

# Company B Presents



Photograph: Alex Craig

## ***ANTIGONE*** ***The Burial at Thebes*** a version of Sophocles' play ***by Seamus Heaney***

Directed by **CHRIS KOHN**

### **Teacher's Notes**

**Freehills**

EDUCATION PARTNER

## Company B

Company B sprang into being out of the unique action taken to save the Nimrod Theatre building from demolition in 1984. Rather than lose a performance space in inner city Sydney, more than 600 arts, entertainment and media professionals as well as ardent theatre lovers, formed a syndicate to buy the building. The syndicate included nearly every successful person in Australian show business.

Company B is one of Australia's most celebrated theatre companies. Under the artistic leadership of Neil Armfield, the company performs at its home at Belvoir St Theatre in Surry Hills, Sydney and from there tours to major arts centres and festivals both nationally and internationally. Company B engages Australia's most prominent and promising playwrights, directors, actors and designers to present an annual artistic program that is razor-sharp, popular and challenging.

Belvoir St Theatre's greatly loved Upstairs and Downstairs stages have been the artistic watering holes of many of Australia's great performing artists such as Geoffrey Rush, Cate Blanchett, Jacqueline McKenzie, Noah Taylor, Richard Roxburgh, Max Cullen, Bille Brown, David Wenham, Deborah Mailman and Catherine McClements.

Sellout productions like *Cloudstreet*, *The Judas Kiss*, *The Alchemist*, *Hamlet*, *The Small Poppies*, *Waiting for Godot*, *The Underpants*, *Gulpilil*, *The Sapphires* and *Stuff Happens* have consolidated Company B's position as one of Australia's most innovative and acclaimed theatre companies. Company B also supports outstanding independent theatre companies through its annual B Sharp season.

Belvoir St Theatre has recently undergone a major renovation to provide Company B with a state of the art home for the future whilst retaining the charm of the original building.

For more information visit [www.belvoir.com.au](http://www.belvoir.com.au)

***ANTIGONE***  
***The Burial at Thebes***  
a version of Sophocles' play  
***by Seamus Heaney***

Directed by **CHRIS KOHN**

Set & Costume Designer **DALE FERGUSON**  
Lighting Designer **LUIZ PAMPOLHA**  
Composer & Sound Designer **JETHRO WOODWARD**  
Assistant Director **JANICE MULLER**  
Stage Manager **LUKE McGETTIGAN**  
Assistant Stage Manager **LYDIA SARKS**

With

**PAUL BLACKWELL** Chorus  
**KATIE FITCHETT** Ismene  
**GILLIAN JONES** Tiresias/Eurydice  
**DEBORAH MAILMAN** Antigone  
**PACHARO MZEMBE** Guard  
**BORIS RADMILOVICH** Creon  
**JAMES SAUNDERS** Messenger  
**HAZEM SHAMMAS** Haemon

*The Company B production of Antigone – The Burial at Thebes opened at Belvoir St Theatre  
on 9 April 2008*

## Synopsis: **ANTIGONE** *The Burial at Thebes*

**We suggest your students become familiar with the plot outline before attending the performance so they experience the play as fully as possible. Greek audiences of the original play would already have known the stories depicted on stage; as a result the action starts without explanation and moves quickly in a way that students may not be used to, compared with contemporary plays.**

Antigone and Ismene are the last of their royal family. Both their brothers have just been killed in a huge battle that has raged about Thebes. One brother (Eteocles) was the King of Thebes - he died defending the city. Their other brother (Polyneices) brought a huge army against the city, in an attempt to win his share of power by force. Their uncle Creon has taken control of the city and declared himself King of Thebes.

As day breaks Antigone comes to her sister with the news that Creon has issued a proclamation that their brother Polyneices' body must not be buried, and that anyone attempting to bury him will be stoned to death. She intends to defy the law and bury her brother but Ismene refuses to help her, out of fear. Antigone disowns Ismene and vows never to accept her help.

As the sun rises fully the Elders of Thebes (the Chorus) greet the new King, Creon. He delivers a victory speech and mission statement in one; declaring he will act in the interests of all and repeating his commands regarding the body of Polyneices – that it must be let to rot on pain of death. He tells the people of Thebes that they are each upholders of this new law.

As they argue with him, a flustered Guard enters, full of qualifications and denials. He informs Creon somebody has covered the body he was guarding with dirt. Creon assumes that somebody bribed the Guards to allow this burial in contravention of his orders and threatens him with horrific tortures unless he apprehends the person responsible. The Guard bolts, vowing not to return. Yet in a minute, he is back, dragging Antigone in.

She stands silently as he tells Creon he found her burying the body of her brother, describes how she whirled up the hill in the midday sun, cried out to see the body uncovered and performed all the rituals precisely until they caught and brought her before Creon. Creon demands the truth from Antigone and she denies nothing. Instead she declares that her decision is based on a respect for the gods and for the dead that surpasses the honour she owes to merely mortal authority, such as Creon's.

Creon proclaims death sentences on her and on her sister. Antigone tells Creon to do it quickly, that what she did was right and that all the people of Thebes know that to be so. Ismene is brought in, griefstruck, and Creon charges her with involvement in Antigone's illegal actions. Ismene claims to Creon that she helped bury the body, but Antigone, stubborn to her word, won't allow her to share in the deed and tells him Ismene is guiltless.

Trying to save Antigone, Ismene asks her uncle if he'd really kill his son's fiancé? Creon is unwilling to consider this personal aspect – he plans to execute Antigone despite the love his son Haemon has for her. Creon has Antigone and Ismene taken away. The Elders of Thebes lament their fate and the fate of their whole unlucky family.

Haemon comes to his father to reason with him, both for Creon's sake and Antigone's. He tells Creon that everyone in the city is talking about Antigone's bravery and begs his father to reconsider the sentence he's passed. Creon is enraged his own son is advising him what to do, and that his law is being questioned. He calls for Antigone to be brought out and executed in front

of Haemon but Haemon leaves in utter disgust.

The Elders of Thebes question Creon, will he kill Ismene though she did nothing? And how exactly will he put Antigone to death? Creon answers he'll have her put in a cave, with some food so that no guilt for her death will fall on the city; there alone, she can decide if she lives or dies. Guards lead Antigone in and she laments her own fate. The Elders of Thebes (Chorus) marvel at her strength. She is nevertheless afraid of the dark and silent end she is going to. Creon cuts her off – commands his will be done and her put in the rock chamber without delay. He tells the people it is Antigone's own fault, that no blame attaches to him.

Antigone speaks again: of her family as if she sees them already in her mind and looks forward to going to meet them in the world of the dead. She asks how the gods could be offended by her doing what everybody knows to be right? If the gods condemn her, she accepts her punishment willingly, but if they approve her actions, she curses those (Creon) who unjustly punish her. She charges all present to be witnesses as she is led away to die.

As they stand there, Tiresias the blind seer comes tapping in, led by a masked boy – he speaks to Creon, warns him of the hideous results of his actions and describes unnatural omens which indicate the coming disaster. He advises Creon to amend, admit his mistakes, before the rot that began with the body left out in the open takes hold of the whole city. Creon won't listen – he accuses Tiresias of corruption, of taking bribes. Tiresias warns him more strongly that he's violated the gods; turning the worlds of the living and the dead upside down in refusing burial to the dead and by burying Antigone alive. That he dishonoured other corpses on the battlefield and that the whole city is polluted.

After Tiresias taps out, the Chorus are stricken with the echo of his predictions. Creon too is chilled. He listens to them – reverses his judgement and rushes out, up the hill to the cave where Antigone is entombed. The Theban elders (Chorus) call on Dionysus for urgent help. Before it comes, a messenger enters to tell them what happened up on the hill. Fearing the worst, Eurydice, the Queen, Creon's wife, comes to hear it for herself. The Messenger tells how they buried Polyneices' sad remains on their way up to rescue Antigone, reaching the cave to hear horrible howling. In a panic, Creon had them break open the door, roll away the stones. Inside they saw Antigone had hanged herself, Haemon was clinging to her; begging for her to come back to him, cursing his father. Creon went to his son and pleaded with him but Haemon tried to stab him with a sword, and failing that, stabbed the sword into his own side and bled all over his doomed bride-to-be.

Eurydice says nothing. She leaves and those who remain wonder at her silence and worry. Creon returns, cursing himself, grieving for his son, but they tell him more suffering is on its way to him before showing him the body of his wife, Eurydice, dead by her own hand. They tell him that as she died she cursed his name for bringing death to her children, Haemon & Megareus. Creon relinquishes all power; calls himself nothing and prays for death. The Elders of Thebes tell him everything that has happened was of his own making; all that is left is for him to accept the worst. The play ends with the Chorus of Theban Elders contemplating the calamity that eventually falls on all who overrule the will of the gods.

## Understanding the Background, History & Context of *ANTIGONE*

Historically, Thebes was the largest city in the region of Boeotia. It sided with the Persians against Athens in the famous wars of Sophocles' time. The ancient city was finally destroyed by Alexander the Great in 335BC.

Mythologically, it was the site of many famous tales. Its first king, Cadmus, founded the city by sowing the teeth of a sacred dragon. The teeth instantly grew into a race of warriors who broke through the soil and set upon each other. The five survivors joined Cadmus to initiate the first dynastic families of Thebes.

