishment of Creon for his crimes. The "anger" and "madness" of Lycurgus evoke Haemon's words to his father: $\epsilon\hat{\iota}\kappa\epsilon$ $\theta\upsilon\mu\omicron\upsilon$: 718, "retreat from your anger"; $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ $\tau\omicron\hat{\iota}\varsigma$ $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota$ $\tau\hat{\omega}\nu$ $\phi\acute{\iota}\lambda\omega\nu$ $\mu\alpha\acute{\iota}\nu\eta$ $\sigma\upsilon\nu\acute{\omega}\nu$: 765, "so that you can rave on in the company of those friends who will endure it". The third myth does not pertain to Creon in any obvious way, if indeed there is a connection. The two blinded sons perhaps are to be equated to the two sons of Creon, although reference to Megareus only appears later (1303). Phineus could be equated with Creon if he too was blinded as a punishment. Since the ode has attracted considerable attention because of the difficulty of interpreting these myths whose details are uncertain, I have only indicated some of the possible secondary meanings, but shall discuss others in the following chapter.

Fifth Stasimon 1115-1154

In the previous episode, the Chorus are silent during the exchange between Creon and Tiresias, but when the latter leaves, they advise Creon to release Antigone from the cave and bury Polyneices. Although Creon admits that he too, like the Chorus, knows that the prophet has never spoken falsely, that knowledge alone does not appear sufficient to convince him to

reverse what he has decreed, so reluctant is he to admit to error and show weakness. Without the prompting from the Chorus, it seems he would have remained intransigent. While he is off stage endeavouring to correct the situation and avoid “the net of disaster” (1097), the Chorus sing the fifth stasimon. The ode is composed of two strophic pairs (1115-1125, 1126-1136; 1137-1145, 1146-1154) of varied meters. The first pair is more unusual and irregular than the meter of previous odes but generally is aeolo-choriambic with some iambs. In spite of some irregularities and uncertainty of the text which make analysis uncertain, the second pair is similar to that of the first.¹⁸

It is a kletic hymn addressed to Dionysos, containing the standard elements of such a hymn. There is an apostrophe (ὦ Βακχεῦ), and an epithet, which here is all-inclusive (πολυώνυμε). The names of his parents are given (1115-1118, 1149) as well as his many haunts (Italy, Eleusis, Thebes, Corycia, Delphi, and Nysa), his attributes (flashing smoke-flame, ivy, grapes, cries of euhoe, dancing, female devotees), past services to Thebes (1137-1139), and call for help (1140-1154).¹⁹ His association with Thebes is emphasized by calling the city “the mother city of the Bacchantes” (1121) and the god’s favourite (1137-1138), by reference to his Theban mother (1115-1116, 1139), and by referring to the city itself (twice) or things associated with it (the river Ismene, the seed of the dragon). The numerous references to the city recall those of the parodos.

It is usually classified as a joy-before-disaster ode as if the Chorus were convinced that all would turn out well and therefore are celebrating. But it is a prayer to Dionysos to bring relief to the city, and consequently their joy is anticipatory, rather than unrestrained because of the certainty of their happiness. They are praying in effect that Creon, by quickly correcting what Tiresias has described as blasphemy, can remove the stain of pollution from the city. There is a movement in the ode from the god’s journey to the city from various locales, to his anticipated arrival, and then finally to the imagined celebration under the night sky, which itself

appears to take part in the revelry. Tension is created by delaying the main verbs (μολεῖν: 1144, προφάνηθ': 1149) until near the end of the stasimon, although the postponement of the request until after the appearance of the other elements is inherent in the genre. Undoubtedly the original audience would have taken pleasure in listening to a prayer to the patron god of the dramatic festival they were attending.

The ode is relatively straightforward, in comparison to the previous ones, and the only one not to allude to the protagonists. It is closely connected to the previous scene in which they learn from Tiresias of the city's pollution. Hence, they are praying that it be cured of the "assault of plague" (βιαίᾱς ... νόσου: 1140-1141). In spite of the Chorus' fervent hopes, there are hints of a darker outcome, which we are expecting in any case because of the dire prophecy of Tiresias. The frenzy of the god's followers (εὐαζόντων, μαινόμεναι) is a reminder of the double-sided nature of the god who can bring both release and destruction. The thunder of Zeus (Διὸς βαρυβρεμέτα: 1117) and the "groaning strait" (1145) hint at calamity, while "fire-breathing stars" have a sinister connotation.²⁰ Finally, the all-night dances which conclude the ode echo those the Chorus mentioned at the end of the parodos but from which they were distracted, because of unforeseen events. Here they pray for the arrival of Dionysos and instead, a messenger arrives.

Since the messenger's opening speech conveys no specific information, the Chorus have to question him for details of what has happened. He only relates the death of Haemon at first and not until the entry of Eurydice does he give the full particulars, which includes Antigone's suicide. The Chorus say nothing about her death, being distracted by the sudden departure of Eurydice which arouses their concern. It is to be noted how Antigone is practically forgotten after the fourth stasimon. Rather like Ismene, she disappears from the play. Tiresias alludes to her only after Creon suspects him of lying for profit and shows his unwillingness to comply

with the prophet's instruction to bury the exposed corpse. After the messenger's account of the incidents in the cave, she is never mentioned again and her body, unlike Haemon's and Eurydice's, is not brought on stage.

Kommos with Creon and Messenger 1260-1353

The Chorus signal Creon's arrival in recitative anapests (1257-1260) in which they cautiously (εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν) blame him for his own ruin. The basic building block of the kommos is made up of two strophic pairs (spanning 1261-1276, 1284-1300; 1306-1325, 1328-1346), mainly in dochmiacs and sung by Creon. These lyrics are interrupted by iambic trimeters (1270, 1277-1283, 1293, 1301-1305, 1312-1316, 1326-1327, 1338) spoken by the messenger, the Chorus, and Creon. The dochmiacs underscore Creon's anguish, in contrast to the calmer tones of the messenger and Chorus. Anapests (1347-1353) of the Chorus end the kommos and the play.²¹

The Chorus have only eight lines of dialogue between their announcement of Creon and the final anapests. Most of the kommos is dominated by Creon, utterly broken in spirit, as he laments the deaths of his son and wife, blames himself for the catastrophe, and wishes for his own death. The secondary role is that of the messenger from the palace who relates the suicide of Eurydice. As in the kommos with Antigone, the Chorus offer Creon little consolation and do not share in his sorrow. Since Creon is crushed by events, overwhelmed by his loss, they begin to take control, telling their king that "quickest is best" (1327), "we must attend to present tasks" (1334-1335), "utter no prayers now" (1337). When Creon asks to be led away, they say: (my translation) "you are advising what is profitable, if there is any profit in misfortunes" (κέρδη παραινέις, εἴ τι κέρδος ἐν κακοῖς: 1326). By referring to "profit", they use one of Creon's favourite words, knowing that they will be understood.

The final lines clearly refer to Creon who has acted impiously (ἄσεπτεῖν: 1350), has received “great blows” (μεγάλας πληγὰς) and is advanced in years (γῆρα). The thought may be expressed in general terms and gloss over the suffering of the characters, but the pious wisdom of the Chorus offers some moral guidance. The phrase τὸ φρονεῖν (“good sense”, “wisdom”) frames the final anapests. It is fitting that this phrase should be used at the end, since the verb, its derivatives, and related words have appeared frequently, and “good sense” is an important theme of the play. As the Chorus have shown, however, “good sense” and “piety” are insufficient without also, the courage to speak.

Summary

The Chorus are notable for the beauty, variety, and suggestiveness of their lyrics, which range from a dazzling, mythic account of the recent war, to a lovely hymn to Dionysos, with odes to human “craft”, the deception, destructiveness, and inescapability of *atē*, the power of Eros, and the harshness of fate in between. In the odes they have a habit of stepping back from the action and singing in general terms about what is happening, so that their songs are both related to and transcend the events of the play. For example, the report of the burial gives rise to their pondering man’s ability to work wonders, both good and bad. The argument between Creon and Haemon suggests the universality and destructiveness of Eros. The recent war makes them reflect on human pride and arrogance. In their lyrical mode, they seem to be both inside and outside the action of the play.

Their songs also provide some sort of change from the previous episode, whether in mood or tone. The celebration and thanksgiving of the parodos contrast with the outrage and discord of the prologue. After Creon fears that the dire prediction of Tiresias may come true and departs in haste and desperation, the Chorus express hope that the “sickness” of the city can be cured and imagine a night of revelry and jubilation in their hymn to the city’s patron god.

The mythological exempla which serve as the Chorus' final thoughts on Antigone are different in tone from the preceding kommos and dialogue, reflective rather than emotional. Their comments about the ubiquity and dangers of Eros are distant in tenor from the wrangling that occurred just before, to which the conversation between Creon and Haemon degenerated.

With the first four stasima, the Chorus generate a certain tension, as we try to make the connection between the protagonists and the principles of human existence stated in them. This connection is not always obvious. We wonder how the burial by Antigone exhibits δεινότης or whether the term is more fittingly applied to the nature of her personality. Likewise, the word, in the sense of "ingenuity" and "resourcefulness", does not suit Creon when he is suggested in the ode by their comment about a person who, in possession of this quality, sometimes uses it for evil ends. In the sense of "harshness", however, it describes up to this point his treatment of the guard at least, if there is still some doubt about the appropriateness of his decree concerning a traitor of the city, and also characterises his subsequent autocratic behaviour. The Chorus may believe that because of *atē*, Antigone demonstrates "folly in speech and Erinys in mind" but we do not or not in those words, and we instead think of Creon. Nevertheless, we try to understand on what basis they are making this assertion.

Their relationship to Antigone creates interest because they show less sympathy to her than we expect. We attempt to come up with reasons for their reluctance to back her cause, since they do not explain themselves fully. Certainly, their distance from her is used to isolate her and to prevent her glorification and the demonization of Creon, but it has to make sense, in addition to being dramatically useful. Certainly, the presence of Creon is a factor that determines what they say or do. We know that they are men who supported Laius when he was king (165-166) and persisted in loyalty (ἐμπέδοις φρονήμασιν: 169) toward Oedipus' sons and therefore they disapprove of political disobedience. They believe her family is doomed and perhaps have rationalized to themselves that there is little they can do to keep her from her fate.

