

Competing Narratives: A Narratological Approach to Sophocles' *Antigone*

While some argue that narratology can be applied only sparingly to drama (see de Jong 2004), the last thirty years have seen a burgeoning interest in the narratological analysis of Greek tragedy (see especially Goward, Markantonatos, Grethlein and Rengakos, and the multi-volume *Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative* co-edited by de Jong and Nünlist). Along with these and other scholars, I propose that we can use narratological categories to analyze not only the choices playwrights make in constructing a play as a narrative whole but also the way in which such choices influence, often subtly and tacitly, the way in which an audience experiences and understands the drama.

In this paper, I examine a play, Sophocles' *Antigone*, in which the two central characters both attempt to assert the exclusive validity of their respective versions of the story. Antigone would have us believe that we are watching a pious freedom fighter willingly sacrifice her own life to protest the injustices of a dictator state and defend the sanctity of the family. Creon, on the other hand, construes the events of the play as the story of an unwavering champion and defender of the city who foils the wicked schemes of a traitor seeking to aid Thebes' enemies. By the end of the play, however, a different narrative has emerged, one which reveals the play to be the story of the aftermath of a terrible family tragedy where an ultimately pointless disagreement between two people with good intentions causes profound suffering for all involved. This paper seeks to elucidate two aspects of the way in which I believe most audiences experience these three competing narratives.

1. For much of the play we are inclined to accept Antigone's version of events over Creon's.

2. By the end of the play, we come to accept that neither protagonist's story is a completely accurate reflection of the drama.

Both of these points are supported by the content of the play; however, I am interested in how the structure and order of the story - as Sophocles has chosen to present it - reinforces this experience of the drama.

I focus on two different categories where Sophocles' hand is clearly at work in shaping the story. The first relies on the regular alternation between episode and stasimon, which affords characters certain opportunities to gain a slight narrative advantage: a) when a character has the privilege of speaking first and last within a given scene; or b) when a character who ends one scene is permitted to resume narrative priority after the intervening choral ode. The second category of analysis considers the chronological sequence of events covered by the play. I consider which character introduces each event (framing the audience's understanding of it) and which character is the last to mention it (offering the final word on that event). As I will show, the data from both categories clearly demonstrate Antigone's initial advantage over Creon in the play, which dissipates as the drama progresses. Indeed, narratological analysis of this nature illustrates that narrative authority is ultimately transferred completely outside the Theban royal family, a trend that can be observed in the other Theban plays. This analysis also suggests a new way of approaching other Sophoclean plays that, like the *Antigone*, present us with a central character who dies part way through the play (the *Ajax* and the *Trachiniae*), calling into question that character's licence to frame the central narrative of the drama. In sum, my paper affirms that narratology should be included among the tools that we use to interpret the Sophoclean corpus and ancient drama more broadly.

Bibliography

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