Cadmus abdicated in favour of his grandson Pentheus, who met a tragic end after banning the worship of Dionysus, progeny of Zeus and his aunt Semele, and was ripped apart in a Bacchic frenzy by his own mother and aunts. A rhythm of violent overthrow and godly intervention continued for many generations, coming to a head with the birth of Oedipus.

Oedipus was the son of King Laius and Jocasta, sister to Creon. The oracle prophesized that Laius would be killed by his own son, so when Oedipus was born he was given to a shepherd to be killed. But the baby survived and was brought up with no knowledge of his lineage. As an adult, travelling to Thebes, he met and killed a man at a crossroads; unknown to him, the man was his father Laius. He continued to Thebes where he solved the riddle of the Sphinx and became one of the great Kings of Thebes. He married Laius' widow Jocasta – his unknown mother - and they had four children: Polyneices, Eteocles, Antigone and Ismene.

The blind seer, Tiresias, who had advised Theban kings since the days of Cadmus, revealed Oedipus' crimes. Horrified, Jocasta committed suicide and Oedipus blinded himself. The city expelled him and he was forced to wander blindly until the end of his days. He was later accompanied by his daughter Antigone, and he died at Colonus.

Following the demise of Oedipus, Creon stepped in as regent. When Oedipus' sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, came of age they made a pact that they should share the throne, alternating one year at a time. But when the time came for Polyneices to rule, Eteocles reneged on the deal and banished his brother from Thebes. With the help of the King of Argos, Polyneices raised an army and returned to conquer Thebes. In the ensuing battle, the two brothers killed each other.

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### The Dramatist: Sophocles

One of the trio of great dramatists alongside Aeschylus and Euripides, Sophocles was born in 495/6 BC at the cusp of the golden age of classical Athens. He witnessed its flowering and the triumphs of the Persian wars (499-448 BC), but by the time of his death, Athens was reeling from the devastation of the Peloponnesian war (431–404BC), and would never again reach the political and civic heights Sophocles lived through.

After the death of Aeschylus, Sophocles emerged as the most famous and honoured playwright of the Athenian golden age. His plays won in competition at the Dionysia, the famous Athenian dramatic festival, at least 20 times, and he never came less than second. Of the 123 plays attributed to him, only 7 survive intact: *Ajax*, *The Women of Trachis*, *Electra*, *Philoctetes* and the Theban plays for which he is best known: *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*.

His great theatrical innovation was the addition of the third actor. Early Greek drama was presented by a Chorus; then over time, first one actor, then a second actor were added. Sophocles' addition of a third greatly increased the potential for character development and conflict.

He also held important civic roles, as a junior colleague of Pericles on the high executive council in charge of the armed forces and as one of the treasurers of Athens. He died at the age of 90, shortly after his great rival Euripides.

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|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>ZEUS</b>                           | Most powerful of all the gods, father to humankind, responsible for law & justice, and the punishment of transgressors. His sphere was the heavens, he hurled thunderbolts at those who invoked his wrath, and the eagle was sacred to him.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>OEDIPUS</b>                        | Son of King Laius of Thebes & Jocasta; abandoned by them to die as a baby with a pin through his feet, because of an oracle that prophesied he would grow up to kill his own father & marry his mother. He was adopted by Polybus & Merope, childless rulers of Corinth, who named him Oedipus, meaning 'swollen foot' and kept him in ignorance of his origins. When Oedipus was warned as a grown man by the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, that it was his destiny to marry his mother and murder his father, he vowed never to return home to Corinth. Oedipus became ruler of Thebes after he rid the city of the Sphinx and married the widowed Queen Jocasta, who bore him four children (among them Antigone & Ismene) and ruled over Thebes, until the seer Tiresias revealed to him that his wife was in fact his own mother, he had unwittingly killed his own father and that his four children (Eteocles, Polyneices, Ismene & Antigone) were his half-brothers & sisters. In horror, Oedipus put out his own eyes and wandered the roads accompanied by his daughter Antigone, charged by the gods never to return to Thebes. |
| <b>ARGOS TROOPS</b>                   | Army of one of the most important cities in the Peloponnese, raised by Polyneices to attack Thebes in the events immediately preceding <i>Antigone</i> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>ETEOCLES</b>                       | Son of Oedipus, brother to Polyneices, sister to Antigone & Ismene. Ruler of Thebes, he died defending Thebes against an attack led by his brother, Polyneices.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>POLYNEICES</b>                     | Son of Oedipus, brother to Eteocles, sister to Antigone & Ismene. Angered by his brother's action in taking the throne solely for his own, he brought military action against Thebes, to take his share of power by force.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>DRAGON of THEBES</b>               | Part of Theban mythology, defeated by Cadmus who was advised by Athena, goddess of wisdom to sow the dragon's teeth in the ground – from them leapt up armed men who became the ancestors of the ancient families of Thebes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>SEVEN GUARDIANS AT SEVEN GATES</b> | In the events immediately preceding the beginning of <i>Antigone</i> – depicted in Aeschylus' play <i>Seven against Thebes</i> , seven champions (including Polyneices, killed during the attack) and an army from Argos, struck at the seven gates of Thebes and were beaten back by seven guardians of Thebes; including Creon and his son Megareus, who was killed in the battle.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>BACCHUS/DIONYSUS</b>               | Son of Zeus & Semele; god of fertility, the life-force – both creative & destructive. God of the vine, wine was his sacred liquid and he used it to induce humanity to yield to the ecstasy of natural forces, and meet the gods in their natural mystery. The main Athenian dramatic festival was called the Greater Dionysia in his honour and his image was carried into the theatre to watch the performances.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>HADES</b>                          | Ruler of the underworld & King of the Dead. His kingdom was guarded by a three-headed dog, a hound called Cerberus, who kept the dead in and the living out.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>OLYMPUS</b>                        | Home of the gods; a mountain 10 000 feet high in northern Greece, ruled over by Zeus himself. The gods were thought to dwell in the sky above it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>APHRODITE</b>                      | Goddess of love and beauty – thought to have been born from the sea foam – she exacted punishment upon those who dishonoured her by rejecting love.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>ACHERON</b>                        | The river of woe in the underworld, thought of as the boundary of Hades across which the dead were rowed by the ferryman. There was also a real River Acheron.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>NIOBE</b>                          | Queen of Thebes, mother of 7 sons & 7 daughters – she angered the goddess Leto by boasting that her fourteen children gave her more right to be considered immortal and worshipped than the goddess' two. Leto sent her son, the god Apollo to slay Niobe's sons & her daughter the goddess Artemis to slay her daughters. Niobe began to weep without stopping whereupon Leto, pitying her, changed her into stone and her tears became a spring of water which still flows near Thebes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>MOUNT SIPYLUS</b>                  | A mountain in Lydia where the weeping Rock of Niobe is located.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

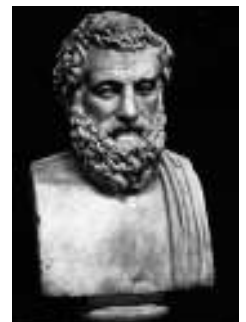
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| <b>PANEGYRIC</b>  | A public speech in praise of someone or something. At a funeral, a panegyric was an accomplished formal oration, glorifying and honouring the deceased.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>DANAE</b>      | Only daughter of the King of Argos, imprisoned by her father in a tower of bronze, because an oracle foretold her son would kill her grandfather. Visited by Zeus, who impregnated her. On discovering this, her father shut Danae and her son Perseus up in a wooden chest and had it cast into the sea. From it they were rescued, and her son grew up to fulfil the oracle, killing his grandfather accidentally during a competition by throwing a discus into the crowd.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>TIRESIAS</b>   | Blind seer and legendary prophet of Thebes – descendant of one of the original Sown Men (from the dragon's teeth planted by Cadmus) of Thebes. Blinded either by the goddess Athena as retribution for witnessing her nakedness; or by the goddess Hera, wife of Zeus in anger for helping her husband win an argument against her. According to the poet Ovid, Tiresias had seen two snakes coupling and had struck them with his stick, whereupon he was turned into a woman. Seven years later, after living as a woman all this time, he saw the same snakes mating again, struck them once more and became a man once more. This was the background to Hera & Zeus calling upon Tiresias for assistance in settling their quarrel – he alone had lived both as a man and a woman so had understanding of both states. In compensation for the blindness inflicted upon Tiresias by Hera, Zeus gave Tiresias the gifts of prophecy and long life. |
| <b>THE FURIES</b> | Three goddesses of retribution who exacted punishment for crimes such as murder, particularly of kin against kin. They guarded the established order of the world, pursuing offenders to the ends of the earth. Also known as the Eumenides.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>CADMUS</b>     | Legendary founder of Thebes, who slew the dragon, placated the god Ares and became the first king of Thebes. Father of Semele, mother of the god Dionysus.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>DELPHI</b>     | Apollo's shrine on the slopes of Mount Parnassus, where the Oracle that foretold Oedipus' fate was located.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>CASTALIAN</b>  | A spring close to Delphi whose waters purified those coming to the temple of Apollo. Also sacred to the god Dionysus.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>SEMELE</b>     | Mortal daughter of Cadmus who became the mother of Dionysus, consumed by divine fire when Zeus revealed himself to her without dimming his true form.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>MAENADS</b>    | Followers of Bacchus/Dionysus, women intoxicated by his presence, who reveled with him under the moon. They were also known as Bacchae.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>PARNASSUS</b>  | Apollo's sacred mountain, one of the highest in Greece. His Delphic Oracle and the Castalian spring were located on the southern slopes. Dionysus and his Maenads reveled there.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>MEGAREUS</b>   | Son of Creon and of Eurydice, brother of Haemon. He defended the Neistan gate (one of the seven gates of Thebes) against Eteocles in the attack leading up to the events of <i>Antigone</i> . Killed defending Thebes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

