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## Contemporary Politics and Empathetic Emotions: Company B's *Antigone*

Sydney-based Company B's 2008 season included *The Burial at Thebes: Sophocles's Antigone* in Irish poet Seamus Heaney's translation. This article shows how the production conveyed notions of war, social upheaval, displacement, and exile that are relevant to contemporary Australian spectators. With its ethnic and racial diversity, and one overt reference to the plight of indigenous people under colonial rule and its legacy, the production confirmed that the emotional resonances in this staging of *Antigone* reflect and yet transcend the contemporary Australian situation; and Peta Tait here argues that the production contributed to spectators' understanding of the emotions underlying contemporary political debates. Peta Tait is Professor of Theatre and Drama at La Trobe University. Her recent publications include *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance* (Routledge, 2005) and *Performing Emotions: Gender, Bodies, Spaces* (Ashgate, 2002). She has published widely on theatre, drama, circus performance, and gender identity, and is co-editor (with Liz Schafer) of the anthology *Australian Women's Drama: Texts and Feminisms* (Currency Press, 1997).

THE SYDNEY-BASED Company B's season in 2008 included a beautifully conceived production of *The Burial at Thebes: Sophocles's Antigone* in Irish poet Seamus Heaney's 2004 translation of the tragedy, originally undertaken for the centenary of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (Heaney, 2004; Wilmer, 2007).<sup>1</sup> A fully professional production of Sophocles' play is rare in Australia. While the drama remained in Ancient Greece the theatre's staging, presentation, and visual design (by director Chris Kohn working with designer Dale Ferguson) broadly suggested political dissension in Australia at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The drama itself is set in the aftermath of a war and the production picked up on these references to convey notions of social upheaval, displacement, and exile that are relevant to Australian spectators. The cast was representative of the ethnic and racial diversity found in Australian theatre, and through one casting decision the production made overt reference to the plight of indigenous people under colonial rule and its legacy. The emotional resonances in this *Antigone* were intended to be understood within contemporary Australia.

Heaney was inspired to translate this 'poetic drama' because of its idea of burial rights arising from emotional feeling rather than an attraction to a political interpretation (Heaney, 2005, p. 18). While *Antigone's* actions are relevant to Australia today through the central question of what motivates socially responsible individuals to challenge the political state, I suggest here that the Company B production opened out the emotional compulsion behind *Antigone's* actions, which prefigure the play's durability and portability.<sup>2</sup> The emotional interactions of Company B's production illuminated how the dictates of familial loyalty were overshadowed by *Antigone's* rejection of the test of her loyalty to Creon.

Surprisingly, however, the production showed that in her empathy for the victim of Creon's 'divide and rule' mentality, *Antigone* also revealed reasoned emotions behind her resistance to an unforgiving, tyrannical state authority implicated in the politics of war. The condemnation of *Antigone* (Deborah Mailman) by Creon (Boris Radmilovich) was a rejection of her sympathetic identification with her brother and confirmation of his own need to subsume the emotions of those

around him. It was also the emotional irrationality of the edicts imposed by the political leader that had to be opposed.

The feminization of emotion means that its force as a motivation for action is often overlooked. Yet interpretations of Greek drama repeatedly point out that gender and emotions such as mourning are pivotal to the meanings in the texts. Drawing on critiques of gender identity in Greek drama, Christian Billing writes that 'the verbal expression of female lament constitutes as powerful an act of violence as the deed of vengeance itself' (2007, p. 70). My analysis of this production of *Antigone* argues that it contributes to the understanding of emotion underlying specific political debates while also pointing to the theatre's capacity to highlight the function of emotions within the wider society. Theatre can provide a space in culture to make sense of emotions and their power.

### The Political Context

The production elaborated on how the play's events take place in the aftermath of a war fought between Antigone's two brothers, and reminded Australian audiences that wars fought elsewhere do have consequences for Australia. The deployment of Australian soldiers to Iraq to join the forces from the USA in 2003 was particularly controversial, with large public anti-war protests in major cities. Further significances in this production can be found in the opposition to the policies of the Australian conservative Liberal Government from 1996 to 2007 under Prime Minister John Howard. Emotionally charged debates unfolded, in particular over the detention of asylum-seekers in prison-like compounds and the rejection of calls for an official apology to indigenous people.