From their harsh criticisms of Antigone (471-472, 603, 929-930), we think of her faults, knowing that she is far from endearing. She shows hardness to Ismene and a proud defiance of Creon. Her passions are exclusively directed toward her family, with no thought given to the polis or even her fiancé. Without justifying the reserve of the Chorus toward Antigone, we are forced to think about it and try to explain it as something other than just subservience and cowardice.

The Chorus display in their songs both wisdom and piety. They show insights into the forces which shape human lives, display an awareness of the danger of not thinking correctly, and recognize the power and presence of the gods. But they are not candid about what they are thinking. They reflect on the situation in their lyrics, but their involvement in the action is limited. Apart from the odes and the kommoi, they have only about fifty lines of dialogue. Sophocles portrays men who probably know very early that Creon is making mistakes. In spite of their reticence, due to fear of his irascible temper, they still offer him gentle counsel and voice their opinion, from time to time. They urge him to listen to what Haemon has said (724-725), suggest the dangerous state of Haemon's temper when he departs suddenly (767) and quietly hint that Ismene's life should be spared (770). When Creon finally asks for their help, they give him good advice, telling him what he should do and in what order. To Antigone, in their final scene with her, they finally acknowledge that her action was "a noble kind of respect" (872), an indication that they believe Polyneices should have been buried.

Because of their fear of Creon, they cannot to any extent translate into practice the truths they express in the odes. That their comments in the odes, which are ostensibly about Antigone, have sometimes only a tenuous connection to her and often better fit Creon, is perhaps a sign that they intuit all the dangers associated with the course of action Creon is choosing.

¹ See Bernard M.W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1964) Chapters I and II, for a detailed description of the Sophoclean hero.

² M. Griffith, *Sophocles, Antigone* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999) 152. He believes that the word may also mean that the brothers are hated by others, to which interpretation Ronnet agrees. She thinks that those others are the men of the Chorus. "Le chœur englobe les deux frères dans une réprobation sans pitié, qui paraît trahir une secrète antipathie à l'égard des Labdacides." G. Ronnet, *Sophocle, poète tragique* (Paris: de Boccard, 1969) 151. This is unlikely, however, since they give no other indication that this is the case.

³ Pohlsander, 25-26.

⁴ See J. Davidson, "The Parodos of the *Antigone*: A Poetic Study", *BICS* 30 (1983), and G.F. Else, *The Madness of Antigone* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1964) 35-40.

⁵ Griffith, 139-140.

⁶ E.S. Shuckburgh, *The Antigone of Sophocles* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1902, 1984) 70.

⁷ Pohlsander, 26-29.

⁸ Pohlsander, 29-32.

⁹ There is uncertainty about ὀλίγος in line 625. It may not be the subject but instead, an adjective in agreement with χρόνον. The alternative reading would be that *atē* is avoided for only a short period of time.

¹⁰ I am indebted to Professor Harry Edinger for this suggestion.

¹¹ Griffith, 256 and Pohlsander, 32-33.

¹² Griffith, 255-256.

¹³ "The word for 'kindred', *sunhaimon* (which means 'with shared blood'), puns on the name of the king's son, Haemon, stressing again the tension in Creon's family and not just in the ordering of the city, as the words 'minds' and 'just' recall the terms of their family quarrel." S. Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986) 101.

¹⁴ φρήν and words derived from it appear nine times in the episode (648, 682, 683, 707, 727, 754 (2), 755, 768).

¹⁵ Pohlsander, 33-39.

¹⁶ For a new, convincing defense for the authenticity of these lines, see S. West, "Sophocles' *Antigone* and Herodotus Book Three", *Sophocles Revisited*, J. Griffin, ed. (Oxford, New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999). She argues that the evidence of Herodotean influence throughout the play supports the genuineness of Antigone's final argument for the burial, which, as has long been noted, is similar to a passage in Herodotus (3.119) concerning the wife of the Persian, Intaphernes.

¹⁷ Griffith, 285-287 and Pohlsander, 39-41.

¹⁸ Griffith, 314-317 and Pohlsander, 41-43.

¹⁹ Griffith, *Antigone*, 313.

²⁰ Winnington-Ingram, 113-114.

²¹ Griffith, 342-346 and Pohlsander, 43-45.

Chapter Five

The Chorus in the *Antigone*: Issues of Interpretation

Since the *Antigone* has long been one of the most popular Greek plays, much has been written about it. Apart from articles on particular odes, however, there is little scholarship focusing exclusively on the Chorus. They are usually given secondary treatment in discussions of the protagonists. Yet, because the attitudes and sympathies of this Chorus are difficult to determine, opinion about them has varied widely, as have interpretations of the odes. Unable to address all disagreements that have arisen concerning the Chorus, I shall limit myself to discussing two major and three minor issues of interpretation, as I did for the *Ajax*.

Major Issues:

1. Relevance of the Chorus

Problem: The choral odes sometimes seem only remotely connected to the action and frequently do not touch upon important issues raised. As supporters of Creon, the Chorus ignore the motives for Antigone's deed. Are the Chorus, particularly their role as singers of songs, largely irrelevant for interpreting the play?

Scholarly Opinion: I begin with three scholars who would answer "yes" to the previous question. Gardiner finds the odes to be so loosely connected to the action that if they were lifted out of the play, they could function as independent poems. She thinks that they sometimes seem so ambiguous that only after detailed and subtle analysis is their relevance perceived. For her, the Chorus in the odes turn away from matters of importance. For example, in the first stasimon (which she discusses in one paragraph), the Chorus do not discuss the burial specifically and because they are alone and able to speak freely, that must mean that they do not care who did it or why. In the second stasimon, they fail to consider Antigone's motives for the burial or the proper relationship between moral conduct and the state. After Haemon's departure, they ignore subjects he has broached, such as the responsibilities of kingship, the duties sons owe to fathers,

and the nature of wisdom. In the kommos with Antigone, they are interested only in the external, physical aspects, not the ethical problem of her death. The fourth stasimon is an impersonal ode which says nothing about the present circumstances. The Chorus address the side issue of Antigone's royalty rather than the dishonouring of her piety. The fifth stasimon is used simply to keep the audience engrossed by means of the elders' hopeful anticipation, which the spectators know to be mistaken. Hence the Chorus are of little use in interpreting the play because they are blind to the causes generating the conflict.¹

According to Ronnet, the hostility of the Chorus to Antigone prevents them from offering any insight into the heroine. Moreover, their songs are not strongly linked to the action, which is only the pretext, and the ideas expressed in them lack depth. Their chief function is to reveal the religious philosophy of the Chorus which complements their political philosophy. They are fatalists and see humans as the victims of unpitying gods who dispense unmerited evils or punish faults which they themselves provoked by blinding the guilty. Resigned submission to the gods corresponds to their servile loyalty to the person holding power. In her view, the first stasimon cannot be a eulogy of man's genius because that would not reflect the religious beliefs of the Chorus, unless it represents the humanistic fervour of the poet. This latter view she rejects because it is not his practice to speak in his own voice nor would such a hymn be appropriate at this point. The ode is in fact an unrelenting criticism of man's audacity, such as was evidenced in the burial of Polyneices. Confusing justice with human laws, they believe that all disobedience is sacrilege. In the second stasimon, their notion of piety is nothing but a passive adoration of divine omnipotence, a view of life which takes away from humans all initiative and hope. The third stasimon is an elaboration of a commonplace topic and shows the mediocrity of their thinking. The mythological exempla of the fourth stasimon turn the attention of the spectator away from Antigone and dilute the pathos of her death. The last stasimon, which could have been the occasion for these pious men to sing about the justice of the gods and

the respect due to the dead, is absolutely void of thought and feeling, without any dramatic or emotional value, nothing but a musical interlude. The odes, in Ronnet's view, are the only weakness of the play because they constantly tend to express generalities. They contain beautiful images rather than convey emotion. On each occasion they risk becoming simple interludes between episodes.²

In Vickers' analysis of the play, he rarely mentions the odes. He says that the Chorus are not representative of the people, which is unique for a chorus in Greek tragedy. They are Creon's handpicked supporters who are conservative and, more importantly, uncritical of their king. As such, they are discredited observers of the action. For example, they tell Antigone that she is suffering, not because of Creon, but for the crimes of her father. After Haemon storms off, they make an irrelevant deduction about his motives. It is apparent that they have not been listening to what he has been saying. When Antigone ends her final speech with the balanced remark that either she may be wrong and suffering justly, or Creon and his supporters may be in error and should be given the same punishment as she herself is receiving (925 ff.), they dismiss her comments as those of the same tempest of mind which ever controls her (929-930). Because of their strong bias, the Chorus are used to isolate the heroine completely, but at the same time, they alienate us or compel us to regard them with deep suspicion.³

One of the scholars who do not believe that the Chorus are irrelevant is Kirkwood. He maintains that they are important for the thought of the play and sees them in a much more positive light than these other scholars. In his view, they are personally interested in what is happening and react to events with a regard for religious rectitude and the welfare and stability of the state. They admire Antigone's piety and from the beginning have doubts about Creon's edict, but they believe it is right to abide by the laws of the land and censure her disobedience as headstrong and ill-judged. When they become convinced by the words of Tiresias that the edict is blasphemous, they tell Creon that he must yield. Their final lines, which are a condemnation

of Creon, and their judgement of Antigone in which they are divided between sympathy and reproach (872-875), form a pair of comments of great significance for the theme of the play.⁴

Burton also believes that the Chorus contribute to our understanding. In the first and second stasima, they develop great themes which arise from the preceding scene. In the former, they acclaim how "formidable" man is,⁵ which reflects contemporary ideas; in the latter, they ponder the destruction of a house by an inherited curse, an ancient theme which employs Aeschylean imagery and thinking. These odes are not merely related to the immediate context but range beyond it, illuminating matters of deep and enduring significance underlying the action. Furthermore, they suggest political and religious ideals by which to judge the characters and with which they are in conflict. They are also powerful instruments of dramatic irony. The hymn to Eros, unlike the first two stasima, ignores the implications of the previous episode, but introduces a motive that could not be brought in earlier without weakening Haemon's case. Only the fourth stasimon contributes little or nothing to our understanding of the action and is almost an intermezzo. The fifth, while not contributing any new ideas, is closely connected with the preceding action and strongly influences the emotions of the audience. In short, the lyrics move away from generalized reflection on the deep issues that lie beneath the action to emotional effects appropriate for particular moments.⁶