### SOURCES:

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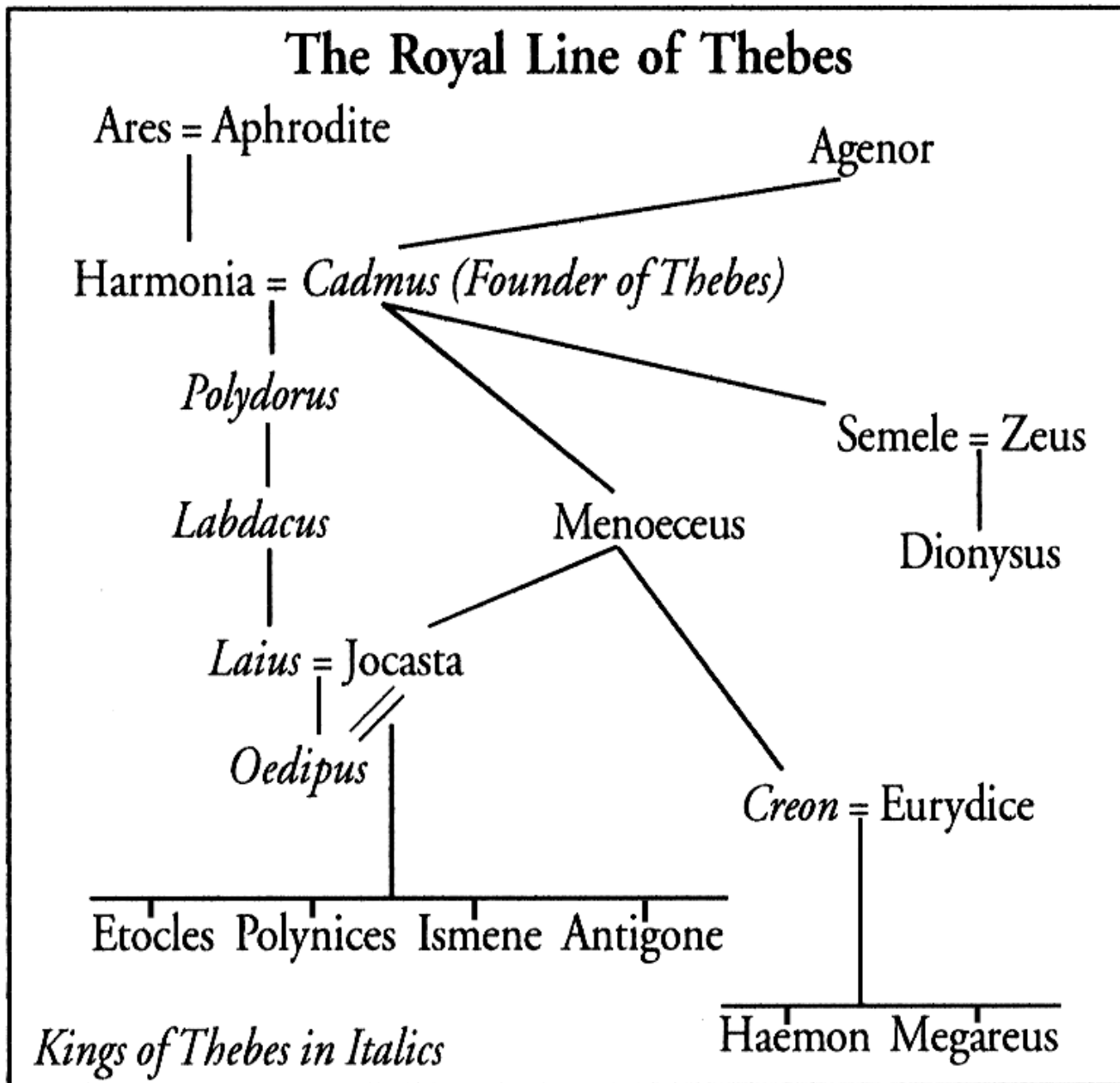
Michael Ewans (ed.) *Four Dramas of Maturity: Sophokles*. Everyman; London, 1999.



**Sophocles**



## Family Tree of Antigone



Source: Borey, Eddie. "GradeSaver: Antigone - Study Guide." [www.gradesaver.com](http://www.gradesaver.com). 26 March 2008. GradeSaver. 26 March 2008 <<http://www.gradesaver.com/classicnotes/titles/antigone/section8.html>>.

### Considering Context: Characters in *ANTIGONE*

To better understand each character's context ask your students to consider each character's position when the play begins. The following information can be used as a starting point. Also refer to the previous information about the history of Thebes and of the family of Oedipus in particular.

**Antigone:** daughter of Oedipus, niece of Creon, sister of Ismene, Eteocles and Polyneices

**Ismene:** daughter of Oedipus, niece of Creon, sister of Antigone, Eteocles and Polyneices

**Chorus** of Theban Elders: group of respected members of society and the polis (city-state) Upholders of civic and religious virtue. Ruled over by Creon.

**Creon** King of Thebes: father of Haemon, wife of Eurydice, brother of Oedipus, uncle to Oedipus' children, Eteocles, Polyneices, Ismene and Antigone. Recently defended the city and people of Thebes against attack from Polyneices

**Guard:** responsible for overseeing the rotting body of Polyneices and ensuring that no citizen attempts to give it burial. He has colleagues, and owes loyalty to Creon.

**Haemon:** Creon and Eurydice's son; heir to the throne. Engaged to Antigone.

**Tiresias:** blind seer and prophet of Thebes. Was responsible for revealing to Oedipus the truth about his marriage, his children and how he had unwittingly fulfilled the grotesque prophecy.

**Messenger:** Owes loyalty to Creon, a citizen of Thebes

**Eurydice:** Creon's wife, mother of Haemon and of Megareus, who was recently killed in the attack on Thebes.

- What sort of status does each character have in society? How is it demonstrated in the way they speak?
- Think about the effect of the recent war on each character, according to which side they were on. Ask the students to imagine what state of mind they imagine the characters to be in when the play starts, given those recent events?

### **Role-play Exercises: Status and position in *ANTIGONE***

- Write the name of each character on a piece of card, give each one to a student and ask the students to arrange themselves in order of most important to least important on the basis of what they know already about each character.
- Ask one student to be Creon: get this student to leave the room, and tell this student secretly that their objective when they return is to find fault with whatever the guards do. Ask a few other students to be guards – give them a chair to guard - and tell them that when Creon returns their objective is to win his approval. Set a time limit (3 minutes) and ask the rest of the class to be observers (Chorus) and to decide which of Creon or the guards seemed to be most successful in achieving their objectives.
- Ask for a different set of guards, and a volunteer to be Antigone. Ask the volunteer to leave the room. Tell the guards that they must guard the chair (the body of Polyneices) and not allow anyone to approach it. Instruct the student who is being Antigone that the game is over when she manages to touch the chair. [Advise the students that they need to achieve their objectives without hurting each other.]
- Give each student a piece of paper (even a post-it note) with the name of a character on it and a brief description. (You might like also to include Polyneices, Eteocles & Megareus). Designate one area in the room to be inside the city walls and the other to be outside. Ask all the students to place themselves either inside Thebes or outside, according to where they think the character belongs at the start of the play. [If the students have read the play, you could also get them to move to where they think each character should be at the end of the play]

## Greek Burial Rituals: *ANTIGONE*

"The ancient Greek conception of the afterlife and the ceremonies associated with burial were already well established by the sixth century B.C. In the *Odyssey*, Homer describes the Underworld, deep beneath the earth, where Hades, the brother of Zeus and Poseidon, and his wife, Persephone, reigned over countless drifting crowds of shadowy figures—the "shades" of all those who had died. It was not a happy place. Indeed, the ghost of the great hero Achilles told Odysseus that he would rather be a poor serf on earth than lord of all the dead in the Underworld (*Odyssey*, 11.489–91).

The Greeks believed that at the moment of death the *psyche*, or spirit of the dead, left the body as a little breath or puff of wind. The deceased was then prepared for burial according to the time-honored rituals. Ancient literary sources emphasize the necessity of a proper burial and refer to the omission of burial rites as an insult to human dignity (*Iliad*, 23.71). Relatives of the deceased, primarily women, conducted the elaborate burial rituals that were customarily of three parts: the *prothesis* (laying out of the body), the *ekphora* (funeral procession), and the interment of the body or cremated remains of the deceased. After being washed and anointed with oil, the body was dressed and placed on a high bed within the house. During the *prothesis*, relatives and friends came to mourn and pay their respects...Following the *prothesis*, the deceased was brought to the cemetery in a procession, the *ekphora*, which usually took place just before dawn. Very few objects were actually placed in the grave, but monumental earth mounds, rectangular built tombs, and elaborate marble stelai and statues were often erected to mark the grave and to ensure that the deceased would not be forgotten. Immortality lay in the continued remembrance of the dead by the living...we know that the women of Classical Athens made regular visits to the grave with offerings that included small cakes and libations."