Socially concerned groups in Australia claimed that longstanding principles of legal rights were eroded by these policies, and campaigns were undertaken by individuals who became the conscience of the nation, arguing for sympathetic treatment from the government as they took social and political action on behalf of asylum-seekers.<sup>3</sup> These issues can be generalized as a division bet-

ween calls for compassion, understanding, and reconciliation from politicians versus a political rhetoric that instead incited distrust, suspicion, and even fear of a designated other.

While a drama about a loyal sister burying her dead brother might seem tangential to these Australian political issues, transcending the specificities and differences between cultures and through time, the emotional values accompanying the act of burial in this production stood out and highlighted how Antigone displayed selfless concern for the fate of someone who was arbitrarily placed outside legal and political protection. Her stand resonated for Australians because of the aforementioned opposition to government policies, and accordingly the production's depiction of how decisions about life and death were fuelled by Creon's angry, punitive reactions. Such emotions appeared to be the driving force behind state decisions.

Perhaps it was this production in combination with Heaney's translation that made transparent how Antigone's story takes place in the aftermath of a war, reinforced by the circumstances of viewing this production on the public holiday remembering soldiers who had died in twentieth-century wars – in particular, the soldiers first commemorated, the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) diggers (soldiers) who fought an ill-fated First World War British attack at Gallipoli in Turkey in 1915. A major ceremony with Australian and Turkish government officials takes place in Gallipoli on 25 April each year, broadcast live on Australian television. Ten thousand young Australasians now make an annual pilgrimage there, reflecting an expanding movement to remember the fallen. Yet the twentieth-century social values of loyal mate-ship and 'a fair go for all', which the diggers nominally fought to protect in offshore wars, belong more to the faded values of nostalgia than those of a twenty-first-century Australian society that sent troops into Afghanistan and Iraq.

Subsequently in the background to this account of *Antigone*, a second news story unfolds in 2008 about the discovery of a ninety-year-old mass grave of First World War soldiers in France and the Australian

Federal Government's announcement on 31 July that the dead soldiers will be moved and reburied properly, out of honour and respect. This is a longstanding issue for the relatives of Australian soldiers who died fighting in other countries. By implicating the displacement caused by war, the Company B production of *Antigone* artfully alluded to these current debates in the context of the original narrative.

The numerous Antigones of European theatre history provide a backdrop to Australian productions of the play (Steiner, 1984; Holledge and Tompkins, 2000), and to most productions in the globalized contemporary theatre (Bérard, 2008). According to the *AusStage* database, there have been nearly fifty productions of *Antigone* since the Second World War in Australian theatre, but these have overwhelmingly been student or non-professional productions by Australian-Greek community groups (*AusStage*, 2008).

Australia's ethnically diverse, multi-racial society was prefigured in the casting for this professional production that adhered to the politics of minority inclusion – as would be expected of Company B. The casting of Deborah Mailman as Antigone gave the production an indigenous Australian presence for knowledgeable theatregoers, although the casting should not be assumed to provide the dominant significances of the production. Mailman is an awarded actor, highly regarded for her theatre roles and nationally known for those on television, and she appears regularly in theatre productions in Sydney and for Company B.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Mailman's presence in this role makes an emotional connection to the plight of indigenous people unavoidable. Throughout its time in government, the Howard regime steadfastly rejected calls for an official apology – considered long overdue by many – to the generations of indigenous children, called the 'stolen generations', who were taken from their parents until the 1970s under government-based sponsored assimilation policies (*Bringing Them Home*, 1997; Healey, 2001).<sup>5</sup> There have been ongoing efforts to reunite indigenous families and the stolen generations from the 1970s, and the families and

communities involved seek poignant ways of acknowledging these relationships, so completely disrupted by state intervention. Reunions are especially painful for those children eventually locating mothers, fathers, or siblings, only to find them deceased. *Antigone* depicts a family dispersed through state intervention.

