

**Broken Sisterhood:  
The Relationship between Antigone and Ismene in Sophocles'  
*Antigone*<sup>1</sup>**

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*Abstract:* This investigation provides textual support for the view that, contrary to the interpretation recently advanced by Bonnie Honig, Antigone rejects Ismene in the prologue and persists in this rejection in the scene before Creon. Building on a pattern observed by Bernard Knox, I show that Sophocles employs dual forms to signal that a speaker is viewing Antigone and Ismene from the perspective of the family, i.e. as a pair of sisters, and contrasting μέν-δέ clauses to signal that a speaker is viewing them from the perspective of the city, i.e. as political agents. As a result, these easily overlooked grammatical markers turn out to serve an important role in the characterization of Antigone, Ismene and Creon, and their changing relationships to one another.

*Keywords:* Sophocles; Antigone; Ismene; Creon; dual forms; μέν-δέ clauses; characterization; Bonnie Honig

Sophocles' *Antigone* has long served western thinkers as a matrix for expounding their philosophical systems.<sup>2</sup> Many of them view the conflict between Antigone and her uncle, King Creon, as paradigmatic of a tension that characterizes human society more generally. Thus Hegel famously saw Creon and Antigone as embodiments of the domain of the state and of the family, locked in a dialectical struggle. His reading has found many critics, most recently from the quarters of feminist theory. A particular difficulty for any interpretation that wants to regard Antigone as a champion of family values consists in her relationship to her sister Ismene.<sup>3</sup> What are we to make of a young woman who rejects her sister, the only surviving member of her immediate family, because the latter will not take part in a suicidal scheme to defy public authority, and who persists in that rejection even when the sister pleads for permission to join her in death?

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Mark Griffith, Judson Herrman, and the anonymous readers of *Scripta Classica Israelica* for their comments on this article.

<sup>2</sup> Lists of such thinkers can be found, for example, in Steiner 1984; Hernandez Muñoz 1996, 151-52; Pöggeler 2004.

<sup>3</sup> As Goldhill 2006, 151 and 2012, 239 points out, this difficulty applies to Hegel's construction of family values as well as to Butler's feminist critique thereof.

In the past, it was quite common for critics to skirt this problem by giving short shrift to Ismene's role in the play or by downplaying the autocratic harshness with which Antigone treats her.<sup>4</sup> At present, the scholarly consensus generally tends toward viewing Antigone more critically, but only a few years ago the political theorist Bonnie Honig published a provocative study in which she takes exception to this 'unkind and unheroic' view of Antigone. If only we 'set aside the Creonic framing that has become hegemonic' in the reception of the play, she claims, we will find that Antigone is connected to Ismene in an 'agonistic sorority' that is 'solidaristic' and 'infused with love, anger, rivalry, complicity, mutuality, devotion, and care.'<sup>5</sup> But this is not so. As Craig Hannaway notes in his level-headed review of Honig's book, 'the contrast between the sisters could not be clearer in the play.'<sup>6</sup> In fact, Sophocles manifests the rift between Antigone and Ismene in his verses in multiple ways, which are well-known to scholars of the play. It is the purpose of this article to point out one more such device that so far has largely gone unnoticed: Sophocles' technique of having dual forms clash with or dissolve into contrasting μέν-δέ clauses.<sup>7</sup> As I will show, Sophocles uses this technique not only in the initial interaction between the sisters, but also at pivotal moments later in the play, in order to highlight the changing relationships between the central characters.<sup>8</sup> (For the convenience of the reader, I provide a table of all passages containing dual forms referring to Antigone and Ismene or Eteocles and Polyneices at the end of the article.)

Bernard Knox was the first to discern that in the *Antigone*, Sophocles employs these two types of markers according to a meaningful, interlocking pattern:

For Antigone and Ismene the brothers are an inseparable entity, and the use of [the dual] form to refer to them makes clear the gulf between the sisters, who cannot think of the brothers apart from one another, and Creon, who distinguishes the patriot brother from the traitor. Antigone points the contrast when she quotes Creon's proclamation: 'Has not Creon, in the matter of the burial of our (ἄνδρα, dual form) two brothers (κασιγνήτω, dual again) honored the one (τὸν μὲν) and dishonored the other?' (τὸν δ' 21-22). In these two

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<sup>4</sup> An influential example is Lesky 1963, 309-12, who makes no mention of Ismene in his summary of the play and complains that scholars have 'grotesquely distorted' Antigone's 'rich humanity.' Nussbaum, too, overlooks Ismene when she says that 'Antigone's virtue [...] involves nobody else and commits her to abusing no other person;' tellingly, she calls the *Antigone* a 'play about brothers' (1986, 66 and 57).

<sup>5</sup> Honig 2011, 51-2013, 170. I provide double references because Honig first published her reading as an article, which she later included, in somewhat altered form, as the final chapter of her book *Antigone, Interrupted*.

<sup>6</sup> Hannaway 2014. Similarly, Goldhill 2012, 247 calls Honig's interpretation an 'extraordinary act of willful reading against the grain.'

<sup>7</sup> Dual forms and μέν-δέ clauses are among the elements of the Greek language for which there exists no clear equivalent in English and which therefore pose a special peril to scholars who are reading the play in translation. Consequently, it is important to remember that Honig's interpretation, although she repeatedly refers to it as a 'close reading,' is based on a collation of English translations rather than on the original text of the play (Honig 2011, 31 n. 5).

