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Between Two Worlds Representing Duality In The Costumes Of The University Of Central Florida Conservatory Theatre's Production Of Seamus Heaney's The Burial At Thebes: A Version Of Sophocles' Antigone

Grace Lorraine Trimble

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BETWEEN TWO WORLDS:
REPRESENTING DUALITY IN THE COSTUMES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA CONSERVATORY THEATRE’S PRODUCTION OF SEAMUS HEANEY’S THE BURIAL AT THEBES: A VERSION OF SOPHOCLES’ ANTIGONE

by

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B.A. Luther College, 2008

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Theatre in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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ABSTRACT

The costume design for the University of Central Florida Conservatory Theatre’s production of Seamus Heaney’s *The Burial at Thebes: A Version of Sophocles’ Antigone* took an ancient Greek classic by Sophocles and infused it with influences from avant-garde theatre. This thesis documents the process of designing the costumes from academic, artistic, and technical aspects. Through this process, I explored how to communicate abstract ideas about humanity into actual costumes and how multiple cultural heritages can be intertwined in a united visual which pushes the audience to think more critically about the story. The recurring themes of duality are central to the final costume design: silk chiffon chitons draped over seemingly nude tattooed bodies, representing the ever-present competing allegiances to the will of the gods or to the law of man.

Working backwards through the process, this thesis discusses the avant-garde aims of the production and how they were achieved in design. The historical and cultural research, and how it directly influenced the costume design, is discussed for both Seamus Heaney and *The Burial at Thebes*, as well as for Sophocles and *Antigone*. Moving through a thorough script analysis and text-to-text comparison of Antigone and *The Burial at Thebes* illuminates the character and situation traits that are expressed in the design. Script-to-script comparisons reveal the heightened political language Heaney has created to make a story readily accessible to modern audiences. This gives Creon more humanity, thus magnifying the conflict, which is analyzed using conflict theory.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................... iii

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................................. vi

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................... vii

INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................... 1

AN AVANT-GARDE DESIGN ................................................................................................... 4
  The Design .......................................................................................................................... 8

SOPHOCLES AND ANTIGONE ............................................................................................... 15

SEAMUS HEANEY .................................................................................................................. 19

THE BURIAL AT THEBES ...................................................................................................... 22

SCRIPT ANALYSIS ............................................................................................................... 26
  When are they? .................................................................................................................... 26
  Where are they? ................................................................................................................ 27
  Who are they? .................................................................................................................... 28
  What kind of dialogue do the characters speak? ............................................................... 29
  What happens before Antigone/The Burial at Thebes? ..................................................... 30
  A Brief Summary of Oedipus Rex ..................................................................................... 31
  A Brief Summary of Oedipus at Colonus ........................................................................ 33
  What happens during Antigone/The Burial at Thebes? ................................................... 35
  What is the role of each Character? .................................................................................. 38
    Antigone .......................................................................................................................... 38
    Creon ............................................................................................................................. 39
    Tiresias ........................................................................................................................... 41
    Ismene ............................................................................................................................ 42
    Haemon .......................................................................................................................... 42
    Eurydice ........................................................................................................................ 43
    Guard ............................................................................................................................. 43
    Messenger ...................................................................................................................... 43
    Boy ................................................................................................................................ 44
    The Chorus .................................................................................................................... 44
  What are the themes of the play? ...................................................................................... 45

THE BURIAL AT THEBES AND CONFLICT ....................................................................... 48

CONCLUSION ......................................................................................................................... 55

APPENDIX A: CAST AND CREW ......................................................................................... 57

APPENDIX B: TIMELINE ....................................................................................................... 60

APPENDIX C: JOURNAL OF DESIGN PROCESS .................................................................. 63
  Prior to Design Meetings ................................................................................................. 64
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Nike (Victory) Adjusting Her Sandal ............................................................. 92
Figure 2: Nike of Samothrace (Victory of Samothrace).............................................. 93
Figure 3: Artemis Left Side ......................................................................................... 94
Figure 4: Tattooed Thigh ......................................................................................... 95
Figure 5: Tattooed Back ......................................................................................... 96
Figure 6: Roughs, Creon and Guard ..................................................................... 98
Figure 7: Roughs, Antigone and Ismene ............................................................... 98
Figure 8: Roughs,Tiresias and the Chorus ................................................................. 99
Figure 9: Roughs, Haemon and Eurydice ................................................................. 99
Figure 10: Creon’s Symbol ..................................................................................... 101
Figure 11: Antigone’s Symbol ............................................................................... 101
Figure 12: Final Color Palette ............................................................................... 103
Figure 13: Creon Rendering .................................................................................. 105
Figure 14: Antigone Rendering ............................................................................ 106
Figure 15: Haemon Rendering ............................................................................ 107
Figure 16: Eurydice Rendering ............................................................................ 108
Figure 17: Ismene Rendering ............................................................................... 109
Figure 18: Chorus Rendering .............................................................................. 110
Figure 19: Tiresias Rendering .............................................................................. 111
Figure 20: Messenger Rendering .......................................................................... 112
Figure 21: Guard Rendering .................................................................................. 113
Figure 22: Boy Rendering ..................................................................................... 114
Figure 23: Production Photo, Antigone and Ismene ............................................. 116
Figure 24: Production Photo, Antigone and Ismene ............................................. 117
Figure 25: Production Photo, Tiresias ................................................................. 118
Figure 26: Production Photo, Creon ................................................................... 119
Figure 27: Production Photo, Guard ................................................................. 120
Figure 28: Production Photo, Antigone and Chorus ............................................ 121
Figure 29: Production Photo, Eurydice and Chorus ............................................. 122
Figure 30: Production Photo, Antigone and Creon ............................................... 123
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Page Breakdown ............................................................................................................. 89
Table 2: Budget ............................................................................................................................ 125
Table 3: Laundry Instructions ....................................................................................................... 128
Table 4: Modified Check-In/Check-Out ..................................................................................... 131
INTRODUCTION