SOURCE: Department of Greek and Roman Art. "Death, Burial, and the Afterlife in Ancient Greece". In *Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–.  
[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dbag/hd\\_dbag.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dbag/hd_dbag.htm) (October 2003)

Homeric belief shows that the Greeks saw death as a time when the psyche left the body to enter Hades. This psyche could be seen, but was untouchable. Beginning in Classical times there came to be the concepts of punishment after death or a state of blessedness. The soul responsible for a person's personality and moral decisions received the eternal punishment or bliss for the choices of the human form. The burial rituals perhaps spawned from this belief that the soul must be guided into the afterlife. If the body was not given a proper burial according to Greek ritual, the soul would remain trapped between the worlds of the living and the underworld

SOURCE Kristina Bagwell. "Burial Rituals and the Afterlife of Ancient Greece" -  
<http://people.uncw.edu/deagona/ancientnovel/kristina.htm> (April 2008)

Read the information about Ancient Greek burial rituals. Give the students this excerpt from the script of the play: -

### **Antigone:**

And right you are to be scared.  
Creon has made a law.  
Eteocles has been buried  
As a soldier, with full honours,  
So he's gone home to the dead.  
But not Polyneices.  
Polyneices is denied  
Any burial at all.

Ask your students to think about and discuss as a group the following question: -

1. What would be the impact of this law on someone who believed the soul needs a proper burial to find its way into the afterlife?

The next extract from the script is spoken by one of the Guards who is charged to oversee the body to prevent anybody from burying it. Ask one of the class to read this out loud: -

**Guard**

...When the sentry showed us this morning, we were stunned. The corpse had actually gone and disappeared. But then it turned out it was only hidden, under this coat of dust. As if somebody had treated it, you know, just to be on the safe side. Somebody observing all the customs..

Then ask them to consider: -

2. Why might 'somebody' do this even if it was against the law?

Ask another student to read the following words of Antigone: -

**Antigone:**

...Was I going to humour you, or honour gods?  
Sooner or later I'll die anyhow  
And sooner may be better in my case  
This death penalty is almost a relief.  
If I had to live and suffer in the knowledge  
That Polyneices was lying above ground  
Insulted and defiled, that would be worse  
Than having to suffer any doom of yours.  
You think I'm just a reckless woman, but  
Never, Creon, forget:  
You yourself could be the reckless one.

Get the class to discuss in pairs what Antigone might mean in this speech, especially –

3. What do you think Antigone means when she says Creon, not her, might be being reckless?

Finally have the students read this speech of Antigone's and ask them: -

4. How will the way she dies affect her finding the way into the world of the dead?

**Antigone:**

....Farewell. I am going away  
Under my rock-piled roof.  
No mourner waits at the mound.  
I'll be shut in my halfway house,  
Unwept by those alive,  
Unwelcomed as yet by the dead.

© Seamus Heaney

***These script extracts are for educational use in the classroom only***

## The Playwright: Seamus Heaney

In the following article, Seamus Heaney, playwright of this version of Sophocles' *Antigone*, describes his process when starting to write *The Burial at Thebes*. Read the article and then respond, either in group discussion or individually; to the questions that follow.

### SEARCH FOR THE SOUL OF ANTIGONE

Early in 2003 we were watching a leader, a Creon figure if ever there was one: a law and order bossman trying to boss the nations of the world into uncritical agreement with his edicts in much the same way as Creon tries to boss the Chorus of compliant Thebans into conformity with his. With the White House and the Pentagon in cahoots, determined to bring the rest of us into line over Iraq, the passion and protest of an Antigone were all of a sudden as vital as oxygen masks.

For weeks, I had been reading desultorily about the play in various essays and introductions, my eyes glazing over as again and again the familiar topics came swimming up: individual conscience versus civil power, men versus women, the domestic versus the public sphere, the relevance of the action at different times of crisis in France, in Russia, in Poland, in Northern Ireland – of course, of course, of course. But why do it again? Indeed, how do it again, if there was no tuning fork?

...All of a sudden I heard a note being struck in my head and inside seconds I had the pen in my hand and had done a number of the opening lines. Purchase on a language, a confidence amounting almost to a carelessness, a found pitch – all arrived in a breath. "Not I, not I," I could have exclaimed, "but the wind that blows through me." What had got me going was not study of the text or of the criticism surrounding it, but the words and rhythms of another work entirely.

The tuning fork sounded when I remembered the opening lines of one of the most famous poems in the Irish language, *Eibhlin Dhubh Ní Chonaill's Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire/ Lament for Art O'Leary*.

*My love and my delight,  
The day I saw you first  
Beside the markethouse  
I had eyes for nothing else  
And love for none but you*

This stricken, urgent keen for a murdered husband, beaten out in line after three-stressed line, gave me the note I needed for the anxious, cornered Antigone at the start of the play. The wife in desperation provided a register for the desperate sister...

*Ismene, quick, come here!  
What's to become of us?  
Why are we always the ones?*

From that point onwards, I had a purchase on the actual writing, and took pleasure in it... I had the idea of making different metrical provisions for different characters and this meant a far greater sensation of working at a verbal face. There was an ongoing line-by-line, eye-to-hand engagement with the material. First came the three-stress line for exchanges between the sisters, then a surge into more or less Anglo-Saxon metre for the chorus, then another change of register into blank verse, but blank verse that was dramatic and suited to the character of Creon rather than simply a metronome.

*Antigone* is poetic drama, but commentary and analysis had turned it into political allegory. What I wanted to point up was the anthropological dimension of Sophocles' work: I didn't want the production to end up as just another opportunistic commentary on the Iraq adventure, and that was why I changed the title.

I called my version *The Burial at Thebes* partly because 'burial' signals immediately to a new audience what the central concern of the play is going to be: a contest involving the rights of the dead and the laws of the

land. But mainly I changed the title because 'burial' is also a word that has not yet been divorced from primal reality. It still recalls to us our destiny as members of a mortal species and reminds us, however subliminally, of the need to acknowledge and allow the essential dignity of every human creature. It implies respect for the coffin, wherever it is being carried, whatever flag is draped over it, whatever community is crying out alongside it. It emphasises, in other words, what Hegel emphasised about *Antigone*, those "Instinctive Powers of Feeling, Love and Kinship" which authority must honour and obey if it is not to turn callous.

Published in the *Guardian*, 2 November 2005 © Seamus Heaney

## Thinking about Translation: *ANTIGONE*

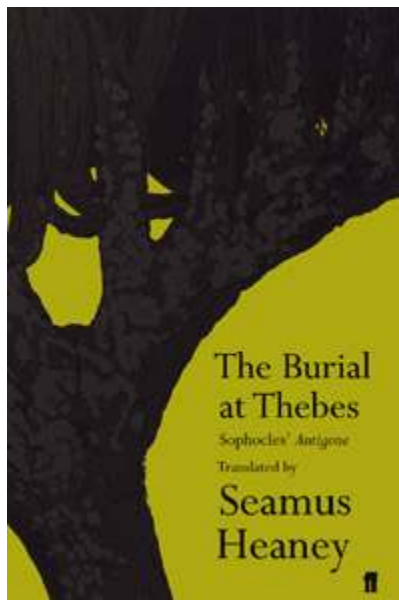
Ask your students to read the Seamus Heaney article above and then compare Antigone's first speech (below) in Seamus Heaney's translation of *Antigone* to any other version of the Sophocles text.

### Antigone:

Ismene, quick, come here!  
What's to become of us?  
Why are we always the ones?  
There's nothing, sister, nothing  
Zeus hasn't put us through  
Just because we are who we are –  
The daughters of Oedipus.  
And because we are his daughters  
We took what came, Ismene,  
In private and in public  
Hurt and humiliation –  
But this I cannot take.

No, wait.

Here's what has happened.  
There's a general order issued  
And again it hits us hardest.  
The ones we love, it says  
Are enemies of the state  
To be considered traitors -



The Burial at Thebes, Faber & Faber, London, 2004

Source: <http://www.faber.co.uk/media/images/books/large/d/d9/d959ef07966e91029b960f2d3a335c9f.jpg>

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## Preparing to See *ANTIGONE*

Read this article which appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on March 29-30, Spectrum p 4-5.

### 'I felt I was right inside someone's nightmare'



smh.com.au  
The Sydney Morning Herald

Theatre director Chris Kohn ... 'I think of everything on stage being a composition.'

Photo: Marco del Grande

Tim Elliot  
March 29, 2008

MOST initiates suffer trial by fire - Chris Kohn had a trial by Beckett. In 2003, the then-29-year-old was working as assistant director and musician for Neil Armfield's 50th anniversary production of *Waiting For Godot* at the Belvoir St Theatre's Company B. Watching on was none other than the stern and patrician figure of Edward Beckett, nephew of Samuel and the fiercely protective executor of his famous uncle's estate.

It soon became apparent, however, that Beckett junior was less than impressed with Armfield's interpretation, which featured Kohn on percussion and harmonium. Storming out while the players were still taking their bows, Beckett later upbraided directors who would dare to tinker with his uncle's work, reserving special ire for the addition of music or, as he called it, "bells and whistles".

"The most worrying aspect was the fact that he started threatening to close down the show," Kohn says. "That would have been a disaster. But it quickly became apparent that he didn't have the power to do that."