<sup>8</sup> My investigation is deeply indebted to Mark Griffith's series of insightful notes on Sophocles' use of dual forms as relationship markers in his commentary (1999, *ad* 2-3, 170-72, 488-89, 531-535, 561-62, 769, 1226-27).

lines the resources of grammar and syntax are used with brilliant linguistic economy to present the difference between a family loyalty which regards the brothers as one and the loyalty to the *polis* which separates and opposes them.<sup>9</sup>

Since Knox sketches his discovery only in passing, let us take a moment to unpack his finding and to confirm its validity. Knox suggests that the *Antigone* contains two competing perspectives regarding Eteocles and Polyneices, that of the family and that of the city.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, he maintains that each of these is associated with a particular set of linguistic markers, the family perspective with dual forms and the city perspective with contrasting μέν-δέ clauses. Combining these two claims, Knox posits the following pattern: Sophocles has Antigone and Ismene use dual forms to signal that they view Eteocles and Polyneices from the point of view of the family, regarding them as an inseparable pair of brothers, while he has Creon (as quoted by Antigone) use contrasting μέν-δέ clauses to signal that he views Eteocles and Polyneices from the point of view of the city, regarding them as an irreconcilably opposed pair of political agents.

In order for Knox's pattern to be valid, two conditions must apply. First, what Knox calls 'the resources of grammar and syntax' which Sophocles employs as signals, namely the dual forms and the contrasting μέν-δέ clauses, must stand out sufficiently from their context to catch the audience's attention. Second, the use of either signal must be restricted to speakers adhering to the perspective that Knox associates with it, namely that of the family in the case of the dual forms and that of the city in the case of the contrasting μέν-δέ clauses.

Regarding Knox's claim that the dual forms serve as a signal of the family perspective that views Eteocles and Polyneices as a unit due to the blood tie they share, it is easy to see that both conditions apply. As to the first, Sophocles uses dual forms throughout his works to emphasize the special bond between sibling pairs, but still the forms are rare enough to stand out from the fabric of the text.<sup>11</sup> As to the second

<sup>9</sup> Knox 1964, 79-80.

<sup>10</sup> I retain the labels 'family' and 'city' as the conventional shorthand to refer to the opposing perspectives although both are problematic. Creon's claim to represent the city is rendered dubious already by the first sentence he utters on stage, in which he draws a distinction between the city and its citizens (Nussbaum 1986, 60). In addition, his frequent use of 'I,' 'me,' and 'mine' in the same speech betrays his autocratic proclivities (Hernández Muñoz 1996, 154). The question whom Antigone does and does not count as a member of her family stands at the heart of the current investigation.

<sup>11</sup> The surviving works of Sophocles contain approximately 130 passages involving dual forms that refer to persons, and more than sixty per cent of these describe sibling pairs. (Parenthetical question-marks indicate that there is more than one possible set of referents.) (1) Antigone and Ismene: *Ant.* 3, 13, 21, 50, 58, 61-62, 488, 533, 558, 561, 769, 770; *OC* 344-45, 445-46, 493, 497, 500, 530-31, 818, 848, 859, 1102, 1107, 1111, 1113, 1149, 1184, 1257, 1290, 1407, 1411-12, 1435-37, 1444, 1543, 1600-1, 1619, 1640, 1670-76, 1683, 1693-96, 1739-40, 1746; *OT* 1462-66, 1472-74, 1486-88, 1495, 1504, 1511; (2) Eteocles and Polyneices: *Ant.* 13-14, 21, 55-57, 144-47; *OC* 337-38, 34245, 344, 365, 372, 417, 423, 430, 448, 1369, 1375-78, 1392, 1425; (3) Electra and Chrysothemis: *El.* 882, 918, 950, 977-85, 1003, 1006, 1038; (4) Electra and Orestes: *El.* 795, 1335(?); (5) Agamemnon and Menelaus: *Aj.* 1387; (6) the Dioscuri: *F* 957; (7) the Sirens: *F* 861.1-2. (All verse numbers and quotations in this essay refer to the text of Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990a.)

condition, the only characters who speak of Eteocles and Polyneices in the dual are Antigone and Ismene (13-14, 21, and 55-57) and, just once, the Chorus (144-47).<sup>12</sup> All of these speakers view Eteocles and Polyneices from the perspective of the family, namely as a pair of brothers, the sisters doing so naturally, while in the case of the Chorus its viewpoint is made clear by an additional phrase emphasizing that Eteocles and Polyneices were ‘born of one father and one mother.’<sup>13</sup> By contrast, Creon, although he too is related to the dead brothers as their uncle, views them exclusively from the perspective of the city and never refers to them in the dual. The contrast is especially striking if we compare the sisters’ (13-14) and Creon’s (170-72) first mention of the mutual fratricide; as Mark Griffith acutely observes, the two passages contain very similar language, but with the important difference that Ismene refers to the brothers in the dual while Creon does not, because ‘to him the brothers are separate entities.’<sup>14</sup>

In the case of the contrasting μέν-δέ clauses, the situation is more complicated, since in general μέν-δέ clauses occur too frequently to be conspicuous in and of themselves. In many instances the particles merely connect two items; however, the verse cited by Knox comes from one of only a dozen passages in the play in which the μέν-δέ clauses set up a strong contrast between two persons.<sup>15</sup> In this particular instance, the playwright has further sharpened the antithesis by containing it within a single verse and underlining it by means of symmetrical word order and word choice:<sup>16</sup>

οὐ γὰρ τάφου νῶιν τῷ κατιγνήτῳ Κρέων  
τὸν μὲν προτίσας, τὸν δ’ ἀτιμάσας ἔχει;

Has not Creon, in the matter of the burial of our two  
brothers honored the one and dishonored the other?

Interestingly, verse 21 bears a notable resemblance to the two sentences from Gorgias which Budelmann adduces as counter-examples to typically Sophoclean style; both of them contain sets of antithetical μέν-δέ clauses in which the contrast is reinforced by pairs of terms opposite in meaning but ending in the same syllable,

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Knox 1964, 79-80 with nn. 32-34.