Griffith emphasizes the ambiguity of the lyric poetry in the play. Rather than merely presenting the viewpoint of the Chorus, the odes sometimes offer two distinct layers of signification. The primary or "surface" meaning is what the Chorus intend, while a secondary meaning is suggested ironically, or subversively, something we are meant to notice although the Chorus do not "intend" it (first and third stasima). Other times, there is no primary interpretation but a multiplicity of signification which constitutes the "meaning" of the passage (second and fourth stasima). The songs habitually confound our expectations and are multi-layered and open-ended. It is often difficult to extract one opinion or a definite interpretation,

because the language is rich and suggestive, the subject-matter far-ranging and abstract. Within the dialogue itself, the Chorus have an important function. As representatives of stodgy and conventional normality, their continuous, if half-hearted, support of Creon and their strong disapproval of Antigone and Haemon, mixed with some pity, direct us to formulate our own ambivalent responses. Our assessment of them as commentators on the action and our response to their points of view strongly influence our interpretation of the play.⁷

My View: The issues that the Chorus address vary in importance. On the one hand, the second and third stasima do not appear to show an awareness of key issues. In the second stasimon, they do not allude to Antigone's motive for burial, although they do later characterize it as a sort of piety (872). In the third stasimon, they do not consider Haemon's fine points of argument, because they suppose he is under the baleful influence of Eros and thus cannot think clearly. On the other hand, sometimes they do respond to key issues. In the first stasimon, they do not mention the burial, but it is strongly implied, as was shown in the previous chapter, by the language they use (δεινά, δεινότερον, μηχανόεν, τόλμας), the emphasis on the polis, and the reference to laws of the earth. What they do say in the odes, even if it is unexpected and side-steps what we might consider the essential issues, introduces ideas which are pertinent to the action. Man's "formidableness", the destructive powers of *atē* and the blindness it causes, the inescapable and harmful influence of Eros, even the terrible suffering that fate brings – the main themes of the first four stasima – are concepts which the Chorus mention and are applicable to the action. We may not agree with their perspectives but, as Griffith remarks, they compel us to evaluate these perspectives and articulate, in response, our own evaluation of the principal characters.⁸ The first stasimon, strongly political, and the second stasimon, deeply religious, indicate the concern of the Chorus for the prosperity of the city and for proper human behaviour which involves the recognition of limits and piety toward the gods. These are

important issues and, as Burton notes, involve political and religious standards to be used in our assessment of Creon and Antigone.⁹

As can be seen from the summaries of scholarly opinion above, there is no agreement about the personality of the Chorus. While Gardiner's contention that they care little about the burial¹⁰ is an extreme reaction and cannot be substantiated and Vicker's remark that they are completely uncritical¹¹ of Creon ignores certain of their comments which hint at differences of opinion, it is not critical for the question of the odes' relevance what exactly it is they believe. Naturally, we endeavour to determine their thinking toward the protagonists with what evidence we have, so as to interpret their lyrics better. In the previous chapter, I characterized them as disapproving of but somewhat sympathetic to Antigone, loyal to Creon as head of the state, but not without qualms about his current policies. This characterization is closer to Kirkwood's assessment than Ronnet's. But it has long been apparent to readers that there are numerous double references in the odes, many of which I pointed out in my previous discussion. Therefore, we are hearing not only the particular views of the Chorus about Antigone, but also unwitting, or less likely, deliberately subtle criticisms of Creon. Such ambiguity gives the odes an extra dimension, greatly expanding their meaning, allowing them to be interpreted in different ways. Because the odes are lyric poetry, their language is often more suggestive than precise, general instead of specific, which qualities make expressions with double references possible. The scholars who dismiss the odes as irrelevant because the Chorus are biased and blind to the ethical issues fail to take into account this aspect of the odes.

Since the first and fourth stasimon are the subjects of a major and minor issue respectively, I shall discuss the relevance of the other odes and the final lines of the play. The concept of *atē*, which figures so largely in the second stasimon, was shown previously to fit Antigone in part, but to apply more appropriately to Creon, who clearly is mistaking "evil" for "good" and will be shown to be in the wrong by Tiresias. Antigone is not usually considered to

be suffering from *atē* because the burial of her brother is not a transgression, an “Erinyes in the mind”, but an act of *philia* and a courageous gesture. But I mentioned that the association of the concept with destruction and troubles passing from one generation to another clearly applies to her family, whose history was earlier recounted in the prologue. Part of the family history is also later recounted by Antigone in the *kommos* (857 ff.), but in this second version, the word *atē* appears. In describing her parents marriage, she says: ἰὼ ματρῶναι λέκτρων ἅ- | ται κοιμήματά τ’ αὐτογέν- | νητ’ ἐμῷ πατρὶ δυσμόρου ματρός· | οἴων ἐγὼ ποθ’ ἅ ταλαίφρων ἔφυν· 863-866, (my translation) “Ah, the *atē* of a mother’s marriage and the incestuous intercourse of an ill-fated mother with my father. From such parents was I born, miserable one.” According to this description of her family history, Antigone may be thought to be suffering from some form of *atē*, which she has inherited from her parents. If my suggestion, mentioned in Chapter Four,¹² that with the word *apatē* in line 617 (πολλοῖς δ’ ἀπάτα κουφονόων ἐρώτων, “to many the deception of thoughtless longings”), some reference to *atē* may be present, Antigone can be considered to have been misled by “trivial Eros”. Although she has clearly done the right thing in burying her brother, her mind nonetheless seems to be in a distorted state.

The battle between the Argives and the Thebans, as depicted in the *parodos*, does not relate particularly to Antigone and Creon, except as a metaphor for conflict. The picture of the gods, however, in full support of the city contrasts strongly with their later turning away from the city when their altars are fouled by the flesh of the exposed corpses. This contrast emphasizes Creon’s impious act. As well, the theme of arrogance and boastfulness punished foreshadows his terrible downfall. Capaneus being struck down from the top of the wall just when he is about to cry victory has parallels with Creon, who has just assumed supreme power and is confident in his abilities to govern and defeat any opposition to his rule. “Zeus”, they chant in anapests, “detests the boasts of a proud tongue” (Ζεὺς γὰρ μεγάλης γλώσσης

κόμπους | ὑπερεχθαίρει: 127-128), words which are echoed in the final anapests. With Creon in mind, the Chorus conclude the play by saying: “the great words of boasters are always punished with great blows, and as they grow old teach them wisdom” (μεγάλας πληγὰς τῶν ὑπεραύχων | ἀποτείσαντες | γήρᾳ τὸ φρονεῖν ἐδίδαξαν: 1351-1353). Since the maxim preceding these words advises the avoidance of impiety towards the gods, it is noteworthy that the Chorus begin and end the play with a common but relevant idea: the gods punish those who display overweening pride.

A few comments should be made about the relevance of the concluding anapests to the important theme of τὸ φρονεῖν (“thinking properly”). The process described in these lines is what happens to someone who has to be taught because he will not learn on his own. The final word ἐδίδαξαν in fact suggests its complement, μανθάνω. Earlier in the play, Haemon who tells his father that “for a man, even if he is wise, there is no shame to learn (τὸ μανθάνειν) many things and not to be over-rigid” (710-711) and “it is a good to learn (τὸ μανθάνειν) from those giving good advice” (723). He supports his advice with images of yielding. The trees which bend with the wind do not snap and ships whose sails are not too tight are not capsized. Tiresias informs Creon that (my translation) “it is most sweet to learn (τὸ μανθάνειν) from one giving good advice, if his words bring profit” (1030-1031) and that all men make mistakes. Their real error is in remaining fixed, because stubbornness breeds stupidity. Thus the final lines point back to other statements about learning wisdom, statements which advise flexibility and listening to others.

The final point to be made about the relevance of the odes concerns the third, fourth, and fifth stasima. The presence of Eros/Aphrodite in the third, Dionysos in the fourth, who appears simply as “the god” (τὸν θεόν: 961) in the myth about Lycurgus, and Dionysos, again, in the fifth, to whom the hymn is addressed, point to the increasing irrationality in the action. Eros is

said to make people mad (ὁ δ' ἔχων μέμνηεν: 790) and “wrench just men’s minds aside from justice, doing them violence” (791-792). The role of Dionysos in the myth is not clear, either punishing “mad” Lycurgus for trying to prohibit the god’s cult, or inflicting madness as a punishment for the offense. In either scenario, the god is associated with madness. The hints at the darker side of the god which are present in the fifth stasimon were detailed in Chapter Four. This emphasis on madness and frenzy in the final odes foreshadows similar behaviour in the action. In the exodos there are three suicides and one attempted murder. Antigone’s suicide, perhaps, should not be termed irrational since, not believing that Creon would ever change his mind, she had to choose between killing herself or slowly starving to death. The other two suicides, on the contrary, were the result of emotions of grief and anger overwhelming reason (and dramatically necessary for Creon’s tragedy). Haemon, who vowed earlier never to see his father again, is so enraged when he does that he “glares at him with savage eyes” (1231), and “spits in his face” (1232), before trying to kill him. His death is grisly, as he leans on his sword and drives half of it into his side and then clasps his dead fiancé in the bend of one arm. Eurydice’s suicide is hardly less lurid or hateful. When she learns of her son’s death, she stabs herself below the liver, cursing her husband as a son-killer.

2. The Relation of the First Stasimon to Themes of the Play

Problem: Although greatly admired, the first stasimon’s relation to the rest of the play has perplexed many. It can function as an independent poem and in fact is often anthologized. While the tie to the burial which gives rise to the ode, even if not made explicit, is easily understood, the ode, especially the opening three strophes in which man’s evolutionary progress and achievements are recounted, does not seem pertinent to important themes of the play.