### Theatre's Emotional Spaces

On entering Company B's Belvoir St Theatre upstairs venue, spectators found a set design that replicated an Australian suburban hall with a small stage, the type of hall built around 1970. From the outset events were positioned in an Australia that seemed orderly and peaceful, at least on the surface. A comment from someone nearby about the lack of a set suggested that it had been mistaken for the permanent theatre stage by a newcomer to the venue.

At first glance the pale green concrete-brick walls, fluorescent lighting, parquet wooden flooring and institutional brown vinyl and metal chairs were completely realistic. On closer inspection, the impression was disrupted by the curtain across the small stage, which was shocking pink in colour with gold trimming. Since the curtain, of sari silk, was out of place in the replica of a hall on stage, it forewarned that the significances of this production might be found in nuanced visual detail.

Such an innocuous hall space typifies where returned soldiers might gather or community groups – from local residents to mental health groups to rehearsing theatre groups – might meet. As I sat waiting for the production to begin, I wondered if Company B's production was going to have a post-modern framing by setting the production as a theatre group undertaking a rehearsal of *Antigone* and literally approaching the play and characters from the peaceful circumstances of suburban Australia.

Dressed in dark suit trousers, his white shirt open at the front to reveal a white singlet underneath, and with gold chains and rings on each finger, the actor playing Creon, Boris Radmilovich, entered and

slowly lined six chairs up against a wall. The style of dress typified men of a generation who migrated from post-war southern Europe to become labourers and factory workers. The set had become a hall in any Australian inner-city suburb with a large southern European migrant community. As Creon exited I was wondering whether the actors were doubling as non-professionals from an Australian-Greek community group coming to rehearsal in acknowledgement of the majority of previous productions of *Antigone* in Australia. Clearly such hints were there for spectators to establish links between the play and contemporary Australian society.

### The Opening Mood

Suddenly the bright lights of the hall went off. An ominous rumble began. Jethro Woodward's powerful electronic soundscape and the darkened stage space was occupied by three men lying asleep, wrapped in blankets. No longer welcoming, and before a word had been spoken, the hall space had become a public shelter occupied in the aftermath of disaster, one that could have taken place anywhere in the world. Perhaps these were civilians seeking temporary shelter after homes were destroyed, or soldiers passing through from a battle?

Flickering lighting reinforced a sense of disturbance. Mailman's *Antigone* entered to stand on the small stage, dressed in a glittering green evening gown and a large man's suit jacket, as if she had just left somewhere in a hurry, taking a male companion's jacket as she went. Had she come outdoors from the celebrations at the end of the civil war prefigured in the play? An official function to mark the victory could be presumed.

Ismene (Katie Fitchett) joined *Antigone* dressed in a smooth, green, silk gown and also wearing a man's black jacket as if she, too, had quickly taken something at hand to follow *Antigone*. Ismene responded to her sister like someone familiar with *Antigone* taking a stand, quietly countering as if expecting to compromise. Their uncle Creon, denying burial to their brother, Polyneices,