<sup>13</sup> 144-47: πλὴν τοῖν στυγεροῖν, ὃ πατὴρ ἐνός / μητρός τε μιᾶς φύντε καθ’ αὐτοῖν / δικρατεῖς λόγῃσιν κτήσαντ’ ἔχετον / κοινοῦ θανάτου μέρος ἄμφω. Cf. also Müller’s sensitive analysis of the verses (1967, 56).

<sup>14</sup> Griffith 1999, n. 170-72. (His mistaken attribution of verses 13-14 to Antigone does not impinge on the point.)

<sup>15</sup> According to Denniston (1934, 369-70), the particles μέν-δέ are used to link any two (or more) items in an antithesis ‘the strength of which varies within wide limits. Sometimes μέν ... δέ conveys little more than τε ... καί.’ Instances of μέν-δέ expressing a contrast between two persons: 22, 23-26, 194-98 (Eteocles, Polyneices); 444-47 (Sentry, Antigone); 484 (Creon, Antigone); 555, 557, 559, 561-62 (Antigone, Ismene); 909-11 (dead husband or child, dead brother); 1068-70 (Antigone, Polyneices); 1221-25 (Antigone, Haemon). Instances of μέν-δέ expressing a different kind of contrast: 80, 99, 150-54, 162-69, 255-56, 255-58, 327-29, 437-39, 616-17, 872-73, 925-27, 11056, 1279-80. Instances of μέν-δέ approaching the function of τε-καί: 61-63, 78, 93-94, 200-1, 480-82, 669, 898-99, 981-83, 1100-1, 1297-98, 1302-4.

<sup>16</sup> 21-22, with Knox’s translation. All other translations are my own.

arranged in precisely parallel sequence.<sup>17</sup> In addition to highlighting the antithesis stylistically, Sophocles has also reinforced it by repetition; he uses another set of contrasting μέν-δέ clauses with the same referents in the very next sentence (23-30).<sup>18</sup> Thus the inference is legitimate that in this passage the contrasting μέν-δέ clauses stand out enough from the context to serve as a signal and hence meet the requirements of our first condition.

The sentence containing the follow-up set of contrasting μέν-δέ clauses also provides the information needed to answer the second condition. Whose perspective is reflected in the antithesis expressed by this conspicuous use of the particles? Is Knox right to attribute it to Creon and to identify it as the perspective of the city, seeing that the words are actually spoken by Antigone? Fortunately, Sophocles soon brings on Creon to announce the decree to the Chorus, and a comparison of his own proclamation with Antigone's report of it proves that the antithesis is in fact his rather than hers. Not only does Antigone accurately capture the gist of Creon's edict, she even uses some of the same wording, including the contrasting μέν-δέ clauses:

#### Antigone's Report (23-30)

Ἐτεοκλέα μέν ...  
 ... κατὰ χθονός  
ἔκρυσσε τοῖς ἔνερθεν ἔντιμον νεκροῖς·  
τὸν δ' ... Πολυνείκους νέκυν  
 ἀστοῖσί φασιν ἐκκεκηρῦχθαι τὸ μὴ  
τάφῳ καλύψαι μηδὲ κωκῦσαι τινα,  
ἔαν δ' ἄκλαυτον, ἄταφον, οἰωνοῖς γλυκὸν  
 θησαυρὸν εἰσορῶσι πρὸς χάριν βορᾶς.

Eteocles on the one hand ... he laid in the earth so as to be honored among the dead below. But regarding ... Polyneices' corpse on the other hand, they say a proclamation has been made to the citizens that no one is to conceal it in a tomb or to lament over it, but to let it lie unmourned, unburied, as a welcome store of delightful food for the birds of prey who catch sight of it.

#### Creon's Proclamation (193-206)

Ἐτεοκλέα μέν ...  
 τάφῳ τε κρύψαι καὶ τὰ πάντ' ἀφαγνίσαι  
 ἃ τοῖς ἀρίστοις ἔρχεται κάτω νεκροῖς·  
τὸν δ' ... Πολυνείκην ...  
 τοῦτον πόλει τῆιδ' ἐκκεκήρυκται τάφῳ  
μητε κτερίζειν μητε κωκῦσαι τινα,  
ἔαν δ' ἄθαπτον καὶ πρὸς οἰωνῶν δέμας  
 καὶ πρὸς κυνῶν ἕδεκτὸν αἰκισθέν τ' ἰδεῖν.

[I have made a proclamation] regarding Eteocles on the one hand ... to lay him in a grave and give him all the holy offerings that are due the most eminent dead down there. But regarding ... Polyneices on the other hand ... a proclamation has been made to this city neither to honor him with a funeral nor to lament over him, but to let him lie unburied, his body to be eaten by birds of prey and by dogs, and a shameful sight.

<sup>17</sup> Budelmann 2000, 23-29. Creon resorts to a similarly pointed contrast when he feels his authority (both as a ruler and as a man) threatened by Antigone's defiance (484): ἦ νῦν ἐγὼ μέν οὐκ ἀνήρ, αὐτῆ δ' ἀνὴρ.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Griffith 1999, n. 23-30: '[T]he parallelism is marked by indignant contrast and crescendo.'

The juxtaposition of the two speeches makes clear that, as Knox maintains, the occurrence of the contrasting μέν-δέ clauses serves as an indication that the newly-minted ruler of Thebes cannot see Eteocles and Polyneices as brothers, but only as irreconcilably opposed political agents. In this radical form, the perspective of the city is espoused only by Creon. Significantly, in the verses I left out for reasons of space when quoting the proclamation above, Creon explains at length the political rationale for his decision to grant a state funeral to the one brother, while denying the last rites to the other: Polyneices led an invading army against his native city, while Eteocles sought to defend it from the attack.<sup>19</sup> By contrast Antigone, in her report of the decree, makes no mention at all of its underlying political rationale, thus showing once more that she views Eteocles and Polyneices exclusively as brothers and not as political agents.