Scholarly Opinion: According to Waldock, the stasimon is a filler between the guard’s exit and his return. It would have undoubtedly charmed the audience but its irrelevance cannot be questioned. The warning contained in the final antistrophe is a hasty attempt to connect it to the

action before the song is finished. The thinking of the Chorus is muffled and hazy. The very offense that they spoke of with awe a short while before is now seen to be an act of anarchy and a menace to civilized order. Because such a reaction is overblown and contradicts what they believed moments ago, and because the real issue is untouched, the first stasimon serves as a warning that the Chorus cannot be taken too seriously.¹³

Crane acknowledges that the relation of the first three strophes to the play is problematic because of the optimism in them. Why such a mood if the Chorus do not admire the person who buried Polyneices? A possible solution is to stress the ambiguity of δεινός, like Ronnet (as described above), and interpret the stasimon as a criticism of man. Another solution is to admit that they have no connection with the rest of the play. The former he finds unacceptable because it ignores the clearly positive elements within the ode. As a refutation of the latter, he proposes that the Chorus at this point in the play see Creon as an innovative and high-minded ruler and are associating him with progressive political ideas current at the time, ideas which stem from Protagoras, whose thinking is reflected in the ode, and the founding of the new, panhellenic colony, Thurii, whose constitution Protagoras may have written.

Creon's enlightened political ideas are set out in his first speech. He will fearlessly follow the best policies (178-180) and not put personal friendships before the interests of the state (182-183). When it is functioning properly, only then can friendships flourish (189-190). These selfless principles may not be the subject of the first three stanzas but they are its point of departure. The shift from triumph to danger which occurs in the final stanza parallels the change in the previous episode, from the initial idealism to the revelation that the decree has been defied. This shift to the negative also anticipates Creon's own development within the play. As well, his eventual status as social outcast within the city is foreshadowed by the conclusion of the ode.¹⁴

McDevitt finds the ode rich in implications and secondary levels of meaning. At one level, the Chorus are saying that because man has the power to impose his will on the world of nature and shape his environment for his own purposes, he has the moral responsibility of choosing how to use that power. He has to choose all the time between good and evil. Since the welfare of the city is their chief concern, good consists in upholding the laws of the land (i.e. Creon's decree) and the justice of the gods. But as a direct expression of support for Creon, the ode also ironically suggests that Creon's moral judgement may be at fault. The Chorus unintentionally recall Creon by the language they use in the ode. The ability to sail the sea and to tame and yoke animals are two of man's major achievements. Thebes itself is likened to a ship (162-163, 189-190) and Creon its helmsman, who, in a different metaphor, imposes the yoke of slavery on the necks of his subjects (291-292). "The temper which rules cities" (ἄστυνόμους ὀργάζει: 355-356) would naturally be found in a ruler.

The φρόνημα man has taught himself (355) has been linked by Creon to laws and government, for only through these can men's thoughts be known (175-177). If, however, there is no correspondence between man-made and divine law, then Creon is the one failing in right conduct. This implication is made explicit when Antigone speaks of the Unwritten Laws and is ultimately validated by later developments. There is also a still deeper level of suggestion in which the ode is not applicable to Creon at all. He does not successfully sail the sea but steers his ship to the "harbour of Hades" (1284). His "thought" is not "wind-swift" and therefore worthy of wonder, but proven to be in error (1261). Rather than curing diseases, he inflicts them on the city (1015). It is Antigone who transcends the limits imposed by her environment, whose conception of law is right, and who overcomes all obstacles but death, in asserting her will. She exemplifies this capacity for greatness which is suggested by the glorious achievements of the paean.¹⁵

The first stasimon, in Segal's view, expands the meaning of the conflict from one involving human relations to basic attitudes to the whole of existence. Sophocles, while drawing on the optimistic rationalism of the Sophists, sees in reason and technical control a potential source of human bondage. The praise of man's intellectual achievement is not unreserved and without qualification. In addition to the ambiguity of δεινός, there is also ὀργός (356), which has been used to mean "anger" (280) and φρόνημα (355), which also signifies "pride" (459). The image of control, evident in the description of man's progress, applies directly to Creon, who tries to dominate everyone. But the world of nature will be shown to be not so easily controllable. For example, the birds (342-343) are the messengers of a violated divine order, and Antigone herself, when in defiance performs the second burial, is likened to a mother bird. Instead of curing diseases (363-364), he brings sickness (noted by McDevitt also). He cannot even tame wild animals (348-352) since Haemon, described as if he were an animal who has lost the power of speech (1231-1232), tries to kill him. This qualification, in the course of the play, of the view of man implied in the ode results in a clearer definition of human greatness, in which the masculine joins with the feminine, rationalism is tempered by the value of affection and emotional ties, and weakness and uncertainty is acknowledged. It only reaches its full measure when confronted by its own negation in death. The image of human greatness persists in the figure of Antigone rather than Creon.¹⁶

My View: Waldock's opinion that the stasimon is mere filler is the result of a cursory reading which does not take into account the suggestiveness of the language and the unintended, ironic, references to Creon. Such a charge can sometimes be made against Euripides but Sophocles always takes care to relate his odes to the play. His odes are never diversions to pass the time until there is a new development in the action. By believing that the final antistrophe is a sudden effort by the poet to relate the ode to the play, he fails to consider that the poem is a unified whole, with a strong rising motion from simpler to more complex achievements,

culminating in the polis, which, in the view of the Chorus, is now under attack. One of the reasons why Waldock concludes that the Chorus can be largely ignored is that in the stasimon they are contradicting what they said previously about the burial. Kirkwood also takes exception to this alleged contradiction, but explains it away by maintaining that the Chorus in the stasimon are not passing judgement on the act of burial.¹⁷ But the comment of the Chorus about possible divine intervention is used to plant doubt in our minds about the piety of the decree and to show the violence of Creon's reaction. Creon also has to be seen convincing the Chorus of the decree's validity, which he does subsequently, so as to reinforce the notion that the decree is his alone and does not have any support initially. In the final scene, Creon, Eurydice, and the Chorus all remark that the catastrophe was caused by Creon and no one else. So as the Chorus sing the stasimon, they believe that the laws of the city and divine justice are in agreement.

Crane's contention that the Chorus are identifying Creon as a high-minded and innovative ruler is far from convincing. Granted, the thinking of Protagoras had a strong influence on the composition, if not the purpose, of the ode.¹⁸ Whether he was responsible for progressive political constitutions is a reasonable conjecture, but still uncertain. That the Chorus believe at this point that Creon is a practitioner of progressive politics, however, is not supported by the play. Although it has not yet been demonstrated that his political maxims are completely hollow, he has already shown signs of low-minded, autocratic behaviour. He immediately suspected the guard of bribery without any evidence and threatened him with death. The decree itself hardly represents innovative rule but rather the contrary, barbarism. The exposure of the corpse to dogs and birds of prey has been mentioned three times already, a strong indication that the decree is harsh and uncivilized.¹⁹ The Chorus, thinking that Creon wants them to guard the corpse, are reluctant to take on the task, alleging old age as an excuse. They thereby show their lack of enthusiasm for the decree. Furthermore, Creon has been portrayed as a ruler who

inspires fear, a traditional way for autocrats to govern. When he announces the decree, the Chorus appear hesitant to voice their opinion and merely say that it is within his power to so command.²⁰ They know, without being told, that the penalty for violating it is death. None of the guards wants to convey the news about the burial to Creon because of the fear of being put to death. Therefore, it is hardly credible that the Chorus see him as promoting new, advanced principles of governing.

While the optimism apparent in the first three strophes is appropriate for the Chorus because these are the achievements which are necessary for communal life as represented in the polis, the use of certain words, as Segal points out, tempers this mood, not explicitly, but subtly. Even if the achievements recounted are praiseworthy, calling δεινότης at the beginning of the final antistrophe a σοφόν τι ("a clever thing") and τὸ μηχανόεν τέχνας ὑπὲρ ἐλπίδ' ("the contrivance of art beyond hope") immediately casts doubt on the glory of these achievements, as if they were merely technical, material accomplishments. Certainly, the absence of the gods (apart from the Earth who is ploughed and Hades, a synonym for death) in the evolutionary development of man which the Chorus present, is also a warning that the optimism in man's ability to make continuous progress is less than whole-hearted. The Chorus in the parodos revealed how conscious they were of the intervention of the divine in human affairs. Yet their piety is noticeably missing from the first three quarters of the ode and does not present itself until the mention of the "sworn justice of the gods" in the final antistrophe.

Consequently, when they qualify their optimism outright, saying that both good and evil purposes are served by δεινότης, it is not an abrupt change, a "hasty attempt" at relevance, but flows from signals that have already been given. What they are making explicit is that δεινότης is amoral, a capability that can be directed toward many types of achievements, both good and bad. If the former, this capability is "wonderful"; if the latter, then it is "terrible". This

potential is as likely to be negative as positive unless there is respect for other humans, expressed in obedience to the laws, and a recognition of human limitation by piety toward the gods, in which case it is directed toward beneficial ends. In the following stasimon, the Chorus add, to complicate matters, that often “evil” is mistaken for “good”. This moral range for human potentiality applies to both protagonists. Creon, who does not listen to others but thinks what he is doing is both right and beneficial for the city, acts the tyrant, bringing pollution to the city and causing three suicides. He has the opportunity of restoring peace to Thebes after the victory against the Argives but misuses his position of power as a means of enforcing his will, with deadly consequences.

Antigone’s burial of her brother is shown to be in accord with the will of the gods. Her action is courageous and her refusal to be intimidated by Creon admirable. She does what is right (i.e. the body ought to be buried), but her greatness is problematic, which McDevitt and Segal fail to address. She does not act from the purest motives, since she claims she would not have obeyed the “divine laws” if the corpse had been a husband or child.²¹ She also has had an unhappy life and to a certain degree courts death as a release from her troubles. Moreover, we misunderstand her if we see her as a Christian martyr. The Greek gods do not ask humans to die for them. If she had done nothing, by the logic of the play, Polyneices would still have been buried because Tiresias would have communicated the gods’ displeasure at the desecration of the body. Therefore, while the Chorus made a simple contrast between “good” and “evil”, the actions of Antigone and Creon are not completely one or the other, although clearly Antigone is in the right and Creon in the wrong.