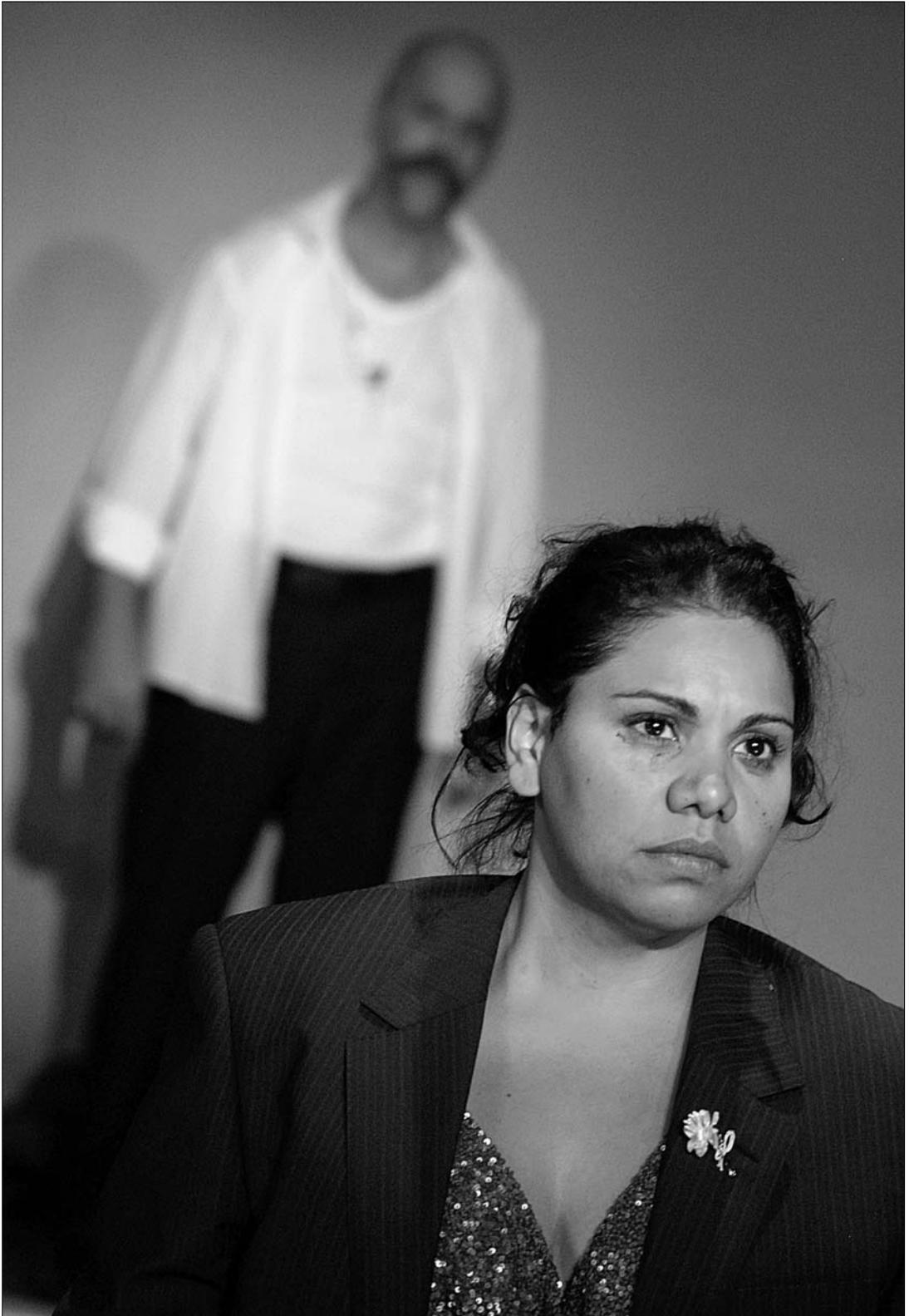
delivered the edict with the conviction of someone continuing in a military mode of leadership. The sisters were controlled. Were they exhausted by the war, where brutality had become a way of life? Certainly the logic behind the emotional delivery of the production at this point appeared to this spectator to convey the subdued wariness of survivors, as if each action required an effort because the characters were emotionally dulled and weary, unable to be shocked even by Creon's decision.

This *Antigone* had a strong Australian accent in the intonations of its conversational vocal delivery. But there were glimpses of anger in Mailman's portrayal, as if the character had been left no choice as occasionally she railed and argued against the unfairness of her position. The tone of speech made this *Antigone* less an idealistic dissident proclaiming a cause, and more like a relative faced with inescapable family obligations, regardless of Creon's rigid mind-set. This *Antigone* might be compared to the Australian-raised daughter of a migrant Greek family. She was the feisty daughter of a patriarchal family whose femaleness created the inescapable rituals of domestic life.

The interpretation of *Antigone* reminded me of a world in which women cared for bodies from birth to death, and the washing and dressing of a dead relative was obligatory. At the same time, there was a sense of recognition in the everyday Australian quality that made Mailman's *Antigone* completely convincing and compelling, and I was reminded of women I knew as neighbours and friends.

It could have been a member of the audience in *Antigone*'s position, forced to act by family circumstances and social collapse. The familiarity of this Australian-speaking *Antigone* within the social world of the audience made her choices seem those that might face even Australians, thereby disrupting the illusion of Australia as a peaceful suburban place untouched by wars which always happen somewhere else.