Kohn, who is directing *Antigone* for Company B, is no stranger to a bit of dramaturgic rough and tumble. The director of such discomforting and absurdist pieces as *The Black Swan Of Trespass* and *The Eisteddfod*, Kohn specialises in by-the-lapels theatre - risk-taking plays that dance with audiences along a razor's edge of plausibility and disbelief. *The Black Swan Of Trespass*, which Kohn co-wrote with Lally Katz in 2003, retells the Ern Malley affair, with a rooster and tomcat as literary pranksters Harold Stewart and James McAuley. Destined to become a fringe classic, the play opened in an 18-seat bluestone cellar in North Melbourne and went on to successful seasons in New York and Sydney.



*The Eisteddfod*, meanwhile, focused on the suffocating rivalry between orphaned siblings who are both rehearsing *Macbeth* for a drama competition, featuring ambiguous allusions to sexual abuse mixed with, as one reviewer put it, "the pulse of a camp panto".

With such knotty and complex works behind him, you might expect Kohn to be the very embodiment of the brooding playwright. But with his shorts, sneakers and bushel of coily hair, the 34-year-old resembles nothing so much as a suburban skateboarder.

"At first I never thought much about the theatre," he says. "I originally thought I'd become a musician." In his late teens and early 20s Kohn played drums for several bands in Perth, where he was born and grew up. "But in the end I couldn't handle the politics of bands and was more attracted to the working environment of theatre, the collaborative element of it."

After moving to Sydney in 1995 Kohn did a Bachelor of Arts at the University of NSW, majoring in theatre, followed by honours in 1997. A year later he moved to Melbourne, where he completed a diploma of directing at the VCA School of Drama, meeting in the process many of the players, such as director Janice Muller and composer Jethro Woodward, with whom he still works today.

In mid-2000, while travelling in Milan, he saw a play that changed his life. "It was *Genesi* by Romeo Castellucci, and it was a real defining moment for me."

Presented in three parts, *Genesi* is a metaphorical interpretation of the first book of the Bible, taking the audience on a journey from Marie Curie's laboratory and her discovery of radium to Auschwitz and, finally, to the desert with Cain and Abel. For Castellucci, Genesis marked not the birth of light and the ascent of man but a descent into horror and despair.

Kohn loved every moment of it. "It showed me the phenomenal power of the theatre. For a while in that theatre I really felt that I was right inside someone's nightmare and the rush of it was incredible. There was no separation or distance and he had done that purely through the craft of theatre."

Returning to Melbourne later that year, Kohn started up Stuck Pigs Squealing Theatre, an independent company dedicated, as its website puts it, "to the creation of dynamic, imaginative and disturbing theatre events".

The idea, Kohn says, was to "create a space where I, and other like-minded people could pursue our own ideas, without having to second-guess an audience."

One of the first works that Kohn directed with SPS Theatre was *The Architect And The Emperor Of Assyria*, Spanish playwright Fernando Arrabal's absurdist tale about an air crash survivor who recreates Western civilisation on a deserted island. Critics lauded Kohn's version, created as a site-specific show in Melbourne's Pony Bar, as "fun, fetishistic and macabre". The show played as part of the Melbourne Fringe Festival but went on to seasons in Melbourne's Bar Open and at B-Sharp, Belvoir Street Theatre, in 2002.

"Chris's use of small objects, his instinct for contemporary chamber design and his particular orchestration and use of soundscapes is ... unique," says Lyn Wallis, who was the Downstairs Theatre director at Company B when *The Architect And The Emperor of Assyria* played there. "In *The Architect* his desert island was rustic, retro and camp - a kind of *Gilligan's Island* take on a classic European text."

The play, together with follow-ups such as *The Black Swan*, announced the young director's experimental intentions, not all of which proved fruitful: *Raised In Captivity*, which Kohn directed at Melbourne's Red Stitch Actors' Theatre in 2003, was criticised as crowded, confused and exaggeratedly kooky.

Such are the risks of adventurism. "I've never aimed at a particular style," Kohn says. "If there's one constant in my work, it's that I believe in the primacy of the basic bones of theatre, which is a performer with a text and an audience in a room."



Off-notes aside, most observers agree that Kohn has a knack of creating clearly delineated worlds that envelope the audience, using music ("because it operates at a subconscious level") and an encompassing sense of rhythm.

"I think of everything on stage being a composition: the way the lights change, the sound and the way the actors speak and move, it all has to be working in concert. All these elements have to be having a conversation with each other. That's how you get access to the subconscious, because it's working in a way that you don't necessarily understand intellectually."

The snag? "You have to pull it all together and understand what you're doing so you can repeat it night after night."

This shouldn't be a problem, according to Company B's artistic director, Neil Armfield. "Chris has been developing a very original kind of theatre that is quite magical and poetic and very funny but which also has a high degree of formality in it. It's playful but it has a strong sense of ritual and beautiful stage imagery."

This mix of qualities, Armfield says, makes Kohn perfect for *Antigone*.

"The Greek tragedies are waiting to be rediscovered but you don't want actors in togas and sandals," Armfield says. "There's a particular life to be found in them and Chris is just the man to do that."

Written in 442AD, Sophocles's classic tragedy is a tale for our times, a knock-down-drag-out battle between civil disobedience and the steely mechanics of state power.

Using Seamus Heaney's 2004 translation, the play tells the story of Antigone (Deborah Mailman), who slips away to bury her traitor brother in the quiet dawn of the latest Theban war. But by doing so, Antigone defies her proud uncle, Creon, sparking a battle of wills and creeds.

"It's a clash of values," Kohn says. "Creon values a show of strength rather than admitting error and Antigone values love and family honour. It goes to the heart of tragedy - conflicting truths that can't be reconciled. Here are people whose ideas make perfect sense but who can't see the other person's point of view."

In a world gripped by a so-called "clash of civilisations", the resonances are deafening. And yet Kohn is leery of easy answers. "One of the reasons this play has lasted so long is that it can attach itself to any era. These are extreme opposing views but they're all argued well: depending on the tenor of the times, audiences identify with Creon or Antigone. Anyway, I'm not interested in presenting anyone as a particular villain."

One of the refreshing aspects of *Antigone* is that the script is already there. "A lot of my work has been with a writer to make new work. Here we have a script from day one, which frees up your imagination to think of all the other aspects."

So, what are those "other aspects"? Kohn is coy but Armfield is upbeat. "I think Chris's take on *Antigone* will be musical and strikingly imagistic. It will probably be weird but in a great way."

Kohn, Armfield adds, has an unlikely sense of vaudeville in his work. "So no matter what happens," he says, "you can be sure it'll be entertaining."

*Antigone* opens at Belvoir St Theatre on April 5.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/28/1206207381023.html>

## **The Director: Chris Kohn**

Chris Kohn speaks with Jane May about directing *ANTIGONE* for Company B.

### **So I was wondering why, what attracted you about directing *Antigone* in Australia 2008?**

Yeah, for me it's not, I don't, nothing particular about Australia in the year 2008 beyond the fact that I am in Australia so experiencing the world as an Australian now so...and the play has resonances or is... and I find compelling and interesting so all I can do is assume that...um for some of the reasons that I find it interesting that other people coming to see the show will also find it interesting so rather than thought it's not about a particular..I don't think there is any particular themes or ideas where I've gone out thinking I need oh to do this show now because it's so politically resonant for this reason or that reason, it's just that ah.. I've found things interesting in it, which presumably or hopefully will make it the same reasons that other people will find it interesting and that's to do with this kind of looking at these figures of Antigone and Creon and how they um, I guess the different ways in which they see the roles of the, ah the kind of humans and the gods and ah the city versus the individual and the kind of argument that they each represent that I find is just presented in a very compelling way in Sophocles' text and also in the way that Seamus Heaney has translated it. So I'm interested in...um in the kind of way that ah these people - the diversity of humanity that people from the same family, the same place can have such diametrically opposed views about something and how that is then played out and also what is that, to what level is that inevitable or is – we watch these people making decisions and we see the tragedy unfolding and I think we can identify the truths in what everybody is saying so kind of.. um...it presents big questions about whether, you know, is there something inherently violent? or, are these kind of oppositions necessarily sort of part of the human condition? so, you know..

### **And do you find that you're attracted to those sorts of ideas in other texts or do you personally find that there's a bit of a theme to your choices?**

No, no, not really, I think if I'm working on an existing text, then it's usually just more about being kind of being drawn to initially read something just based on things that I might've heard of or whatever and there from that it either kind of sets off a imaginative – like it kind of asks to be put into production by me, or it doesn't, you know it's for someone else, or it's just not interesting to me or whatever, but so I don't set out with any particular ideas other than ah the kind of inherent idea that theatre is a place where.. um.. of transformation and creating worlds that people enter into that are, you know, outside of the everyday. So, that can, I mean that's, I'm interested in the transformative power of theatre but that I mean, it could, I mean, you know, that could be played out in all different kind of contexts so it depends on what comes my way or you know even if it's not a script that's already written it's what the initial idea is and um.. the seed of that idea of that dramatic world.

### **And had you read *Antigone* a long time ago, like is it something that you felt...?**

Yeah, I've been involved in about three or four other productions over the years in different ways so I did an adaptation a few years ago... um... yeah and I studied it, also, as a PhD student, actually studied the text, not on a theatrical level but on a philosophical level as well.