Thus we find Knox's pattern fully confirmed: the perspective of the family and the city are each reflected linguistically in a distinct grammatical or syntactical signal and embodied dramatically by separate sets of speakers. Only the Chorus briefly bridges both viewpoints, speaking of Eteocles and Polyneices by turns as brothers (144-47) and as political agents (212). However, in both passages their stance is significantly less emphatic than that of Creon and the sisters. After hearing Creon proclaim the decree, the Chorus reiterates the contrast drawn by Creon between the princes' political roles, but much more concisely and without the use of any μέν-δέ clauses (212): τὸν τῆιδε δύκνουυ καὶ τὸν εὐμενῆ πόλει.

Having established the validity of Knox's pattern—while teasing out some collateral insights in the process—we are now ready to apply it to the relationship between Antigone and Ismene, which, according to Honig, has been universally misunderstood. At first, she sums up what transpires between the sisters in the prologue in a way that is consonant with the existing scholarly consensus: 'Antigone responds to Ismene's entreaties by rejecting her sister and swearing an abiding inhospitality to her forevermore.' But then she undermines this finding with the surprising assertion that the rift that emerges between the sisters in the prologue has no lasting effect, since sisters typically 'fight like cats and dogs and soon again are best friends.'<sup>20</sup> By taking recourse to this essentializing stereotype, Honig raises the possibility that Antigone does not stick to her oath of 'abiding inhospitality... forevermore,' but rather has already forgiven Ismene for her refusal to help with the burial of Polyneices by the time the two sisters stand before Creon: 'When Ismene says she wants a share in the deed, and Antigone will not consent, does Antigone belittle her sister? Or does she affirm her? Intonation is everything' (2011, 45=2013, 165). To a reader of the play in translation both of these options may indeed seem equally viable. The Greek text, however, contains linguistic clues that Antigone in fact persists in her rejection of her sister. In order to assess the tone of the exchange between the sisters before Creon correctly, it is necessary first to

<sup>19</sup> Eteocles: ὁς πόλεως ὑπερμαχῶν / ὄλωλε τῆςδε, πάντ' ἀριστεύσας δορί (194-95). Polyneices: ὁς γῆν πατρώϊαν καὶ θεοὺς τοὺς ἐγγενεῖς / φυγὰς κατελθῶν ἠθέλησε μὲν πυρὶ / πρῆσαι κατ' ἄκρας, ἠθέλησε δ' αἵματος / κοινοῦ πάσασθαι, τοὺς δὲ δουλῶσας ἄγειν (199-202).

<sup>20</sup> Honig 2011, 31 and 40 with n. 12=2013, 153 and 161 with n. 19. Reinhardt 1979, 79 invokes a slightly different stereotype when he calls Antigone's and Ismene's dispute before Creon 'a real girls' fight.'

trace the trajectory of the rift between the sisters as it breaks open over the course of the prologue.

As Griffith in his illuminating notes on the relevant verses and Goldhill in his rich analysis have shown, Sophocles employs an array of linguistic resources to mark the shift from unity to rejection in Antigone's attitude toward Ismene, including dual forms.<sup>21</sup> Even in the first sentence of the play, Antigone uses this device, along with several others, to connect herself with her sister: 'the two of us who are still alive' (3:  $\nu\omega\iota\nu$  ἔτι ζώσαν). Given that Antigone has sought the encounter with Ismene in hopes of convincing her to help with burying Polyneices, the dual can be seen here as a tool of persuasion; it does not simply state their sisterly bond as a fact but serves as an appeal to Ismene's solidarity.<sup>22</sup> In her reply, Ismene endorses the connection as she paints a verbal picture of their misery by surrounding a dual form that refers to their bereft selves with others referring to their dead brothers (13-14):

δυσὶν ἀδελφοῖν ἐκτερήθημεν δύο,  
μᾶτ' ἀνόντοιν ἡμέραι διπλῆι χερσί.

Of our two brothers we two were robbed when  
they died on a single day at each other's hands.

Soon after, Antigone in her turn juxtaposes dual forms for both sibling pairs, 'the two brothers of the two of us' (21:  $\nu\omega\iota\nu$  τὸ κασιγνήτω).<sup>23</sup> In this same speech, she also broaches the subject that has led her to seek this interview with her sister in the first place: will Ismene help her to bury Polyneices in defiance of Creon's edict? Ismene clearly feels that her union with her sister depends on her response and answers in a round-about way, employing a whole cluster of dual forms. Having first reminded Antigone of the wretched way 'the father of the two of us perished' (49-50: πατήρ...  $\nu\omega\iota\nu$ ), as well as of their mother's suicide and of their brothers' mutual fratricide, she pleads that at this point, of the whole family 'only the two of us are left' (57: μόνα δὴ νῶ λειψόμενα), who, as women, are naturally unfit to oppose men (61-62: γυναῖχ' ὅτι / ἔφουμεν, ὡς πρὸς ἄνδρα οὐ μαχομένα).<sup>24</sup> Only after this detailed recollection of their common lot and the repeated appeals to the bond that has united them so far, does Ismene finally declare herself incapable of taking part in the political action that Antigone has proposed (65-67):

<sup>21</sup> Griffith 1999 *ad loc.*; Goldhill 2006, 151-52 and 2012, 240-41. Below I seek to add to their insights in two ways, first by suggesting that Sophocles repeatedly places the dual forms in tension with contrasting  $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ - $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$  clauses and second by including in the investigation the dual form used by Ismene in 558, which Knox overlooked and Griffith and Goldhill do not mention.

<sup>22</sup> Knox 1964, 179 n. 31 aptly compares the duals Electra uses in order to win over Chrysothemis for her plan of murdering Aegisthus. For the concept of dual forms serving as a tool of persuasion, cf. also Schein 2003, 20 n. 4 and Roisman 2005, 42.