The monotone of the electronic soundscape continued throughout the production. Designed to generate a threatening effect, it



Antigone (Deborah Mailman) and Creon (Boris Radmilovich). Photo: Heidrun Lohr.

was not intrusive and I lost awareness of the sound as the production progressed. Its effect in the background no doubt reinforced a perception of unease.

When Pacharo Mzembe, the actor cast as the guard, announced the burial of Polyneices with halting and increasingly convoluted excuses that became almost comic, some association might be found with recent arrivals from Africa who enlarge Australia's multi-racial society, and often arrived as refugees after the 1980s. Mzembe was able to convey both the character's fear of the consequences of delivering the news, in his loss of physical composure while speaking, with a pleading tone to make his news palatable to Creon, so as to avoid becoming the scapegoat of his wrath. The Chorus was played by one actor (Paul Blackwell) – an older, wiser figure counselling caution to Creon.<sup>6</sup>

The guard addressed Creon as 'boss', in a colloquial reference to the status accorded employers. The dialogue revealed that the guard's task was to watch over the dead body of the traitor, which meant that he had been doing the work no one else had wanted to do – as happens to successive waves of migrants. But he also finds himself unwittingly trapped by the government edict. The translation refers to patriots like Eteocles and unpatriotic traitors and subversives defying the victors in the war (Heaney, 2004, p. 10).

Textual references to Polyneices having killed his countrymen bring to mind civil war. This production highlighted the aftermath of wars fought in distant places (off-stage and before the play opens).<sup>7</sup> As well, the civilian experience of these conflicts has been brought to Australia by migrants. This production contrasts with theatre's retelling of specific migrant and indigenous stories, which has dominated much new Australian writing for performance over the past three decades (Tompkins, 2006). Instead, because the narrative context remains removed, this production invites consideration of the effect and aftermath of all war and the emotional circumstances that compel an individual to take a stand against the state at such times.

Mailman's Antigone stood looking at her reflection in a glass door of the suburban hall,

her back to the audience. She might have contemplated escape, but instead confessed that she would die. She seemed brave. In this moment of speaking of her death out loud, the character was coming to terms with her mortality. In prosaic action, Mailman moved across to a chrome-metal trolley from a hospital or a mortuary with plastic and metal buckets, as if washing were a decisive action in response to the realization of her death, and this action would lead to her downfall.

### Socially Mourning the Dead

Most of her behaviour around the burial was recounted, and in the retelling implicitly conveyed the strength of her emotional motivation and certainty, her emotional loyalty to her outcast brother. At this point in Company B's production, it was evident that Antigone inhabited the emotional spaces of empathy even for the dead, and her actions seemed completely justifiable.

Antigone's actions in burying her brother constitute the process of personal mourning, but is she mourning more than the death of a brother? Perhaps she mourns the legacy of family guilt and her own death? In considering the politics of mourning, Peggy Phelan draws on Lacan's analysis of death to explain that Antigone herself becomes suspended between life and death in 'the terrible economy of death' that rehearses multiple deaths (1997, p. 13). In Phelan's interpretation, Antigone also mourns a loss of self. As events unfold, a dead brother takes precedence over a living sister.

In this production, Antigone reacted with quiet gravity, as if her sorrow were a depersonalized condition. Social mourning requires recognizable rituals and Antigone could only reinstate the public memory of her brother through a physicalization of mourning. But to me it seemed less about taking a decisive, resistant stand to bury Polyneices and more about following a course of action arising out of the substance of a self shaped by femaleness that carries the social expectations of caring and grieving on behalf of others. Given the iconic status of this Greek drama within theatre, theatre itself becomes complicit

in reinforcing how female identity is inseparable from selectively performed emotions within culture (Tait, 2002).

In Company B's production, the guard was treated violently as the interaction on stage and the dialogue fused and conveyed how he was beaten up. He was literally forced to follow Creon's demand that he return with whoever buried Polyneices, to gain his own freedom. The guard seeks physical freedom from state-imposed violence. Yet Creon expects to rule even over Antigone's emotional loyalties. How are freedoms maintained in a political culture that expects to police the emotional space that its citizens inhabit?