### **And do you consider that the text requires a particular style of performance or do you sort of leave that open to your actors?**

I think that Seamus Heaney's translation seems to call for different modes or like, different modes for different scenes because it's um, very thoughtfully written in terms of the metre, and so there's different modes where um, it's a rhetorical mode where it's sort of like um a presentation of an argument, other modes it's just about kind of, very much focused on two humans relating to each other and so um, overall, I think that, overall the text does, you discover through rehearsal what it, what that rhythm is ...um.. scene to scene, but not overall; I wouldn't say there's an overall style that it calls for but I mean we've decided to set it in a world within a world of a community centre, but that's kind of just to give us a playing ground to play within and to give a layer against which we can read the action, the world of the actions of the characters in the play but um..

No, I mean I think that if you gave it to, this same, even this same script to five different directors would hopefully approach it in five very different ways.

**Sure, sure. And those kind of, finding those things like the community centre and setting it there, is that something that you do in collaboration with Dale, as the designer, or is that something you came to Dale with?**

I came to Dale with that. And it came out of, um, well like we had one, another design idea, but then in auditions, hearing the words spoken by actors I was sort of seeing this, I was kind of seeing it veer away from me, from the declamatory, classical, sort of formalistic style into a more of a fluid sort of, the speech, a lot of the speech was a bit more kind of, more like, some of it was more in a kind of conversational, sort of everyday sort of language and I needed a fluid world that would allow for different kind of modes of speech, basically, I think.

**Sure, sure. And I guess it's always hard to pinpoint where inspiration comes from, but is that just something that, I mean do lots of ideas for settings, when once you've identified what kind of um qualities you want the setting to have, do they just present themselves to you?**

I was interested in it being, you know, I thought the important thing was the space that it comes out of should be a, ah, public, sort of a civic space because it's; a lot of this play is about the state and the individual and kind of public spaces and sort of plays itself out in public and so, and then I also wanted it to be a bit sort of like; there to be a quality of the everyday and something that everyday people might have a relationship with so that's when I came up with the idea of a kind of community centre type space, it's a space that nobody lives in that people come to and visit and it has different purposes for different people so it's a space that people move through.. um and then I started talking generally about those ideas and then the more I was talking about it the more I realised I was kind of referencing in my own mind a particular space in Melbourne that I've worked in, a community centre and so we just ended up modeling the space exactly on that so it's kind of pretty much.. um, it's pretty much an exact reproduction of that space, or a corner of or a half of that room put into the Belvoir. And that's because we thought we could either just look at the characteristics of those spaces and make a design based on the sort of things, sort of textures and objects and things that relate to that space, but then I thought; we you have a ready-made space there that those rules have already, over the years, shaped and modeled this place so now it is as it is, for whatever invisible reasons it's become that space with those curtains and those chairs and so we just decided to, rather than kind of work out what those rules are and then implement them, we've just choose the space that already is run by those rules and then reproduce that.

**Sure. And did any adjustments to the design have to be made because of references, specific references in the text or did it sort of just..?**

No but it means that, you know, well if, it means that, we kind of go: “are we going to have a... well these spaces often have a trestle table in them, do we require that?” Yeah, we can probably use that, so you know, we’ve got that. There’s nothing that we have to introduce to the space specifically. I guess, that as the characters; there’s some things that we bring into it, as long as it belongs in that world, as long as it belongs on one level in that space, then we can bring things in, we brought things in.

### **What kind of things?**

..like ah, we needed blankets so sort of blankets might be kind of in a, if that was a refuge of some sort there’d be blankets there so we put them in, or the table or um.. ahh.. what else?, other things, there’s a character who transforms through having these sort of sticks, walking sticks so you know, we put them there, they’ll be in the space somewhere, so there’s things like that, yeah.

**Ok. I wondered if maybe, and it’s a big question, if you could just tell us a little bit about your process in the rehearsal room, like you’ve already mentioned that actually in the audition process some of the actors’ auditions in fact perhaps inspired you on the direction you might take?**

Yeah, well we couldn’t, because it’s um, Sophocles, from the Sophocles it’s very dense it terms of it’s very important that everything is, every moment is understood – which it is with any play, but with this one it’s kind of very condensed, it’s not a long show and yet a lot, these kind of big things happen, and so we did a, we had two kind of processes sort of side by side where, um we just play and we had to also work out how the space of the community centre kind of world relates to the world of the play. So, side by side we sort of did some kind of open play ideas of just kind of using the room in different ways and how does the character come out of that world into that world, you know, how the entries and entrances and exits work and stuff, so we had this kind of spatial play and then parallel to that was sitting around the table and really kind of identifying what’s going on in each line, researching like the classical references so we could understand who the different gods are and what their roles are and um so there’s that research.

### **And do the actors do that research themselves?**

Oh, we sort of more commonly bring things in. We more commonly um like we’ll do the kind of realise, no, the thing we need to research and bring it in and give that to the actors to read. Ah, but some of them will do their own. I mean, their research is more about their research of line to line, just kind of understanding the text, so that external stuff we bring in, or, and then, so then there’s a kind of close work around the table, which then you take to the floor, and then so the last kind of week and a half we’ve been combining the two, like the playing, bringing it to the space, but with the kind of the like, kind of the work that we’ve already done on the closely looking at the text around the table, yeah. And then Jethro’s always there feeding sound in and like trying bits and yeah the costumes are coming in bit by bit so that kind of, the other world yeah of the kind of design and the sound design is sort of developed bit by bit, as well, sort of pieced together, yeah, and that feeds what happens on stage, and also, we can try out different ideas for the sound as we go, things like that. Yep.

**That’s great, thank you.**

## Rehearsing *ANTIGONE*

*Antigone* rehearsed for 5 weeks in the rehearsal room at Company B's Administration and Production Warehouse at 18 Belvoir Street in Surry Hills. Rehearsals took place from 10am to 6pm Monday to Friday. A sixth week was spent in technical production rehearsals, on stage in the Upstairs Theatre at Belvoir St Theatre. *Antigone* is a professional theatre production and the actors, director and crew are paid for the rehearsal period.

**REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHY:** Heidrun Löhrr



Hazem Shammass, Janice Muller, Paul Tassone, Chris Kohn, Pacharo Mzembe, Boris Radmilovich, Deborah Mailman, James Saunders, Katie Fitchett, Gillian Jones  
Photo: Heidrun Löhrr

**“we had two kind of processes sort of side by side where.. we just play and we had to also work out how the space of the community centre kind of world relates to the world of the play. So, side by side we sort of did some kind of open play ideas of just kind of using the room in different ways and how does the character come out of that world into that world, you know, how the entries and entrances and exits work and stuff, so we had this kind of spatial play and then parallel to that was sitting around the table and really kind of identifying what’s going on in each line, researching like the classical references so we could understand who the different gods are and what their roles are and um so there’s that research.”**

**(Chris Kohn, director of *Antigone*: interview with Jane May, 2008)**

**EXERCISES:** Exploring the world of the play through open play.



Hazem Shammas, Pacharo Mzembe & James Saunders

Photo: Heidrun Löhner

**Imagine you were directing these scenes for performance: -**

- A guard has to tell the ruler of the country some news that the ruler hates to hear – ask the two actors to decide between them what the news will be, but allow them to improvise and extend the scene. Intensify the drama by advising the ruler to threaten the guard unless he changes the news that he is reporting.
- A girl attempts to persuade her sister not to carry on with a course of action that will result in her sister's death. Again, ask the actors to determine the specifics of the scene together. Then heighten the stakes by suggesting that if the girl refuses to give up her action, her sister will die too.
- A young man tries to dissuade his father from a course of action, by arguing that he is on the same side as his father. The subject matter can be decided by the actors. Give the father the objective to have his will at all costs. Increase the pressure on that actor by introducing a third actor, mother to the young man, to appeal to his mercy. Both of them together can attempt to change the father's mind.
- A blind person (man or woman) comes into a room and tells everyone in the room that they are in danger unless they take certain actions.

**How might you encourage your actors to identify with the characters they are playing?  
What sorts of strategies might you use to approach the scene from different angles?  
What props would you like to have in your rehearsal space?**





Pacharo Mzembe, James Saunders, Paul Tassone

Photo: Heidrun Löhr

Look at the photograph above and describe what you see the actors doing.

After reading the article on page 14-15 and the interview with the director on pages 16-18; think about how the actors might use the 'world of the community centre' in which *Antigone* is set.

**"I thought the important thing was the space that it comes out of should be a, ah, public, sort of a civic space because it's; a lot of this play is about the state and the individual and kind of public spaces and sort of plays itself out in public and so, and then I also wanted it to be a bit sort of like; there to be a quality of the everyday and something that everyday people might have a relationship with so that's when I came up with the idea of a kind of community centre type space, it's a space that nobody lives in that people come to and visit and it has different purposes for different people"** (Chris Kohn, director: interview with Jane May, 2008)

What kinds of everyday activities might people use a community centre space for?

Think about public spaces – what kinds of qualities do they have compared to public spaces? [You might consider bus-stops, train stations, town halls, church halls, doctors' waiting rooms.] How do people behave differently in these spaces compared to the way they behave in private spaces?

**ACTING EXERCISE:** Decide on a public space to explore. Ask the students to enter it silently then choose a character to become and remain in the world of that character, performing an activity on their own for the first few minutes, then direct them to interact with one other person in the space.