<sup>23</sup> My translation treats  $\nu\omega\iota\nu$  as a genitive of possession but it could also be an ethical dative. Cf. Jäkel 1961, 38.

<sup>24</sup> Ismene's stance has often been criticized as faint-hearted and evasive, but it receives some validation later on in the play. While Creon becomes increasingly defensive in the face of his young niece's defiance, he yields after having been confronted by a male authority figure like himself, Teiresias (1095-99). Cf. also n. 32 below.

ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν αἰτοῦσα τοὺς ὑπὸ χθονὸς  
ξύγγνοιαν ἴχθιν, ὡς βιάζομαι τάδε,  
τοῖς ἐν τέλει βέβωσι πείσομαι.

Therefore I, on the one hand, will obey those in authority, asking the dead to forgive me on the grounds that I am doing these things under compulsion.

Ismene's choice of words here shows her at pains to avoid a rift with her sister; she refers to Antigone's scheme to bury Polyneices in highly abstract terms as 'engaging in pointless actions' (68: *περιεὶς πράττειν*) and makes no mention of Antigone herself. Syntactically, she expresses her refusal by means of *ἐγὼ μὲν...* which, as Griffith comments, has 'no answering *δέ...*, although an implied contrast must be felt with "you".'<sup>25</sup> Evidently, Ismene shrinks back from making the contrast explicit because she wishes to preserve the bond that connects her to her sister in spite of their disagreement. Antigone, however, will have none of this. In a withering reply she not only proclaims her resolve to bury Polyneices to be incontrovertible, but also distances herself explicitly from her sister by providing the contrasting *δέ*-clause that was missing from Ismene's speech: 'I, on the other hand, shall bury him' (71-72: *κεῖνον δ' ἐγὼ / θάψω*). Ismene, still desperately intent on preserving their bond, now tries to redirect the resulting *μὲν-δέ* clauses so as not to place herself in opposition to Antigone (78-79):

ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἄτιμα ποιοῦμαι, τὸ δὲ  
βίαι πολιτῶν δρᾶν ἔφρον ἀμήχανος.

I, on the one hand, am doing nothing dishonorable, but on the other hand, I am by nature incapable of acting in defiance of the citizenry.

But Antigone seals the rift between them by means of another set of now sharply antithetical *μὲν-δέ* clauses (80-81):

σύ μὲν τάδ' ἂν προὔχοι· ἐγὼ δὲ δὴ τάφον  
χόρους' ἀδελφῶι φιλάτατ' ἰορέυσομαι.

You, on the one hand, may make these pretenses, but I, on the other hand, shall go to furnish a tomb for my dearly beloved brother.

As this analysis shows, the dual forms connecting Antigone and Ismene do not merely disappear but, in Antigone's mouth, are replaced by contrasting *μὲν-δέ* clauses.<sup>26</sup> This insight provides an important clue to the question whether, to use Honig's terms, Antigone belittles or affirms Ismene in their later exchange before Creon. For Knox is mistaken when he states that the sisters' use of dual forms is restricted to the prologue: '[Antigone and Ismene] speak of themselves in the dual throughout the first scene... Significantly, the dual form is not used by either of them in this connection after Ismene

<sup>25</sup> Griffith 1999, n. 65-7; cf. also Jebb 1888, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Of course, Sophocles underlines Antigone's rejection by other means as well. Cf., for example, the excellent observations on Antigone's labeling of Ismene as an 'enemy' by Cairns 2016, 94-95.



has refused to help her sister bury Polyneices' body.<sup>27</sup> In truth, Ismene employs the dual form one more time later on, and she does so in direct opposition to a set of contrasting μέν-δέ clauses. This dramatic moment occurs during the heated debate between the sisters before Creon, which culminates in three unsuccessful attempts on the part of Ismene to persuade Antigone to let her share her death and thereby reestablish their previous unity (554-60):

- Ic. οἴμοι τάλαινα, κάμπλάκω τοῦ σοῦ μόρου;  
 Av. ὄ μὲν γὰρ εἴλου ζῆν, ἐγὼ δὲ κατθανεῖν.  
 Ic. ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἀρρήτοις γε τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις.  
 Av. καλῶς ὄ μὲν τοῖς, τοῖς δ' ἐγὼ ὀδοῦν φρονεῖν.  
 Ic. καὶ μὴν ἴση νῶιν ἔστιν ἡ ἕξαμαρτία.  
 Av. θάρσει. ὄ μὲν ζῆις, ἡ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχή<sup>28</sup> πάλαι  
 τέθνηκεν, ὥστε τοῖς θανοῦσιν ὠφελεῖν.
- Is. Alas, woe is me. Am I really to miss out on your death?  
 An. Yes, for you chose to live and I chose to die.  
 Is. But not without my views having at least been stated.  
 An. Your way of thinking seemed right to some, mine to others.  
 Is. And yet, the fault is the same for both of us.  
 An. Take heart! You are alive while my life has long since  
 been given over to death in order to benefit the dead.

Commenting on Antigone's response to Ismene's first plea (555), Honig suggests that instead of interpreting it 'as a cold, demeaning rejection,' we can also hear Antigone say these words 'with great tenderness, resignation, and sacrifice.'<sup>29</sup> But the Greek text contradicts this interpretation. As shown by the underlining, Antigone counters all three of Ismene's entreaties with the syntactical construction that heralded the rupture of their bond in the prologue: contrasting μέν-δέ clauses. Consequently, the textual evidence strongly suggests that Antigone is persisting in the attitude of rejection she had reached by the end of the prologue. Moreover, by the conventions of rhetorical strategy, we expect Ismene to put her strongest trump into the third and final appeal, and there is reason to believe that she does so. While scholars disagree as to what Ismene might mean when she speaks of their 'fault,'<sup>30</sup> the significance of her choice of the dual form νῶιν (558) is clear: it marks her last hope of mending the broken bond of their previous union. Thus we are justified in rephrasing Goldhill's perceptive conclusion regarding the relationship between the sisters in even sharper terms; Antigone not only 'systematically avoids the first person plural, avoids constructing a verbal bond of "we",' but explicitly repudiates this bond when Ismene seeks to re-establish it by means of a dual pronoun.<sup>31</sup>

Creon, who has witnessed this exchange between the sisters, reacts with apparent bewilderment. Commenting on the altercation, either to himself or to the Chorus, he

<sup>27</sup> Knox 1964, 79.