In her responses Mailman communicated as if she carried a great weight of sadness rather than delivering an overt expression of mourning with tears and wails. To Creon, however, Antigone and Ismene are 'two vipers spitting venom at the throne' (Heaney, 2004, p. 24). He asks who this 'reckless woman' thinks she is. Creon is enraged that a woman, his niece, in flouting his edict, has sought to take control by defying the man in charge, as if this loss of face, this social shaming, makes him into a woman. His masculinity, like his rule, is built on 'nerve', on emotional bravado (Heaney, 2004, p. 10). A defiant niece becomes equal to or worse than a traitor nephew.

There was a less ambiguous motivation for Creon's intransigence compared with most of the other interactions in the production that were cleverly ambiguous, caught up in a number of possible interpretations arising from the complexity of family relationships. For example, when Antigone refuses Ismene's change of heart in wanting to join her, is it out of love to save her sister or a proud rejection of Ismene for not joining her in the first place? Ismene, too, is guilty in Creon's mind.

An obedient son, Haemon (Hazem Shamas), hugged his father and professed love. Haemon's pink frilled shirt and dark suit were the dress code of someone attending a formal social occasion in suburban Australia. In the character's communication it becomes evident that Haemon is representative of a

generation born in Australia and straddling two cultures, respectful of his family and traditional ways from elsewhere but arguing for a more tolerant set of values, indicative of a younger generation in a changed world.

When he suggests that Antigone was only doing what any sister would have done, Creon will not listen and seemingly cannot hear that Haemon has sided with Antigone. There is a heated exchange between father and son. Why could only the youthful Antigone and Haemon foresee the tragic consequences of unforgiving decisions by the state as embodied by an older generation? Again this potentially held an inference about political dissension.

Antigone appeared on stage brought to the authorities with her wrists shackled – an overt reference to the treatment of indigenous people in Australia. The shackling literally reproduced a known image from the extreme colonial containment of indigenous people. In Australia's colonial past, settler cultures perpetuated the destruction of the societies they displaced by taking away their land and denying them citizenship. Merged with Antigone's story, then, this image refers to the intergenerational legacy of the treatment of indigenous people since colonialism.

This brief moment in the staging connected Antigone's imprisonment to the significance of the tragic loss of indigenous life for simply adhering to family loyalties and indigenous law since colonialism. The production contributes to decades of theatre and contemporary performance by artists directly exploring indigenous issues (Casey, 2004; Holledge and Tompkins, 2000).

As she walked away, Antigone bade farewell to life. Direct expressions of grief and lamentation were banished from public spaces. Creon told Haemon that she was not intended for a husband, and the son's reasonable arguments were drowned out by heated, angry responses.

A softly spoken and androgynous Tiresias (Gillian Jones) entered to warn Creon, accompanied by a crippled boy guide (Katie Fitchett). Creon angrily refused to listen until the Chorus persuaded him to heed the warning. But too late. Antigone had fallen

victim of Creon's anger towards her for emotional disloyalty. The news of the tragic consequences of Creon's edict with the deaths of Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice arrives with the messenger (James Saunders) towards the end of the production and is announced to the Chorus.

This messenger, a motorcycle courier costumed as a Hell's Angel rider, represented an identity typified as outside social convention and perhaps even contemptuous of the law, especially in relation to the violent rivalry between suburban motorbike gangs. Such a figure is familiar in an urban world of the present so that the spectator was again reminded of the production's relevance in contemporary Australian conflicts.

The Company B production shadowed emotional divisions in contemporary Australian society and politics – emotions which belong as much to artistic intention as to the reception of the production and performance analysis. The artistic intentions outlined by Kohn and Mailman expand on the appeal of Antigone's story for these theatre artists, since the resonances extend beyond their significance within the production.

### Reason as a Casualty

In a radio interview, Kohn explains that he is aware of how the families of Jewish survivors of concentration camps – many of whom came to Australia – continue to experience the impact in generations that follow. He explains that he was attracted to the play's 'careful construction' with arguments that suited the moment and shifting balance from one side to the other (Smith, 2008). While Kohn admits that the inferences to current politics after September 11th 'sit there and speak for themselves', he had 'kept faith' with the original event (Smith, 2008).