They can do this by looking or not looking, touching or not touching, giving them an imaginary object, or by making some kind of sound. (not by speaking). Eventually get them to walk freely around the space, according to their own impulses as that character. When the exercise reaches its own natural conclusion, ask the students to describe how they felt in the space.



Paul Tassone, Hazem Shammas, and Boris Radmilovich

Photo: Heidrun Löhrl

Look at the photograph above. How would you describe the mood of the scene?

What kind of relationship and attitude do you think the character Paul Tassone is playing (Chorus) has towards the character Boris Radmilovich is portraying (Creon)?

How would you estimate the reaction of Hazem Shammas' character (Haemon) towards what both men are saying?

### **THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN WATCHING *Antigone*: -**

- How do the actors use eye-contact to create tension?
  - i) with each other?
  - ii) With the audience?
- When do they avoid making eye-contact or 'blank' each other?
- One of the characters (Tiresias) in the play is blind, yet is also known as a 'seer' or someone who sees into the truth of things. How does the actor playing Tiresias (Gillian Jones) explore the contradiction of these two aspects of the character in her performance?





Deborah Mailman, James Saunders, and Paul Tassone

Photo: Heidrun Löhner

Look at the picture above. James Saunders (centre) portrays the role of the Messenger who brings news to Creon and to Eurydice about what has happened to their family.

What kind of energy is there in the position the actor has chosen? What does it look like he's about to do?

**"The Greek tragedies are waiting to be rediscovered but you don't want actors in togas and sandals," Armfield says. "There's a particular life to be found in them and Chris is just the man to do that." (Tim Eliot, 'I felt I was right inside someone's nightmare', SMH: March 29-30, Spectrum p 4-5.)**

In Greek theatre, much of the 'action' occurs off-stage and is retold by a character such as the Messenger. The actor playing this role needs to bring enough energy into their retelling to convey the full weight of the events they are disclosing

### **EXERCISE: RETELLING A STORY**

Ask your students to think of or bring in a familiar story – something significant that happened to them – or it could be from a Greek myth, from the Old Testament or from the newspaper. Tell them it needs to be short and clear with strong dramatic elements. In groups, get them to tell their story twice. The first time around, they can use any sort of movement & action to convey impact – noise, gestures, movement. The second time around, ask them to convey the story using only stillness and their voice. You could ask two other students to hold their arms, or get them to stand completely still against a wall.

Then ask the group to compare the two versions of the story. Which one was most powerful?

## The Set & Costume Designer: Dale Ferguson

Dale Ferguson discusses with Jane May the process of developing set & costumes for *Antigone* (with interjections from the director Chris Kohn – indicated by his initials after each statement)

**So I'll just ask you Dale, are you involved in the - Chris was just telling me a little bit about the rehearsal process, I mean I wondered if, are you involved in, do you sit in on rehearsals at the beginning of the process?**

As much as I can, especially in this process with um Chris, as in we've approached this design in that, the set is like an anchor, a bit, we've really anchored the set to liberate the rest of the production so we could then find out what it was, so by giving and that sort of so how the costumes evolved is really truly from the rehearsal.. um, what we learned from rehearsal, or what comes out of rehearsal so that um, a lot of the dramatic conventions have been made up as you've gone, haven't they Chris?

Mm, mm, mm (CK)

So it's really hard to make that kind of call when you're not even knowing when anyone's going on or off stage and so it's kind of nice for me seeing it, um, you know it's a bit of a.. sort of like going round a room like this where you don't know what's there, it's sort of good.

**Yeah, I mean, yeah cause I haven't even seen, cause we saw the set design when they brought in the model box on the first day but just from being in the Admin office, well I haven't even seen some of the costume designs yet**

No, yeah, well any drawings are sort of hidden (*laughs*) so that no-one has any preconceived ideas about what they are because, um, I sort of talk to Chris and get hints and often it will be like he'll say: "I see the girl – Antigone - in an evening dress" and ok, so that's um like but it may not be like a queen, you know so you end up with a certain situation and then he'd mention that I think it's a texture – so maybe it's sequined, just take that, and then that becomes an anchor, and then sort of that you can say: "Ok, she's in a sequined dress, what's the situation around that? How does everyone else relate to that?" So that's sort of how I've been working, and then: "If she's in a sequined dress, what's her sister?" So that became the next relationship and once I've worked out that relationship - visual relationship - like the sister and Antigone, Ismene; um, that became the next thing, so it's like resolving one problem at a time.

**Yeah yeah, I find that really interesting. Does that mean that a particular style evolves or do you... is it much more eclectic than that?**

It's probably more eclectic. Soon as you see a style evolve you head in the other direction, (*laughs*)

**So you want to make it really clear, you don't want anyone going 'You look like a..'**

You don't want to have any red herrings in there, like false identifiers of something that actually isn't, or things like, set up a convention that is not intended. So you've got to be careful – it's a bit of a jigsaw puzzle, or a Rubix cube, you move one thing you kind of have to think of something else as well because you don't want them to look as if everybody is say from the, like some of them look a bit formal, we don't want it to look like they've all come from this one formal party somewhere, it's compositional and it's also, it's kind of about careful eclecticism, kind of thoughtful eclecticism, I think. (CK)

**Ok, sure.**

So I sort of try to think up situations and then soften it, I suppose is a lot of what I've been doing. For instance: the messenger as opposed to the guard and the difference in status they have, how long that messenger has to be in the room before we have any inkling about his role in the room, so a lot of those sorts of things.

**So you don't want to sign anything to show anything before..?**

Yeah. And the hardest thing when you've got this kind of production is that everything just sits well, and yet you don't want it to be bland so you've got to try and keep it bold and therefore you've got to - I'm sort of prepared that I'll make some mistakes and make some changes because I think that's a big part – it's just not fearing being wrong, otherwise you just bland it out.

**Yeah that's where you get the best results I guess. And what about working with colour in, I guess both in the set design and the costume designs, again I imagine it's more organic, do you make any conscious choices with colour in, say the costume designs?**

Yeah, you do but again that's where you're driven by the fact that the set was the original anchor so that's provided the canvas on which to work so you're thinking, um 'Well, how does that colour relate to that?' and then you sort of avoid obvious - ah choices about, say the colour red – red says too much too often, you know, um so we also have the imposition of the eccentricity of a hot pink curtain because that was in the original room that we based it on and a choice we would have thought we were very clever if we'd made that choice, and as a result it's just based in truth and to me it's just going to be right. I don't have to question it and that's liberating, I don't have to question it.

**Yes, yes.**

Yes (CK)

So, for me this production is about visual anchors, what is a known, and then what are the unknowns and how do you just sort of just build it, that's why ...I think if you went in, you just can't go in without every element – loose as a goose

No, it'd be too hard (CK)

you've got to have one post and in this case the post has been the set, the room.

**Right, right, ok - and did you actually go to the room that Chris...**

Yeah, Chris worked in it

**..realised he was imagining, and is it quite, is your design quite faithful to the actual room?**

Yeah, Chris has told me to go and have a look at it to get a feeling for it and when I went there, I just said 'This is it' because there were elements of it that I felt would really lend themselves well to the space and I immediately went in there and orientated myself in the theatre and therefore when I saw Chris at the first meeting after I went, I had a bit of an instinct how it related to the Belvoir, how

it twisted, and how it was put into the theatre; it also had a ceiling which I felt was an element that I thought would work well in there; a stage within a stage..

Yeah (CK)

**Okay and do you have to work with the lighting designer as well, or is that something that comes a bit later?**

Yeah, I do, but in this production, we've imposed such a narrow theatrical grid for, parameters really, which should hopefully be a virtue in that we want it lit like a room and that we want to get in there and we might say, oh that was a mistake but at least you know it's going to look...

(Chris Kohn leaves)

**And yeah, I guess this way you're working with Chris on this particular production, just going back to that, do you always work like that or do you think there's a particular relation with Chris..?**

This is the first time we've worked together so it's sort of a new area for me.

I always have that sort of element of...*Peribanez* was sort of make it up as you go, um, it was such an epic piece and a sort of relatively small budget and so that was um a similar kind of make it up as you go but not, not – I always sort of made a choice and then dismissed it, it was wrong - here I've just gone in with no fixed ideas; that's the difference.

**I just think that, yeah, it really kind of, what you've been talking about really highlights the fact that yeah, you just do have to be, seems like the best results are when you're open and you can hold your nerve, in a way..**

You have to, I don't think, um I think – either two things, either the designer is young and completely out of line with the connection with their director I don't think you could go in and do this if you were particularly inexperienced because you would lack the confidence to know that you weren't doing enough work, know what I mean?

**Yes, absolutely**

You can argue whether it works or doesn't work. I don't think that you can argue that the process hasn't been thoroughly *work*; that the process has been lazy, know what I mean?

**No. And just to finish, maybe if you just could tell us a little bit about when you first read the script of *Antigone*, what were your impressions, what struck you the most; I guess about the ideas that the play was expressing, conveying?**

A lot of the things the chorus said struck me as being relevant to a world deteriorating and a world in crisis.. um ..and a world of - that is environmentally.. um.. there is an environmental chord that was struck in this that I didn't read in the original, the translation we're doing, I read it in the slightly more verbose, yeah, it lacks the clarity and simplicity of this version, yeah but that was the thing that I was struck by the most, um by in the first read and just how, um how much; what a wide view of the world it had and how he saw it through this prism of tragedy, of human tragedy.