Another important relevance of the stasimon stems from the applicability of many words and phrases to Creon. Since they have already been pointed out, there is no need to repeat them here. I would add that there is already considerable doubt at this point about the propriety of the decree so that the implication that Creon is “moving toward evil” is quite strong. Segal is

correct to see in man's progress, as outlined in the ode, the elements of control and mastery, which when applied to Creon assume sinister connotations. Creon is obsessed with control but rather than over nature and animals, spheres which need to be controlled if humans are to get beyond a primitive stage of existence, it is over men and women. The yoke reference (351), as was mentioned in the previous chapter, is almost a repetition of his own words (291-292). He tries to extend political control over areas that are outside the domain of politics. He violates the sanctity of burial and discovers that his ability to dominate has its limits. Birds give signs that the city is polluted, a "mother bird" defies his edict, sacrifices to the gods no longer burn, his own son, likened to a wild animal, tries to murder him. He transgresses the proper bounds of power and tries unsuccessfully to manipulate bonds of affection so as to make them conform to his own narrow, political ideology. The subsequent use of imagery from the ode to describe rebellion and wildness, in opposition to Creon's attempted control, is extremely effective. Although it is only in retrospect that the theme of control is made clear, it extends the meaning of the ode to an important theme in the play. Being mere mortals who are subject to the will of the gods, we cannot expect to exercise complete control over our lives. We must recognize our human limitations, even if many of our accomplishments are wonderful and beyond our expectations.

Minor Issues

3. The Nature of What the Chorus Say

Problem: The odes are rich in thought and suggestiveness. Why do the Chorus speak as they do? Do they fully understand what they are saying? Are they in some measure an instrument of the poet, who uses the odes to highlight themes and direct our attention to important issues?

Scholarly Opinion: Winnington-Ingram believes that in the plays of Sophocles, the characterization of choruses in Sophocles is in general consistent and while not detailed,

operates within appropriate limits, which vary from play to play. But according to him, the odes are so important structurally and thematically that the connection between the songs and the character of the singers may become rather tenuous. Although the attitudes and sympathies of a typical Sophoclean chorus tend to be straightforward and readily explicable, the Chorus of the *Antigone* are different. In regard to Creon they veer from ostensible, if not unreserved, support to a measure of censure. Toward Antigone, it is difficult to determine the nature and degree of their sympathy.²² Although he does not directly address the question, according to his reasoning, the vagueness of their position and the strained link to character complicate the distinction in the odes between what they intend to say and what meanings are conveyed.

Commenting on the ambivalence of the phrase in the first stasimon νόμους ... χθονὸς | θεῶν τ' ἔνορκον δίκαν, which, in one interpretation, would show they are supporting Creon, in another, that they favour Antigone, Else writes: "... on which side does the chorus stand? Which does it mean? But the question is misplaced and idle. ... There is simply no use asking what the chorus 'means,' as if it were an individual with a definable ἦθος and διάνοια. The chorus means what it says, no more and no less, and if what it says can carry two quite different meanings, then it means both – unless and until the development of the play establishes one of them as right."²³

To Bernardete, the Chorus are continually shifting perspective. They move effortlessly from the unlimited power of man to the unlimited power of Eros, totally persuaded of each at the moment, but they never reconcile the thought of their odes. In his view, they never understand anything of what they say. They are merely the mouthpiece of wisdom, without being wise themselves.²⁴

At one level of interpretation, according to Kamerbeek, the words of a Sophoclean Chorus are always consistent with their general characteristics and what they can be expected to know

of the action. But the songs are not only comments by ordinary human beings about the actions and situations of heroic protagonists far different from themselves. They are also the reflections of the poet on aspects of the human condition as dramatized in the tragedy. If at times ambiguity exists, it is put there by the poet. It does not reflect a double perspective on the part of the Chorus.²⁵

For Griffith, the Chorus are remarkable for combining obtuseness with insight. Likening them to archers, he says they have an uncanny ability to miss the nearest target completely, but score a bull's eye on another target at which they are not even aiming.²⁶

My View: My three questions are: Why do the Chorus speak as they do? Do they fully grasp what they say? To what degree, if any, are they an instrument used by Sophocles to highlight key issues? As men of wisdom and yet filled with fear of Creon, the Chorus appear to speak often with deliberate ambiguity because he is present. This partly explains why they speak as they do. The odes are full of double references and multiple meanings. Of these, the Chorus are probably not fully cognizant. They are consequently in some measure an instrument that Sophocles uses to present important issues in the play.

A different approach is that put forward by Else, who asserts that the Chorus do not have a defined character and viewpoint. In the odes they are thus characterless lyric voices, which the poet can use for his own dramatic purposes. Bernardete comes to a similar conclusion. If, as he says, they constantly shift from one perspective to another, without attempting to harmonize their thoughts, that must mean that there is no coherent character reflected in the odes.

Winnington-Ingram's proposes a less extreme variation by claiming that the character of the singers is sometimes only dimly perceived in the odes. On those occasions, they are more the instruments of the poet – to create mood, to reinforce themes, to be allusive – than characters in the action.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the thinking of the Chorus is to some degree perceptible in the odes. They give thanks to the gods for the Theban victory in the parodos. They disapprove of the burial in the first stasimon. They think Antigone is suffering from *atē* in the second. They believe Haemon is blinded by Eros in the third. They advise Antigone to accept her fate in the fourth, and pray that Dionysos may come and heal the city in the final stasimon. Such thinking may be straightforward and avoid important ethical considerations, but it reflects their concern for the city, their support of Creon, and their disapproval of Antigone. Therefore, I do not agree that their character is entirely lost or only tenuously present in the lyrics.

The odes, however, convey much more than the straightforward thinking of the Chorus. Unintended references to Creon, foreshadowing, explorations of themes, suggestiveness – these all form part of what the wise and pious Elders say. Here we detect the great artistry of the poet, not speaking in his own voice exactly, but shaping the thought of the Chorus in words that elicit other meanings. The play would be far less interesting if the odes were merely the uncomplicated thoughts of the Chorus, who might then appear unable to judge the conflict adequately. In such a case, we could largely ignore the odes because the ideas contained in them would be rather thin and would offer little insight into the drama. Fortunately, the poetic skills of Sophocles have made them multi-layered and open to different interpretations. There is a distinction, therefore, between what they may intend and what they unintentionally suggest. Since they are not aware of all the possible secondary meanings, they do not understand all they say.

The unexpectedness of some of the odes is an indication that the Chorus are not just reacting to the situation but are being manipulated to some extent by the poet in order to direct our thoughts to important issues underlying the action. Is it not surprising to hear an ode that begins with man's amazing achievements, from a Chorus who wish to convey their censure of the

burial? Is not the hymn about the universality and inescapability of Eros an interesting and thought-provoking reaction to the conflict between Creon and Haemon? The range of the odes is another indication that they transcend the specific horizons of the Chorus. They borrow ideas from current thinking (Protagorean and Sophistic concepts)²⁷ and traditional thinking (the power of Eros), and are rich in mythological references (parodos, fourth and fifth stasimon). The inherited curse which passes down from one generation to the next is Aeschylean in thought.²⁸ While the parodos and the fifth stasimon are the most characteristic of the Chorus, reflecting their piety and patriotism, the other odes are less so, yet still conveying on one level their thinking about Antigone and Haemon. It is an amazing achievement that the odes, especially the middle ones, are both the thoughts and more than the thoughts of the Chorus.

4. The Attitude of the Chorus to Antigone

Problem: The Chorus show only moderate sympathy for Antigone. Haemon, however, mentions that the city fully supports what she did and is lamenting her punishment. Are the Chorus different from all the other citizens and unrepresentative of common morality? Would whatever support they seem to give to Creon have appeared extreme to members of the original audience and alienated them?

Scholarly Opinion: Vickers, as was indicated above in the summary of scholarly opinion on the relevance of the Chorus, thinks they are very unrepresentative and mere toadies of Creon. Gardiner also believes that the Theban elders differ from average citizens. They have been summoned by Creon because of their continuing loyalty to the royal house, not because they are representative of the Theban people. Nevertheless, she thinks that as mature men of standing in the city, they bring a broad political significance to the conflict. She describes them as pious individuals, who are at the same time passive, fearful, and very much concerned with their own survival.²⁹

A contrary view is put forward by Kirkwood, who describes the men of the Chorus as impartial and judicious, and thinks that they represent the view of law-abiding Thebans. They are concerned about what is happening and take an interest in both the laws of Thebes and acts of human decency. But Antigone has broken what is, right or wrong, a law of Thebes, which explains their judgmental attitude toward her.³⁰

Winnington-Ingram says that Haemon must be believed when he says that the city mourns for her and regards her actions as most praiseworthy. Although a Chorus of elders would normally be expected to voice the sentiments of the polis, the isolation of Antigone is an essential dramatic requirement. To accomplish this end, the heroine is given a male chorus who cannot speak freely. As males, they are naturally opposed to a woman's boldness. As councillors to the throne, they value more highly the maintenance of authority than the common people of whom Haemon speaks.³¹

According to Griffith, few members of the original audience would have been likely to have identified completely with either protagonist. Their relationship to the action would have been similar to those whom he calls the "internal audience of the play" (i.e. the guard, the messenger, and the Chorus). Notwithstanding their limitations, the circumspect and complacent Chorus represent a normal perspective, especially near the end of the play.³²

My View: Although they say nothing against Creon for most of the play, the Chorus give hints that they do not fully agree with him. Such hints include the neutral tone of their reaction to the announcement of the edict, their sympathetic description of Ismene when she reenters, their questioning Creon if he intends to kill both sisters, and their tears of sorrow when Antigone is led out to her death. They are evidently more moderate in their views than Creon and do not share his extreme hostility toward Antigone or Ismene. As I have already noted, there are indications that they are reticent about expressing themselves out of fear. This timidity, to be sure, emphasizes strongly the autocratic and ruthless nature of Creon. Allegiance to the ruler

has always been their political creed, but it is reasonable to suppose that fear prevents them from saying that the punishment of Antigone is harsh and excessive. When Creon, uneasy about the dire predictions of Tiresias, asks them what he should do, their uneasiness about his policies is finally expressed, as they compare him to “those who think mistakenly” (τοὺς κακόφρονας: 1104).