<sup>28</sup> Jebb 1888, 107: 'In 559, ἡ ἐμὴ ψυχή functions as "a periphrasis for ἐγώ".'

<sup>29</sup> Honig 2011, 46=2013, 166.

<sup>30</sup> Kamerbeek 1976, 112: 'It is remarkable that [Ismene] speaks of an ἕξαμαρτία.' For discussions of *hamartia* in this play, cf. Burnett 2014, 214 n. 40 and 216 with n. 50.

<sup>31</sup> Goldhill 2012, 241.

refers to the sisters first in a dual form, like Ismene, and then in a set of contrasting μέν-δέ clauses, like Antigone (561-62):

τὸ παῖδέ φημι τώδε τὴν μὲν ἄρτίως  
ἄνουν πεφάνθαι, τὴν δ' ἄφ' οὗ τὰ πρῶτ' ἔφου.

Regarding these girls, I declare that the one has recently  
turned out to be a fool, while the other has been one all along.

The appearance of dual forms and contrasting μέν-δέ clauses within the same sentence brings to mind the two verses on which Knox based his pattern concerning the tension between the perspective of the family and the perspective of the city with reference to Eteocles and Polyneices (21-22): τὸ κασιγνήτω / τὸν μὲν ... τὸν δ'... . As we have seen, in that passage the dual forms represent Antigone's own view while the contrasting μέν-δέ clauses reflect Creon's, amounting to a quotation from his decree. Similarly, in this passage, the dual forms represent Creon's own perspective of the sisters while the contrasting μέν-δέ clauses merely echo Antigone's triple use of the construction in the preceding verses (555, 557, 559).

Evidently, the acrimonious exchange between Antigone and Ismene has given Creon a momentary sense of the fundamental disagreement between them regarding the question who should bear the consequences for Polyneices' burial. Prior to this scene, the vision of a distraught Ismene roaming the palace had sufficed to convince him that both sisters must have collaborated in the burial and hence deserve equal punishment. He speaks of them in the dual when he vows that 'both of them will die a most ignominious death' (488-489: οὐκ ἀλύξετον / μόρου κακίτου). As soon as Ismene has been brought in, he repeats his conviction that both sisters are guilty of political defiance by calling them, again in the dual, 'two agents of ruin and rebellion against my throne' (533: δύο ἄτα κάπανατᾶς εἰς θρόνων). This view of the sisters as an inseparable unit is so deeply engrained in Creon's mind that even watching Antigone repudiate Ismene right in front of his eyes causes him to suspend it only briefly. When he issues the death sentence a few hundred verses later, he has already returned to thinking of them in the dual and declares himself resolved that both of them must die. It is only when the Chorus echoes his pronouncement with palpable dismay, that Creon restricts the punishment to Antigone (769-71):

Κρ. τὰ δ' οὖν κόρα τάδ' οὐκ ἀπαλλάξει μόρου.  
Χο. ἄμφω γὰρ αὐτὰ καὶ κατακτεῖναι νοεῖς;  
Κρ. οὐ τὴν γε μὴ θιγοῦσαν· εὗ γὰρ οὖν λέγεις.

Cr. These two girls, however, he [Haemon] shall not save from death.

Ch. Do you really intend to kill them both?

Cr. Not the one who did not lend a hand; you are right.<sup>32</sup>

Thus throughout the tragedy Creon's attitude toward the sisters is the reverse of his attitude toward the brothers. Whereas he views Eteocles and Polyneices in their antagonistic relation to the city rather than as members of the same family, and hence

<sup>32</sup> According to Burnett (2014, 206-7), this exchange forms part of a series of verbal interactions between the Chorus Leader and Creon over the course of which Creon gradually moves from brusquely rejecting any advice offered by the Chorus Leader to accepting it.

never speaks of them in the dual, he cannot think of Antigone and Ismene as anything but a pair of sisters, and hence repeatedly lumps them together in dual forms, even after witnessing first-hand that the tie between them has been severed.<sup>33</sup> This proclivity surely has to do with his deep-rooted belief that women can have no political agency and that they are interchangeable. When Ismene, having failed to win permission from her sister to share her death, changes tactics and asks Creon to spare Antigone because she is betrothed to his son Haemon, he responds that ‘others, too, have fields fit for plowing.’<sup>34</sup> In his opinion, one woman makes as good a bride for his son as the next. Of course, Haemon later acts out a drastic refutation of his father’s view by committing suicide in an overtly sexual manner while clutching Antigone’s dead body.

By killing himself in this way, however, Haemon contradicts not only his father but also the bride to whose corpse he is clinging. For Antigone had earlier explained to the Chorus that her decision to give her life in order to ensure Polyneices’ burial is motivated by the fact that, since their parents are dead, she cannot acquire another brother in his stead; she would not have done the same for a husband or a child, as those can be replaced (909-12). Not least because of their chillingly calculating tone, scholars have felt uncomfortable with these verses for centuries, and responded by attempts to excise them from the text or to downplay their harshness.<sup>35</sup>

But even apart from this disputed passage, Antigone’s definition of her family is shockingly exclusive, seeing that after their disagreement in the prologue she no longer regards Ismene as part of it. Ironically, then, it is Antigone’s very insistence on viewing her dead brother from the perspective of the family rather than from that of the city, which leads her to assume political agency herself and to disown her closest living family member when she refuses to do the same. In fact, Antigone’s disregard for Ismene is so complete that in lamenting her imminent death, she calls herself ‘the only one left of the royal family’ (941: τὴν βασιλειδῶν μούνην λοιπὴν).