**And do you think that there are, that those ideas are coming out in the design elements of the production?**

No.

**No, you think there's other..?**

I think it's such a, um – I think the text, well the space is so um, ah neutral for this show, stage within a stage, it has no metaphor.

**Right, it's a ground on which to present this work.**

And they can control how much of that comes through and how much of a family drama this is or how much the court exists just by their mannerisms, so it's sort of based in the neutral space and when we went into it, you don't even know if they're going to create a situation or just use it as a stage, so, yeah.

**And then the costumes, they don't sound as neutral, just in my, from what you've said – do you think they're heading in the direction of saying something a bit more specific or do you think it's still?**

Not saying something more specific, more of a blend of um - character, status and their relationship to each other and their costumes are linked to their state of mind. For instance, um, I've deliberately put Antigone in a fabric that's very heavy, it has a lot of gravity, because she's, rather than floaty, that has weight as opposed to her sister, who has air. Creon, he's deconstructed his costume is deconstructed because everything is taken off, to say he exposes himself is wrong, but maybe to show a more brutal approach, I've sort of tried to show the brutality in his personality.

**And what about Haemon's?**

With Haemon to show - ah - more his servility.

**Yeah, right**

His situation is more linked to Antigone and Ismene. Their status is similar.

**That's great, thank you, thanks very much.**

## ANTIGONE in Production



Model box: Dale Ferguson

Photo: Heidrun Löhner

### Considering Set & Costumes

After reading the interviews with Chris Kohn, director and with Dale Ferguson, set & costume designer for *Antigone*, look at the photograph of the model box above and discuss the following:

- What are your initial impressions of the set, as gathered from the model box's depiction of what the set will eventually look like? Do you think a set like this is what an audience would be expecting to see a Greek tragedy like *Antigone* played out upon?
- What sort of mood does this set suggest to you?
- How has the designer used colour in the set? What is the effect of these colours?
- Can you see the little cupboards under the stage in the picture? How do imagine these might be used in the staging of *Antigone*?
- What kind of challenges do you think this set would pose for actors? For the director?
- As a whole class – brainstorm some of the difficulties that you imagine the production team might encounter in trying to replicate a real place, such as the community centre in Melbourne, on the upstairs stage of the Belvoir Street Theatre?
- From Dale's description of the costumes of Antigone & Ismene and from observing the 'neutral space' of the set above, can you imagine how those sorts of fabrics and dresses which he describes will work with or against the space? What might be the advantage of these sorts of costumes, given the events and the themes of *Antigone*?

## **COSTUME EXERCISE:**

Sketch and label or simply discuss (with colours, fabrics, features) the costumes for Creon, Haemon & Tiresias that you think would be most appropriate and striking; given the other information provided about the style of production and the overall concept for this production of *Antigone* in the interviews with Chris Kohn, director, and by Dale Ferguson, set & costume designer.

Write a paragraph about each costume, explaining the choices that you have made, and outlining how the costume would work for the actor given factors such as:

- doubling of roles (Tiresias is played by the actor who plays Eurydice, Haemon forms part of the Chorus of Theban elders, Creon plays only himself throughout)
- freedom of movement required according to the demands of performance
- the way the costume informs the audience of the character's status and role in the action

## **SET CONCEPT EXERCISE:**

In the interview which you read earlier the director of *Antigone* said about the choices his creative team had made in this production:

**“ we’ve decided to set it in a world within a world of a community centre, but that’s kind of just to give us a playing ground to play within and to give a layer against which we can read the action, the world of the actions of the characters in the play but... I think that if you gave it to, this same, even this same script to five different directors would hopefully approach it in five very different ways.” (Chris Kohn, director: interview with Jane May, 2008)**

Divide the class into five groups; in each group nominate a director, a set designer, a costume designer (and depending on how many members in each group, a lighting designer, a sound designer, a dramaturg). From your reading of *Antigone* – discuss and nut out a concept and approach to staging the play, completely different from that outlined in the interviews and photographs of this production.

You might like to consider the following:

- the challenges of staging a Greek tragedy for a contemporary Australian audience
- what action happens on stage and what action occurs off stage
- exits and entrances
- how to evoke the mood of the play
- what props you might need to fully enact the events of the play
- how the costumes will support your vision
- what kind of music/sound you might use

## **SOUND in *Antigone***

Some things to think about whilst watching the performance: –

How are sound & music used throughout the production to ‘feed’ what happens on stage?

Does the sound used in *Antigone* create an effect of ritual?

How does it work with other elements of the production to create a complete ‘composition’?

## **Further Research: STAGING of *ANTIGONE***

Find pictures of Ancient Greek theatres: if you can, particularly of the 5thC theatre of Dionysus in Athens. Bring photocopies of these theatres in to class. Work out which part of the theatre was the



'orchestra' (circular playing area). Find out approximately how large the space was and how many people the theatre could hold. Mark out where the 'skene' & where the 'parodoi' would be located

- Think about how each of these areas would have been used in the staging of *Antigone*.
- Consider how staging *Antigone* in this space would differ from staging *Antigone* in the upstairs Belvoir St Theatre (capacity 322)

### Further Research: Gender in *ANTIGONE*

1. In groups, investigate the role of women in Greek society. Share your findings with the class and use them to illuminate the following exercise.
2. Consider the following statements from Creon, Ismene and from Antigone that relate to gender and the spheres appropriate for men and for women to operate within.

#### Ismene:

...How do you think we'd fare  
If we went against the order?  
Two women on our own  
Faced with a death decree –  
Women, defying Creon?  
It's not a woman's place.  
We're weak where they are strong.  
Whether it's this or worse,  
We must do as we're told.



Katie Fitchett and Deborah Mailman

Photo: Heidrun Löhr



**Creon:**

...When she defied the general order  
Antigone had already gone too far,  
But flaunting that defiance in my face  
Puts her beyond the pale. Who does she think  
She is? The man in charge?

Have I to be  
The woman of the house and take her orders?  
She has brought death sentences upon herself  
And on her sister –



James Saunders, Boris Radmilovich and Deborah Mailman

Photo: Heidrun Löhr

**Antigone:**

...Not for a husband, not even for a son  
Would I have broken the law.  
Another husband I could always find  
And have other sons by him if one was lost.  
But with my father gone, and my mother gone,  
Where can I find another brother, ever?  
The law of this same logic I obeyed  
When I disobeyed Creon. It's a rule of life,  
But all Creon can see is a crazy girl  
He must get rid of.

3. How do you envisage these beliefs and opinions about the roles of women and men will affect each actor's characterisation?

## Questions for Discussion after the show: *ANTIGONE*

### Tragedy & *ANTIGONE*

1. How did the production of *Antigone* which you've seen express a tragic view of human experience?
2. Describe the production elements that contributed to this depiction of a moral universe.
3. To what extent do you think Antigone chose her own fate and to what extent was it unavoidable? How did Deborah Mailman's interpretation of the character demonstrate this?
4. How does the direction and staging of the production of *Antigone* you saw support this interpretation?
5. How did the actors in this production of *Antigone* indicate Creon's isolation and the gods' abandonment of him at the end of the play?

### Powerplay & *ANTIGONE*

1. What sort of power does Creon wield? [Consider whether recent events have had an impact on the type of power he demonstrates over the people of Thebes.]
2. How did the play start? Did you notice Creon find something at the beginning of the action? What is the significance of him finding this object? What does it indicate about the nature of the power which he holds?
3. Do you consider Antigone herself to be powerful? If so, where do you think her power comes from? How did the actors make this clear to the audience?
4. Consider the similarities and the differences between the way Antigone and Creon exerted their power. How did their onstage interactions provide insight into the way certain sorts of power operate?
5. In the production of *Antigone* which you saw, how much power belonged to the people of Thebes? How did the Chorus demonstrate this in their performance?



Hazem Shammas, Pacharo Mzembe, Boris Radmilovich & James Saunders

Photo: Heidrun Löhr

## After the Show

After each school matinee performance at Company B there is a Q & A session with the actors. In order to make the most of this experience, you might like to think about the *sorts* of questions you might ask before seeing the show.

### School Matinee Q & A sessions: A Guide

- Ask questions about the production you have just seen, rather than other plays, film or television programs in which you have seen the same actors.
- Think of the Q & A session as an opportunity to deepen your understanding of the production you have just seen, rather than just an opportunity to learn about the actors' careers or the profession of acting.

### Class Activity

Use a play you have seen recently when composing questions for this activity, or think of some general questions which can acquire more detail once you have seen the play.

1. Students list 3 questions that an actor might be asked by a student audience after a performance.
2. Students rank these questions from most (1) to least (3) according to:
  - Level of sophistication
  - Interest to the student
  - Cliché or what an actor would always be asked
3. Students share their best questions with the class – most sophisticated, of most interest and the one they won't ask because it is very clichéd.
4. Ask students to reflect on the idea that the Q & A session is an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the production
5. List the areas in which students could deepen their understanding of the production such as: themes and ideas, message, the setting, costume and set design, characters, acting style.
6. Choose a play the whole class has seen.

In pairs, students are to select 2 areas of the production they would have liked to have known more about and compose 2 specific questions for each one.

7. One pair swaps their questions with another pair and composes answers for their questions.
8. Share question and answers with the class.