Unless we have good reasons to suppose that Haemon’s remark about Antigone’s popularity among the general populace is false, we must accept the fact that the reaction of the Chorus to Antigone is somewhat different from that of the common people. They refer to her “thoughtlessness” (383), “savage nature” (471), and “folly in speech and Erinys in the mind” (603). Although they agree that her action was pious (872), they censure her independence, aggressiveness, and exclusive devotion to her family (or those whom she recognizes as her family). What they see in her character leads them to express their disapproval of her.

Their difference from the common people does not mean that they are unrepresentative in their reaction to Antigone, only that their thinking is shaped by different concerns. They place the utmost importance on the respect for law and loyalty to the ruler, even if the latter, in their case, is tempered by fear. There is also another reason for their distance from Antigone, which was probably shared by many in the ancient audience. Although they do not express it, this male Chorus presumably disapprove of a woman’s defiance of male authority.³³ Therefore, their allegiance to Creon, stemming from the importance they place on political obedience as a means of promoting the welfare of the city, and from their displeasure at Antigone’s “unfeminine” assertiveness, would not appear unreasonable.

In some way, the failure of the Chorus to comprehend fully the nature of a hero is typical of a Sophoclean Chorus. They do not find Antigone easy to understand because she does not act in accordance with their everyday morality. Whether her isolation is a necessity is another matter. It is an element of the play Sophocles has chosen to write, but this isolation need not be a way of

increasing her heroic grandeur. It can as easily be attributed to her harsh, uncompromising nature. As Winnington-Ingram himself writes: "How well we know her, and how well we are rid of her!"³⁴ Therefore, the Chorus' distance from her may reflect partially our own. We may admire her courage and her refusal to be intimidated by Creon, qualities which are in contrast to those of the Chorus. But we may not find her particularly likeable. We may also fail to find her willingness to die for the sake of burying her brother particularly worthy of great admiration and praise. We may also note that Tiresias reports that the gods condemn Creon for his actions (1015, 1068 ff.) but never says that Antigone was right to act as she did.

5. The Interpretations of the Fourth Stasimon

Problem: As was said previously, it is difficult to understand the implications of the fourth stasimon because uncertainty exists in regard to the second and especially the third myth. While the idea that fate may bring suffering is stated twice and is evidently a major theme, it is not clear why these three myths have been chosen and what they signify. Various interpretations of the ode have been offered.

Scholarly Opinion: For Bowra, the stasimon shows the Chorus wavering. The change in Antigone that was apparent in the kommos, has left them puzzled and uneasy. They can no longer accuse her of arrogant obstinacy, but come to no definite conclusions. The three stories seem to suggest different interpretations, any one of which may be right.³⁵ Gellie, on the contrary, maintains that the Chorus remain dispassionate. He believes that it is impossible to discover precise connections to the action because of the expansiveness of the story telling at a point of rest. The ode's principal purpose is the evocation of darkness, both of the cavern and of death itself, to which Antigone is being led.³⁶ According to Else, Sophocles has intentionally kept the stasimon low-key and its content fairly unimportant at this break in the action. Perhaps we are not supposed to listen too carefully to the mythological exempla. Perhaps the stasimon is one of the poet's less successful efforts.³⁷

In McDevitt's view, there is a sharp distinction between what the Chorus intend and what they unknowingly imply. They mean to apply all three exempla to Antigone, but since many of the details do not fit her and the parallels are banal, their understanding of her is seen to be inept. The disparity between Danaë's eventual good fortune and Antigone's anticipated death shows their insensitivity and tactlessness. Although they do not mention the guilt or innocence of the victims and therefore are not here passing judgment on Antigone, the myths, when applied to her, imply otherwise. Danaë and Cleopatra were not responsible for their suffering, while Lycurgus brought on his troubles. The three myths reinforce Antigone's essential innocence, the first and third as positive exempla, the second as a negative exemplum. The ode is also rich in ironies and resonances. These include the image of the yoke, the realization of error, marriage, wild nature versus civilization, knowledge and ignorance, sight and blindness.³⁸

Sourvinou-Inwood does not distinguish between intended and unintended meanings because the stasimon represents for her a much more negative appraisal of Antigone. In the first myth, the ancient audience would have differentiated between Danaë, who was a passive victim, and Antigone, who initiated her own punishment by assuming the role of a (rebellious) male acting against the polis. The second myth, which shifts from a comparison with Antigone to closer references to Creon, emphasizes learning and healing. Both Lycurgus and Creon made mistakes of which they were unaware, because knowledge of divinity is fraught with uncertainty. In the myth, Antigone is represented by the Maenads, who too leave their house and embrace "madness" and disorder.

The figure of Cleopatra in the third story is an ambivalent figure, not only because of the wildness of the setting, but more importantly because of the ambiguity of the reference to the "savage wife", who could be the mother or the step-mother. Since the guilt of Phineus is in no way implied, there is no "bad father", only a "bad mother" in the story. Antigone is also a "bad mother" because she favours brothers over sons and kills her future sons by renouncing Eros

and choosing to die for a dead brother. The first and third paradigms relate expressly to Antigone because of the invocations of ὦ παῖ in them. As well, only in these two myths is fate a factor since mention of it is omitted in the middle story. All three paradigms are concerned about not seeing properly and the rising pitch of parent-child hostility in the ode (only implied in the Lycurgus myth) suggests the destruction of the Labdacids.³⁹

My View: Although the stasimon comes at a pause in the action, it is unlikely that the stories lack significance, having merely the purpose of creating mood and being only loosely connected to the play. The principal problem of interpretation is our ignorance of what versions of the second and third myth were understood by the ancient audience. We do not know how Lycurgus was punished in the *Edoni* of Aeschylus. The two plays that Sophocles wrote about Phineus are not extant. Interpretation, therefore, can only remain speculative. If the myths seem puzzling, it may be due to our ignorance rather than to the ode's failure.

Bowra's belief that the stasimon shows the Chorus wavering is hardly credible. Fifteen lines before (929-930), they made a harsh comment about Antigone and it would be unusually abrupt if they were now moderating their position without any new information. It is true that by addressing her twice as παῖ, they show sympathy. The first apostrophe (949) is double, indicating perhaps greater commiseration, while the second is given extra force because it concludes the ode. Nevertheless, their attitude toward her remains the same. They are exhorting her to submit to her fate, cruel though it might be, by giving examples of people who have suffered for one reason or another.

Sourvinou-Inwood's reading, although interesting, is not completely satisfactory and is sometimes convoluted. She argues that the Chorus by subtle references consciously portray Antigone negatively and Creon positively. In her analysis she overlooks some of the negative references to Creon. The last four lines of the Danaë myth, which are about the inescapability of fate, refer more appropriately, as she says, to Acrisios than Danaë. Acrisios recalls Creon:

both men imprison others and both are father figures, the first a real father, the second, Antigone's *kurios*. Creon, therefore, must be linked to fate also, which would indicate that he cannot escape his doom. The omission of a reference to fate in the second myth, which is most closely associated with him, may then not be significant. The theme of parent-child hostility is more suggestive of the quarrel of Haemon with Creon, which escalates later to murderous rage, than of the Labdacids. The exposure of Oedipus by Laius is never alluded to in the play.

If Cleopatra was the "savage wife", the closing phrase of the stasimon would be perplexing, since it seems to underline her innocence. Sourvinou-Inwood's explanation for that scenario is far-fetched. She says that the Chorus would be then referring to the mental derangement with which the Fates afflicted Cleopatra and which caused her to blind her own children, comparable to the "fury in mind" of Antigone, which induced her to think that the burial of her brother took precedence over the laws of the city. If that were so, Cleopatra would be a figure of horror, which Antigone clearly is not; their "crimes" would be of a different order. If Cleopatra is the offender, the presentation of the myth is extremely condensed and elusive. The association of "bad mother" to Antigone is also not convincing, because of the hyperbole of equating dying a virgin to killing one's future children, and because of the incomparability of the latter with blinding one's own children. Furthermore, members of the ancient audience may not have criticised her for renouncing Eros, because they thought it a malign force which caused people to lose self-control. Since child-bearing is essential for the continued life of the community, however, her preferring to bury a brother whose corpse was being dishonoured, rather than consummate her future marriage to Haemon, would not have been considered a model for female behaviour.

The interpretation of McDevitt is attractive because it recognizes the difference between the thinking of the Chorus and the unintended negative references to Creon, whom they are still supporting. But I do not think that the Chorus are being characterized as inept, insensitive, and

tactless because some details of the myths do not apply to Antigone. They are exhorting her, with sympathy for her plight, to accept her fate, which, in their view, she has brought upon herself to a large degree. These stories provide similarities to, as well as differences from, her own, but that is how mythological comparisons work. Even Niobe, to whom Antigone compared herself, is different in some aspects from the heroine.

The conclusion that Antigone's innocence is reinforced by the ode is possible but is perhaps a little too straightforward, and must remain tentative, given our incomplete knowledge about the versions intended. The inclusion of a negative exemplum between two positive ones, if true, would be unique in Greek literature. The guilt or innocence of Antigone is not in any case a major theme. Of greater importance is the notion of not seeing, common to all three myths, and to which Sourvinou-Inwood draws attention. Danaë no longer sees the heavenly light. Lycurgus fails to recognize Dionysos as a god and in one version of the story, mistakes his son for a vine and kills him. The eyes of Cleopatra's sons are blinded. Sight and blindness is a metaphor for knowledge and ignorance. This metaphor is most apt for Creon who is ignorant of his transgressions and the destruction he is bringing to his family. After the stasimon, blind Tiresias arrives with news of the gods' displeasure at the exposed corpse and the entombed living body. At the beginning of his first speech, he tells Creon: "you shall learn" (γνώσῃ: 998). Only later does he say at what cost.