In her radio interview, Mailman speaks of the strength of 'burial rights' to indigenous people in Australia and how it is very important to 'lay people with respect' (Smith, 2008). She clearly explained that she did not feel that she needed to make a political statement about indigenous rights as an actor other than to interpret the character as a

sister within the play's family relationships. To a large extent, then, the drawing out of resonant associations from the production did depend on these interpretations. For me, the immeasurable effects of war came to the fore, even in so-called peaceful Australia with troops currently stationed overseas.

A member of Kohn's artistic team, philosopher Andrew Benjamin, writes that 'fate stands opposed to judgement' in a play about 'the nature of conflict', and finds that Antigone stands for love and friendship and Creon for nationalism (*Antigone* programme, 2008). But he continues that this play cannot be reduced to a family in conflict with the law when reason itself is the victim and only wisdom and judgement can redeem it. In nominating reason as a casualty, Benjamin leaves open the other possibility within the narrative circumstances, that emotion overwhelms the spaces of the psyche. It is a logocentric culture that denies the potent destabilizing force of emotions in society.

In her tone, Mailman's Antigone was forceful and resolute, controlled rather than overwhelmed with passion. In defying the edicts of the laws that Creon embodies, the character of Antigone has come to personify taking a stand for just principles. As Company B's Antigone conveyed valid and logical justifications for her actions, could Creon dismiss these because they were emotions and therefore subordinate to reason? The exclusion of Polyneices is a decision that reaffirms the state's language-based law. By comparison, females are expected to express sorrow through tears and other bodily signs, to embody grief, and contribute to the emotional bonds that unite societies.

Mailman's Antigone was argumentative but not screaming in fury, sad but not crying out in despair. At the point of Antigone's shackling, these emotional interpretations make sense in the context of Australian political history because they suggest emotions arising from a longstanding, deep-seated confrontation. This might have been an instance of confrontation between indigenous and settler cultures. Those living with personal grief and mourning over time in a community experiencing sadness and suffering

might eschew outward, short-lived displays of emotion.

### The Politics of Emotion

Creon on the other hand was blindly angry about how Antigone disobeyed him in the immediate circumstances, so his irrationality seemed obvious, his sanity called into question – even blind Tiresias could not reach him. The emotional balance in this production was meaningful since femaleness was not typified by clichéd hysterical reactions. Instead the overly wrought Creon was furious, on the verge of losing self-control – a necessary feature of conventional masculine dominance. The expressive delivery of Creon contrasted with the quieter responses of the other characters to reveal how his decisions emerged from emotional excess.

Theatre can expose the power of emotion and provide a potent social lesson about how emotions can govern actions with political force. It can reveal the direct impact of emotions on political decision-making. In the morality of the play, judgements are emotional judgements. The production reveals the consequences as Creon's emotions forestall reasoned arguments from the comparatively calmer Haemon and formal restraints arising from family obligations. Emotional feelings influence thoughts, especially about personal relationships, and these come to the fore in social behaviour inclusive of legal decisions.

The possibility that beliefs arise from emotions and their allegiances and function as ideas, as 'emotion-instigated beliefs', suggests how these processes outweigh coherent arguments, and potentially can become socially destructive (Frijda and Mesquita. 1997, p. 46–7). Individuals can become deluded with emotion-based beliefs which manifest as generalizations, persistent attitudes, and seem to them unquestionably true. Yet emotions also underlie rational arguments across the range of twentieth-century politics and ideologies (Goodwin *et al.*, 2001). They are not subservient to human reactions, outcomes or conflict, but form the substance of how these come about. As happens in

theatre, emotions are not private experiences, but socially reinforced expressions. Antigone shows that emotions which are socially performative might also serve the higher ideals of humanity.

By finding that emotions have reasons that coincide with actions, it is possible to reclaim Antigone's decisions as measured and considered. The apparent lack of self-reflective awareness of emotions and their instabilities by a powerful political leader like Creon makes him blind to their force and propel this tragedy. The production's interpretation of Antigone's defiance of Creon played out a comparable emotional gulf between the opposing points of view in contemporary Australian politics. Whatever the arguments about Antigone's motivation, the emotional expression in this production made her actions coherent and explicable.