In conclusion, Antigone’s treatment of her sister constitutes a key facet of her character which we must not disregard. It sheds light also on the famous verse in which she gives her reason for choosing to bury her brother Polyneices even though this action can be seen as a gesture of disrespect to her other brother, Eteocles: ‘I am born to join in love, not in hatred’ (523: οὗτοι συνέχθειν, ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν). Too often, scholars have treated this statement as a general maxim that marks Antigone as the champion of a new morality.<sup>36</sup> Hernández Muñoz, for example, claims that Antigone has discovered

<sup>33</sup> Griffith 1999 comments on Creon’s use of the dual as indicative of his thinking of the sisters as a unit (nn. 488-89, 531-35, 561-62 with a cross-reference to 21-22, 769).

<sup>34</sup> 569: ἀρόσιμοι γὰρ χᾶτέρων εἰς γῆα. The agricultural metaphor has a harsh ring to it even though it is not unique to Creon, cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 18.

<sup>35</sup> For a list of the former, aptly refuted, cf. Griffith 1999, n. 904-15; also Murnaghan 1986 and Neuburg 1990. An example of the latter is Reinhardt’s claim that Antigone’s choice conforms to a general rule, alleging that a sister giving precedence ‘to her love for her brother over everything else ... has been a matter of experience since earliest times’ (1979, 83). For the view that a dead child can be replaced by another, cf. also Eur. *Alc.* 290-94 and Thuc. 2.44.3.

<sup>36</sup> Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990b, 126: ‘[T]he sentimental effusions which this line has provoked are unwarranted. Neville Chamberlain used it to justify his self-abasement before Hitler, since when Greek has never been quoted in the House of Commons.’ (I am indebted

‘the power of forgiveness and love, thereby opening up a new chapter in the ideological evolution of Greek tragedy;’ Lesky, even more sweepingly, sees her as a ‘tenderly serious heroine’ whose inclusive ‘concept of love’ constitutes a ‘primordial expression of western humanism.’<sup>37</sup> But even Reinhardt’s more cautious paraphrase—‘I was born into the [circle] where love between blood-relations knows itself to be in harmony with its like’—is still problematic since the tragedy shows that Antigone’s loyalty applies only to her male siblings.<sup>38</sup> A mere thirty verses after the famous statement, she rejects Ismene’s pleading for a shared death in the triple set of contrasting μέν-δέ clauses discussed above. The two passages are poignantly linked, since Antigone’s maxim gains special force from the fact that the compounds ‘συνέχθω and συμφιλέω are found nowhere else in classical Greek.’<sup>39</sup> In the sisters’ dispute before Creon, however, Antigone turns a deaf ear when now Ismene in her turn repeatedly employs the prefix συν- in her pleading (537, 541, 545).<sup>40</sup>

There can be no doubt, then, that Antigone’s rupture with Ismene is irrevocable. Sophocles underlines this rift by means of an astonishing variety of subtle linguistic clues, which can serve as an important corrective against the persistent temptation to make Antigone into the kind of heroine we would like her to be rather than to grapple with the complex character that Sophocles has created. The playwright’s strategic deployment of dual forms and contrasting μέν-δέ clauses in tension with one another deserves to be added to this list.

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to the anonymous reader of *Scripta Classica Israelica* who pointed me to this remarkable note.)

<sup>37</sup> Hernández Muñoz 1996, 160: ‘Antigone qui a découvert la force du pardon et de l’amour, ouvrant ainsi une nouvelle page dans l’évolution idéologique de la tragédie grecque’; Lesky 1963, 312-13: ‘zärtlich-ernste Heroide’ (the expression is Hölderlin’s), ‘Liebesbegriff,’ ‘Urwort abendländischer Humanität.’

<sup>38</sup> Reinhardt 1979, 78-79.

<sup>39</sup> Griffith 1999, n. 523.

<sup>40</sup> Cairns 2016, 99.

**Passages containing dual forms referring to Antigone and Ismene or Eteocles and Polyneices** (translations follow the Loeb edition by Lloyd-Jones)

Duals referring to Eteocles and Polyneices (single underline)

Duals referring to Antigone and Ismene (double underline)

Contrasting μέν ... δε clauses (broken underline)