- ¹ Gardiner, 82-95.
- ² Ronnet, 147-157.
- ³ B. Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy: Drama, Myth, Society* (London: Longman, 1979) 526-546.
- ⁴ Kirkwood, *Sophoclean Drama*, 126-127.
- ⁵ "Formidable" is Burton's translation of δεινός (Burton, 96), a word which, like its Greek counterpart, inspires a range of emotions, from fear, dread, and apprehension, to awe and wonder.
- ⁶ Burton, 136-137.
- ⁷ Griffith, 18-19.
- ⁸ Griffith, 19.
- ⁹ Burton, 136.
- ¹⁰ Gardiner, 87.
- ¹¹ Vickers, 538.
- ¹² See Chapter Four, note 10.
- ¹³ A.J.A. Waldo, *Sophocles the Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966) 112-114.
- ¹⁴ G. Crane, "Creon and the Ode to Man in Sophocles' *Antigone*", *HSPH* 92 (1989): 103-116.
- ¹⁵ A.S. McDevitt, "Sophocles' Praise of Man in the *Antigone*", *Ramus* 1 (1972): 152-164.
- ¹⁶ C. Segal, *Interpreting Greek Tragedy* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986) 137-161, a reprint of "Sophocles' Praise of Man and the Conflicts of the *Antigone*" *Arion* 3, no. 2 (1964): 46-66.
- ¹⁷ "Since the chorus have already expressed a measure of disapproval of Creon's edict and have suggested that the gods had a hand in the burial, it seems impossible that they are now, only a little later, condemning the act in solemn and unequivocal tones." Kirkwood, *Sophoclean Drama*, 207.
- ¹⁸ For sources for the first stasimon, see Burton, 98-101, and G.A. Staley, "The Literary Ancestry of Sophocles' 'Ode to Man'", *CW* 79 (1985): 561-570.
- ¹⁹ The lines are 29-30, 205-206, 257-258.
- ²⁰ The initial position of σοί in the response of the Chorus to Creon's announcement of the edict (211ff.) probably indicates that they have some reservations about it.
- ²¹ See Chapter Four, note 16.
- ²² Winnington-Ingram, 137-138.
- ²³ Else, 45.
- ²⁴ S. Bernardete, "A Reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*, I", *Interpretation* 4 (1975): 166.
- ²⁵ J.C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles, Part III, The Antigone* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978) 14.
- ²⁶ Griffith, 19.
- ²⁷ Burton, 100-101, Crane, 108-111, and Staley, 561.
- ²⁸ Burton, 105 and Else, 15.
- ²⁹ Gardiner, 82-85.
- ³⁰ Kirkwood, *Sophoclean Drama*, 52.
- ³¹ Winnington-Ingram, 138.

³² Griffith, 57.

³³ S.B. Pomeroy notes that in a statement conveying a general truth, but which is specifically about her, Antigone uses a masculine rather than a feminine participle (464), and that in similar types of statements, Creon refers to her by a masculine pronoun (479) and participle (496). She believes that this is a way of characterizing her as a masculine sort of woman. Because in normal Greek usage, masculine references in generalities can denote both male and female, her reasoning is flawed. Nevertheless, even if Antigone is not portrayed as a male figure, Ismene's submission to authority would undoubtedly have been seen by most of the original spectators as more exemplary for a female than Antigone's independence. See S.B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (New York: Schocken, 1975) 99-103.

³⁴ Winnington-Ingram, 128.

³⁵ C. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944) 104-105.

³⁶ G.H. Gellie, *Sophocles: A Reading* (Melbourne: Melbourne Univ. Press, 1972) 48.

³⁷ Else, 68-69.

³⁸ A.S. McDevitt, "Mythological Exempla in the Fourth Stasimon of Sophocles' *Antigone*", *WS* 103 (1990): 31-48.

³⁹ C. Sourvinou-Inwood, "The Fourth Stasimon of Sophocles' *Antigone*", *BICS* 36 (1989): 141-165.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

After examining the choruses in the *Ajax* and the *Antigone*, I determined that there were several significant issues for each play. For the *Ajax*, the major issues were: 1) the contribution, if any, of the Chorus to the play's unity; and 2) their usefulness in our assessment of Ajax. In regard to the first, I said that the similarities in mood and content between the first and third stasima are not sufficient to unify the play. In my discussion of these odes in Chapter Two, I noted that they are in some ways quite different. The first is largely concerned about Ajax, his past and present self, and although it includes elements remote from the present situation, it is strongly anchored in the immediate action. The third, on the contrary, has only a passing reference to Ajax, and is reflective, universal in its theme. Rather than being a response to the preceding scene, it is an interlude in the wrangling. Nor did I think that the Chorus' concern about present circumstances and their fear about the future, emotions which generate tension and a sense of danger, carry far enough into the second part of the play to give it unity. A sense of disunity is provided by the introduction of new characters, a new theme (burial of Ajax), and the lowered tone of language. In my analysis of the role of the Chorus, I observed that the final ode is a reprieve from, rather than a continuation of, the tension, and that their participation in the action diminishes after the discovery of Ajax's corpse. Therefore, the Chorus cannot be said to act as unifying agents for the two parts of the play.

Concerning the second issue – the contribution of the Chorus to our evaluation of Ajax – I acknowledged that their understanding of events is sometimes limited but, nevertheless, they direct to a large extent our response to the hero. In my discussion in Chapter Two, I described them as being unaware of the heroic ideals which motivate Ajax, and confused about his mental state after he recovers from his initial state of delusion. They characterize him as a victim of the gods rather than a would-be assassin who is consumed by resentment and outrage. Not aware of

his true nature, they are easily duped into thinking that Ajax has changed his mind about suicide. But because of their long association with him, they are credible observers of his character. I listed several words and phrases they use to present Ajax as a man with a fiery and harsh temperament, and pointed out that their acknowledgement in the parodos that he might have shown haughtiness and independence toward one of the gods is later shown to be a correct assessment of his character. Their steadfast loyalty to, and utter dependence on, Ajax attest to his grander qualities – his abilities as a leader and protector of his men. They create sympathy for him by their continual concern for his well-being, their grieving over his present condition, and their mourning when he is dead. By never referring to his attempted murder of the Greek leaders, or assigning him any guilt for what he did, they draw our attention away from his crime and thereby help contribute to our positive appraisal of Ajax.

The minor issues in the *Ajax* related to: 1) the meaning of choral self-referentiality; 2) the Chorus' awareness in the first stasimon of Ajax's intention to kill himself; and 3) their identity as soldiers or sailors. I expressed doubt about whether the purpose of choral references to dancing were to remind the ancient audience of the ritual role of the Chorus in the cultic celebration of Dionysos and in so doing, make their experience "more integrated". I questioned whether rituals which were shown to be ineffective promoted cultic worship and suggested that it might do the opposite, if attention were being drawn to their role as ritual performers. Where the reference occurs in the *Ajax*, the audience, instead of contemplating their dual identity, would have more likely pondered the ambiguous words of Ajax's preceding speech and surmised that the joy of the Chorus was ill-founded. I thought a sufficient explanation for the reference is that it is a way of indicating the heightened emotions of the Chorus, which then stand in contrast to the following reversal of fortune.

As for their knowledge of Ajax's imminent suicide, I said in my discussion of the ode in Chapter Two, that the Chorus allude to it by references to "sickness", Hades, "ruin" and by the

description of the funereal-like lamentation of his mother. Ajax has made clear his intention to kill himself too many times already for them to be ignorant of it. I conceded, however, that their awareness is not a primary concern, because while they sing the ode, we believe that Ajax may be ending his life at that very moment or will do so presently, and therefore we interpret their words with this expectation.

Of less significance is the occupation of the Chorus. Since, however, two scholars who have written books on the Sophoclean Chorus thought it worthwhile to state their views about it, I addressed the issue. I maintained in my discussion of their identity in Chapter Two, that they were both soldiers and sailors. The danger they feel to themselves because of Ajax's night assault is more credible if the Chorus are his comrades in battle. The more frequent reminders of their role as sailors call attention to their unheroic nature and their birthplace, Salamis, the latter underscoring the length of time they have known Ajax.

For the *Antigone*, the major issues were: 1) the relevance of the Chorus, particularly the odes, to the interpretation of the play; and 2) the relation of the first stasimon to important themes. I argued that the Chorus are extremely relevant, because of themes they introduce or develop, and because of the suggestiveness of their lyrics, which often have unintended references to Creon. They may not always address the most obvious issues and confound our expectations, but the ideas they do introduce are always pertinent. The piety and patriotism of the Chorus, which I noted in my discussion of the parodos, are important concepts for the play. Creon will be shown to commit acts of impiety and unknowingly cause harm to the city. Instead of having the gods' full support, as made evident in the Chorus' description of the Theban victory, the city will become polluted and anathema to the gods.

The political and religious considerations of the first and second stasima, which I discussed in Chapter Four, are useful in evaluating the actions of both Antigone and Creon. I said that the concept of *atē*, which more easily applies to Creon and foreshadows the deaths of

his son and wife, may also apply to Antigone, whose mind is distracted and whose devotion to her brother can be regarded as excessive and exclusive of other concerns. While the Chorus do not respond to the valid points raised by Haemon, their broaching the subject of Eros picks up a theme underlying the argument between him and his father but the mention of which during the scene, would have distracted from what was conveyed. I observed that the presence of Eros and Dionysos in the final three odes point to the growing irrationality in the play, particularly in the final episode, where three suicides and an attempted murder are reported.

In regard to the first stasimon, I concluded that it is extremely relevant to the themes of the play. In my analysis of the ode in Chapter Four, I said that according to the Chorus, δεινότης, an amoral force, needs to be directed toward “good” by respect for laws and piety toward the gods. In Chapter Five, I stated that the terms “good” and “evil” apply to the protagonists but not wholly. Antigone is clearly in the right but her actions are not completely pure, and the cause she dies for does not merit our absolute admiration. Creon’s belief in the importance of the polis is not wrong, and after the recent war, his concern for its well-being is sincere. He is mistaken, however, in believing he is acting in the interests of the city, and thereby unknowingly commits “evil”.