Perhaps it can be argued that empathy eventually prevailed in Australia. Major political conflicts arose from political rhetoric about boats of asylum-seekers arriving on Australian shores after escaping the conditions of war and minority persecution and the ongoing demand for legal and formal ways to redress the disempowerment and dispossession of indigenous people. Following the change of Federal Government in 2007, an official apology was made to the 'stolen generations' by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on 13 February 2008.

But the struggle of indigenous people to gain recognition for numerous social injustices continues. And although Australian troops began withdrawing from Iraq in June 2008 under the Rudd Government policy, as fighting escalates in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka the numbers of persecuted people from minority groups arriving by boat via Indonesia has once again increased.<sup>8</sup> These issues remain current. But so, too, does the expectation that a democratic government should undertake empathetic positions in policies. The significances in Company B's production of *Antigone* suggest how the politics of emotions matter in the face of an uncaring and irrational, emotionally manipulative state authority.

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## Notes

1. Company B's *Antigone: The Burial at Thebes* opened at Belvoir St Theatre, Sydney, Australia, on 5 April 2008 and I saw the production on 25 April.
2. I was struck by how the play implies that the distinction between humans and non-human animals arises through burial in ways that relate to Judith Butler's interpretation of the play, but decided to pursue this perspective on the play separately in 'Human Rights, Humanness, and Animalness in *Antigone*', *Austra-*

*lasian Drama Studies Journal*, No. 56 (April 2010), p. 71–83. See Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

3. Australia is a nation founded by migrants arriving by boat and assuming control of land formerly inhabited by the indigenous peoples. Given the history of how Australia has been settled through successive waves of migrants from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East over two hundred years, often escaping tragic situations and political events in their homelands, a more sympathetic understanding of the social consequences of larger historical and political forces that bring migrants to Australia might have been expected of the government. Significantly, this government's response to the several hundred Iraqi, Afghani, Pakistani, and Iranian asylum-seekers arriving in Australia by boat after first having reached Indonesia, which opportunistically stirred up false fears of these new arrivals for electoral votes (Marr and Wilkinson, 2003). These policies alongside other decisions were perceived to have stalled progress towards a society at ease with cultural diversity, if not also undermining well-established existing laws and Australia's longstanding support for international legal principles of human rights. The boat people were accused by the Howard Government ministers of thwarting Australia's official refugee programme and its waiting list protocols, and if boat people reached Australia, they were detained for years in centres on mainland Australia behind barbed wire while the legitimacy of their claims was assessed. The government repeatedly pointed out that new arrivals threatened Australia's security, and that people-smugglers were profiting from these illegal operations. Opponents of these policies argued that it was unnecessary to imprison asylum-seekers being assessed (especially children and families), and that this practice set Australia apart among developed countries.

4. For her first major production in the acclaimed *The Seven Stages of Grieving* in 1995, a collaboration with director Wesley Enoch, Mailman's indigenous heritage was explicitly allied to an acting role (Casey, 2004, p. 244; Tompkins 2006, p. 72–4). This used an imaginative abstract contemporary performance form and was one among a number of important solo shows by indigenous female performers in the early 1990s. Most of which were much more autobiographical than Mailman's performance. These shows were an innovative development within Australian theatre and have been extensively analyzed elsewhere (Casey, 2004, p. 247).

5. Those children were placed in missions run by religious or welfare organizations or in boarding schools or foster care, and later often sent out as indentured workers without proper pay. These policies had immeasurable repercussions upon the survival and welfare of indigenous families and communities, with a continuing legacy of social and health problems and premature deaths still evident today.

6. Blackwell was one of four actors in this production who might be presumed to have an Anglo-Celtic heritage, although this should not be taken to have any particular significance.

7. Australian soldiers fought in the First World War in Europe and Turkey, and throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Asia in the Second World War and in the Korean and Vietnam wars.

8. In 2009 the number almost doubled. Some even leave refugee centres with decade-long waiting times in south-east Asia to undertake this dangerous journey.