<b>Verse 3, discussed on p. 7</b>	
AN. ἄ, ποῖον οὐχὶ <u>νῶϊν</u> ἔτι <u>ζώσαιν</u> τελεῖ;	ANTIGONE ...ah, which [of the evils that come from Oedipus is Zeus] not accomplishing while we still live?
<b>Verses 12-14, discussed on pp. 4 with n. 14, 7</b>	
IC. ...ἔξ ὅτου <u>δυοῖν ἀδελφοῖν</u> ἕτερήθημεν <u>δύο</u> , μῖαι <u>θανόντοιν</u> ἡμέραι διπλῆι χειρί·	ISMENE ...since we two were robbed of two brothers, who perished on one day each at the other's hand.
<b>Verses 21-26, discussed on pp. 2-6, 7, 10</b>	
AN. οὐ γὰρ τάφου <u>νῶϊν τῷ κασιγνήτῳ</u> Κρέων <u>τὸν μὲν</u> προτίσας, <u>τὸν δ'</u> ἀτιμάσας ἔχει; <u>Ἐτεοκλέα μὲν</u> ... <u>τὸν δ'</u> ἀθλίως θανόντα Πολυνείκου νέκυν...	ANTIGONE Why, has not Creon honoured one of our brothers and dishonoured the other in the matter of their burial? Eteocles... But as for the unhappy corpse of Polyneices...
<b>Verses 49-67, discussed on pp. 4, 7-8</b>	
IC. οἴμοι· φρόνησον, ὦ κασιγνήτη, πατὴρ ὡς <u>νῶϊν</u> ἀπεχθῆς δυσκλεῆς τ' ἀπώλετο... τρίτον δ' <u>ἀδελφῶ</u> δύο μίαν καθ' ἡμέραν <u>αὐτοκτονοῦντε τὸ ταλαιπώρῳ</u> μόρον κοινὸν <u>κατειργάσαντ'</u> ἐπαλλήλοιν χεροῖν. νῦν δ' αὖ <u>μόνα</u> δὴ <u>νῶ</u> <u>λελειμμένα</u> σκόπει ὅσῳ κάκιςτ' ὀλούμεθ'... ἀλλ' ἐννοεῖν χρή τοῦτο μὲν <u>γυναῖχ'</u> ὅτι ἔφουμεν, ὡς πρὸς ἀνδρας οὐ <u>μαχομένα</u> . ... <u>ἐγὼ μὲν</u> οὖν αἰτοῦσα τοὺς ὑπὸ χθονὸς ξύγγοιαν ἴχειν, ὡς βιάζομαι τάδε, τοῖς ἐν τέλει βεβῶσι πείσομαι.	ISMENE Woe! Think, sister, of how our father perished hated and ill-famed...; and, thirdly, our two brothers, on one day killing each other, did themselves both to death at one another's hands. And now consider how much the worse will be the fate of us two, who are left alone, if in despite of the law we flout the decision of the ruler or his power. Why, we must remember that we are women, who cannot fight against men...

	So I shall beg those beneath the earth to be understanding, since I act under constraint, but I shall obey those in authority.
<b>Verses 71-81, discussed on p. 8</b>	
AN. ἀλλ' ἴσθ' ὅποια σοι δοκεῖ, κείνον δ' ἐγὼ θάψω. καλὸν μοι τοῦτο ποιούσης θανεῖν. ... IC. ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἄτιμα ποιῶμαι, τὸ δὲ βίαια πολιτῶν δρᾶν ἔφην ἀμήχανος. AN. σὺ μὲν τὰδ' ἂν προὔχοι'· ἐγὼ δὲ δὴ τάφον χώσουσ' ἀδελφῶι φιλότατοι πορεύσομαι.	ANTIGONE Do you be the kind of person you have decided to be, but I shall bury him! It is honourable for me to do this and die. ISMENE I am not dishonouring them, but I do not have it in me to act against the will of the people of the city. ANTIGONE You may offer that excuse; but I shall go to heap up a tomb for my dearest brother!
<b>Verses 144-47, discussed on pp. 4 with n. 13, 6</b>	
XO. πλὴν τοῖν στυγεροῖν, ὧ πατρὸς ἐνὸς μητρὸς τε μιᾶς φύντε καθ' αὐτοῖν δικρατεῖς λόγῃσιν κτήσαντ' ἔγετον κοινῶι θανάτου μέρος ἄμφω.	CHORUS ...except for the unhappy two, who, sprung of one father and one mother, set their strong spears against each other and both shared a common death.
<b>Verse 488-89, discussed on p. 10</b>	
KP. αὐτὴ τε χηρὸς ξύναιμος οὐκ ἀλύξετον μόρου κακίτου.	CREON [S]he and her sister shall not escape a dreadful death!
<b>Verse 554-60, discussed on pp. 8-10</b>	
KP. οὐδ' ἐμάνθανον τρέφων δὴ ἅπαντα κάπανατάσεις θρόνων.	CREON [N]or did I know that I was rearing up two plagues and two subverters of the throne.
<b>Verses 554-60, discussed on pp. 8-10</b>	
IC. οἴμοι τάλαινα, κάμπλάκω τοῦ σοῦ μόρου; AN. σὺ μὲν γὰρ εἴλου ζῆν, ἐγὼ δὲ κατθανεῖν. IC. ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἀρρήτοις γε τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις. AN. καλῶς σὺ μὲν τοῖς, τοῖς δ' ἐγὼ ἴδοκον φρονεῖν. IC. καὶ μὴν ἴση γῶν ἐστιν ἡ ἴσημαρτία.	ISMENE Ah me, am I to miss sharing your death? ANTIGONE Yes, you chose life, and I chose death!

AN. θάρσει. εὐ μὲν ζῆς, ἢ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχὴ πάλαι τέθνηκεν, ὥστε τοῖς θανοῦσιν ὠφελεῖν.	ISMENE But I did not fail to speak out! ANTIGONE Some thought you were right, and some thought I was. ISMENE Why, our offence is equal! ANTIGONE Be comforted! You are alive, but my life has long been dead, so as to help the dead.
<b>Verses 561-62, discussed on p. 9-10</b>	
KP. τὸ παῖδέ φημι τῶδε τὴν μὲν ἀρτίως ἄνου πεφάνθαι, τὴν δ' ἄφ' οὗ τὰ πρῶτ' ἔφυ.	CREON I say that one of these girls has only now been revealed as mad, but the other has been so from birth.
<b>Verse 769-71, discussed on p. 10</b>	
KP. τὰ δ' οὖν κόρα τάδ' οὐκ ἀπαλλάξει μόρου. ΧΟ. ἄμφω γὰρ αὐτὰ καὶ κατακτεῖναι νοεῖς; KP. οὐ τὴν γε μὴ θιγοῦσαν· εἴ γὰρ οὖν λέγει.	CREON But he shall not save those two girls from death! CHORUS Then have you a mind to kill both of them? CREON Not the one that did not touch the corpse; you are right!

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