I observed that in this first stasimon the optimism apparent in the description of human progress is tempered by the ambiguity of certain words, and put into some doubt because the pious elders almost totally exclude the gods from their account of human accomplishments. I agreed that the theme of mastery and control is inherent in their account of human development, a concept most relevant in interpreting the character of Creon. He tries to put the “yoke” on humans rather than animals, only to find that his control is limited. He loses control of the “ship of state” and sails it to the harbour of Hades. He brings disease instead of medicinal remedies, and finds himself opposed by the animal word, represented by birds who no longer give oracular

signs, by Haemon, likened to a wild animal without the power of speech, and by Antigone, compared to a mother bird.

I identified the following minor issues in the *Antigone*: 1) the ambiguity of the lyrical utterances of the Chorus and their understanding of what they sing; 2) the relationship of the Chorus to Antigone and how representative their attitude to her is; and 3) the interpretation of the fourth stasimon. I explained that in the odes, the Chorus speak ambiguously at times, partly because of their fear of Creon, and partly because of the artistic intentions of the poet. I mentioned in Chapter Four that the presence of Creon prevents the Chorus from speaking with candour. In the following chapter, I argued that Sophocles crafted the lyrics so that they mean more than what the Chorus are thinking, more than what they can know. For instance, they have no prophetic powers, so they cannot realize that their words foreshadow the destruction of Creon's family. Furthermore, the range and unexpectedness of the odes suggest that they are not just the thoughts of the Chorus. Therefore, they cannot be fully cognizant of the double references, multiple meanings, and exploration of themes, which are present in the odes. In spite of these secondary meanings, their thinking is still perceptible in the songs, including their piety, concern for the city, uneasy support of Creon, and disapproval of Antigone.

In describing their attitude to Antigone in Chapter Four, I said that they have sympathy for her, but disapprove of her defiance of the edict. While supporting Creon, they still have qualms about his manner of governing. Certainly they are not nearly as hostile as Creon to Antigone. Although they do not praise her to the same extent that the common people do, they acknowledge that the burial of her brother showed a noble respect for him. They withhold their full assent because of the importance they place on the respect for law and loyalty to the ruler. They also react negatively to her harshness, independence, assertiveness, and (female) defiance of male authority. I concluded that their attitude to her reflected that of many of the original spectators.

The interpretation of the fourth stasimon must remain tentative because of the uncertainties relating to the second and third myths. The main theme of the ode, which I made clear in my discussion in Chapter Four, is the harshness of fate, to which even the high-born are subject. With some feeling of sympathy for her cruel punishment, they encourage her to submit to her fate. That their mythological exempla do not fit her in many respects is not an indication of their insensitivity, only that some, not all features of these myths remind them of her. As in other odes, there are unintended negative references to Creon. These are suggested by the figures of Acrisios and Lycurgus, and by the description of parent-child hostility. One theme I agreed was common to all three stories and most pertinent to Creon, was sight and blindness, which is a metaphor for knowledge and ignorance. This theme also anticipates the arrival of the blind seer, who will instruct Creon to "see" the errors of his ways.

I draw the following general conclusions about the Chorus in these two plays.

1) Personality of the Chorus

The Chorus have a distinct personality and character. Ajax's men respect authority, are totally dependent on, and utterly loyal to, their leader, unheroic, war-weary, and confused at times in their thinking. They distance themselves from the rest of the Greek army, by their devotion to Ajax, by their suspicion of the slanderous talk of the common soldiers, and by their hostility to Odysseus and the Atreidai. The Theban elders are pious and patriotic, judicious in their judgements, rich men of the city, who place a high value on allegiance to the ruler, but fearful of Creon. Their attitude toward the major characters, unlike that of the Chorus in the *Ajax*, is not easy to determine because of their lack of candour. But there are sufficient hints to indicate with some degree of certainty what their feelings are toward Creon and Antigone. In both plays, however, the Chorus do not always act as a distinct character. Announcing the entrances of other characters and advising moderation between disputants are conventional functions, not closely tied to their personality.

The nature of their character, for the most part, is established early in the play, the parodos in fact revealing a great deal about them, especially that of the *Ajax*. Their character is also reflected in the other odes, but at times these songs are not driven by their character. This does not occur nearly to the same extent in the *Ajax* as it does in the *Antigone*. In their songs, they never sing of anything that is inappropriate to their personality, but sometimes the themes are not closely linked to their character, but could have been sung by a generic Chorus, not just by this one. Examples are the description of the grieving Eriboea in the first stasimon of the *Ajax* and in the *Antigone*, the “Ode to Man”, the description of *atē*, and the hymn to Eros. This blurring exists only for those who expect lyrical utterances to emanate always from the character of the singers. It would not have been noticed by the original spectators for whom reflection in choral song was a common phenomenon.

2) Characters in the Action

The Chorus are not only commentators on the action; they participate in it to some extent. In both plays, the Chorus are concerned about the events they witness and are personally affected by what happens, although the soldier/sailors more so, because of their strong attachment to Ajax. This Chorus act as a second (and third) actor in their exchanges with Tecmessa and Ajax. Although they participate a good deal in the action in the first part of the play, they never affect the plot development. On the contrary, the Chorus in the *Antigone*, who are more reflective and less involved in the action, ironically do influence what happens. They save Ismene’s life by asking Creon if he means to kill both sisters, and by their question, they cause him to change his mind. More importantly, they convince Creon that Tiresias’ prophecies are always true, and then direct him to open the cave in which Antigone is confined and bury the exposed corpse, both of which he does, but in reverse order.

3) Help Us to Understand Major Characters

Although limited in knowledge and sometimes mistaken, the Chorus help us interpret major characters. The Theban elders are wiser than Ajax's men but they too are not all-knowing. They are mistaken initially about the perpetrator, never question their belief that the ruler must always be obeyed, and are unaware that Creon's impious decree is a source of pollution in the city until Tiresias' announcement. Despite the limitation of both choruses, they shape and influence how we perceive Ajax, Antigone, and Creon.

In the *Ajax*, the Chorus are a reliable and credible source of information about the character of their leader, because of the many years of service with him. As detailed in my discussion of the second major issue, they shape our feelings toward Ajax, even if he is, to a large extent, an enigma to them. In the *Antigone*, the unintended references to Creon in the odes suggest the intuitive, negative feelings of the Chorus toward Creon, reinforcing our own. The moral confusion brought on by *atē*, the importance of the polis and piety toward the gods, the divine punishment of pride and arrogance – all are useful concepts in evaluating the protagonists. Moreover, the distance of the Chorus from Antigone forces us to consider what it is about her that provokes this reaction in them.

4) Introduce or Develop Themes

The elaboration of important themes is not equally significant for both choruses. In the *Ajax*, the Chorus allude to "sickness" in the parodos, which was introduced by Athena, and then they develop the theme in the first episode and first stasimon. Their melancholy lament against the unpleasantness of war, while relevant to some extent to the play, introduces a new theme with universal appeal. In the *Antigone*, this function is much more developed. As has been mentioned before, the Chorus introduce ideas related to pride and arrogance, piety, *atē*, Eros, fate, control and mastery, good and evil. In both plays, the themes of the odes may not always be closely tied to the immediate situation. If more remote, they tend to broaden the scope of the

play and instead of thinking of the characters in the drama, we are as likely to reflect on their applicability to the human condition.

5) Instrument of Contrast

In my discussions of the entrance-songs and the second stasimon of the *Ajax* and the fifth stasimon of the *Antigone*, I observed how these odes contrast with what has preceded, and for the latter two, the so-called joy-before disaster odes, with what follows also. I described the predominate meters of all the lyrical passages, whose rhythms of course differ from the iambics of the spoken dialogue. I also noted that in the second kommos in the *Ajax* and in the *Antigone*, the singing and speaking roles are reversed, in order to emphasize the sorrow of Ajax and Creon. In performance, other differences would be instantly noticeable. The Chorus have their own separate space – the orchestra – in which to perform. In the lyrical passages, they not only sing but also dance and their performance is accompanied by the music of an *aulos*. They have a group identity and sing together, as opposed to the other characters who speak (or occasionally sing) as individuals. In short, the Chorus provide many different types of contrast in the play, especially in performance.

6) Direct Emotional Responses

Because singing is more emotive than speaking, the Chorus are continually generating emotions, which influence how we experience the play. In the four odes of the *Ajax*, they convey anxiety, gloom, (false) joy, and melancholy. In the kommoi, they give vent to feelings of sorrow and pathos. Throughout a large portion of the play, they create a sense of danger and generate sympathy for Ajax. In the *Antigone*, the moods of the odes are not so easily classified, but include joy over, and thanksgiving for, the recent Theban victory, marvel mixed with horror at human accomplishments, pessimism about the powerlessness of humans in comparison to the gods, apprehension about the influence of Eros, sympathy for Antigone mixed with fatalism at the cruelty of fate, and (false) hope. Since they remain both sympathetic toward, and

disapproving of, Antigone, they shape to some extent our response to her. Their uneasiness about Creon, expressed ambiguously in the lyrics, creates a sense of foreboding.

While the choruses of the two plays may share, to varying degrees, the above characteristics, they also differ from one another. The chief difference is that the Chorus in the *Antigone* have a much stronger lyrical voice. They sing six odes (versus four for the Chorus in the *Ajax*), whose far greater range in subject matter widens considerably the horizons of the play, and whose density of expression is much more suggestive. The odes in the *Ajax* are for the most part closely tied to the action and do not transcend to any great extent the confines of the drama. Another difference relates to the continuity of choral utterance. The Salaminian sailors play a large role in the first part of the play but their role diminishes in the second part. This does not occur in the *Antigone*, where the Theban elders, in addition to their engagement in two kommoi in the later half of the play, punctuate at regular intervals the action with their odes. As a final point, Ajax's men are completely dependent on him for their prosperity and well-being, while Creon's councillors are somewhat independent of the protagonists. This has an important bearing on the expression of their emotions toward the other characters. The former show strong sympathy for Ajax and Tecmessa and display hostility to their leader's enemies; the latter are more reserved in their emotions, tepidly supportive of Creon, and wavering between sadness for, and censure of, Antigone.

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