As costume designer for the University of Central Florida Conservatory Theatre’s production *The Burial at Thebes: A Version of Sophocles’ Antigone*, I was asked to create a design that would adequately express the complexity of the script in a manner faithful to our production’s goal of creating a piece influenced by aims of avant-garde theatre. *The Burial at Thebes* has two distinct historical heritages layered on top of each other. Underneath is the story of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, a play nearly 2,500 years old, which was one of the first plays written in ancient Greece at the dawn of Western theatre that we know of. Layered on the older text is a newer version by Seamus Heaney, world-renowned contemporary Irish poet. Heaney’s poetry is infused with rhetoric choices rich with Irish cultural heritage. This layering of cultural influence over a well-known story lends itself well to visual and environmental abstraction. These dual references allow for freedom in design, since complexity and duality are written into the text. The simultaneous use of Greek landmarks and Irish phrases establish a world on multiple planes.

Heaney’s focus is the aural and lexiconal relationship. As a poet, he strives to convey information and emotion through careful choice of meter, phrase, and diction. I determined from the beginning that the costume design would be nontraditional, with a focus that would draw attention to the humanity and struggle of the characters. I made a detailed script analysis of *Burial at Thebes: A Version of Sophocles’ Antigone*. I analyzed the script line-by-line in comparison with *Antigone*, in particular to gain an appreciation for the changes Heaney chose in creating a more human Creon. Because it was Heaney’s intent to treat Creon and Antigone as
duel protagonists, I analyzed the plot through the lens of Conflict Theory (a social science theory), which enabled me to view it objectively.

The Irish heritage of Heaney and the ancient Greek world of Sophocles served as influences for the costume design, but not as direct sources. The main inspiration was the representation of the idea of duality and competing allegiances and actualizing those in the costumes. The resulting design was a transparent chiton-like garment whose silhouette pays homage to the ancient Greece of Sophocles, while the transparency and flowing nature of this layer recalls the ethereal nature of the gods. The flesh-toned underlayer adorned with tribal-like tattoos was representative of the human world, here especially embracing the poet’s Irish heritage, with symbols reminiscent of ancient Celtic art. The duality of flowing chiton while exposing the tribal cues from the flesh underneath represents the dual allegiance (1) to the gods and (2) to the law of man, and the struggle between these competing demands. The process that resulted in this design included much experimentation with different designs symbolic of gender, allegiance, and culture. Constructing a costume design for Burial at Thebes: A Version of Sophocles’ Antigone proved to have more challenging components than many costume designs, due to the plethora of historical influences and literary inspirations, not to mention the director’s chosen path of abstracted realism.

Throughout the design process and continuing through the performance, I questioned my design’s ability to influence the audience and push the envelope. I researched the principles of avant-garde theatre and the relationship between avant-garde artists and classical theatre during the design process and used them as a point of reflection and comparison after the production had closed. Interestingly, many of the most well-known avant-garde artists have turned to classic
texts in their work. And Antigone has a particularly rich history of new versions that bring new life to the ancient tale.

Instead of recounting this process chronologically, the beauty of hindsight is that the final analysis does not have to wait until the end. Here, we will discuss the final product first, then journey backwards through the research that led to its creation. Initially, we’ll see how the avant-garde aims were met and how this production follows in the footsteps of many a great theatre artist in re-envisioning classics. Next, we’ll look into how historical and cultural research directly influenced the costume design. Finally, we’ll discover how Heaney altered the original text to heighten the conflict in The Burial at Thebes. Heaney contemporized the political language of Creon to create a more accessible character, someone a modern audience could relate to. Through giving Creon more humanity, the conflict becomes more complex, resulting in a brilliantly heart-wrenching saga.
AN AVANT-GARDE DESIGN

During the design and construction process and continuing throughout the performance of *The Burial at Thebes*, I was continually asking myself—and being asked by others—“Is this play avant-garde?” When people think of avant-garde, they generally think of things that are innovative, experimental, and challenging to the status quo. Rejecting traditional, and therefore classic, theatre seems to be the first assumption about avant-garde theatre. There is an assumed tension between classics and challenging the status quo. During the design process of *The Burial at Thebes*, I was enrolled in a Contemporary Theatre class with Dr. Julia Listengarten, the director, so our conversations about avant-garde theatre were frequent and complex. Taking this class from Julia allowed me to gain not only a greater understanding of the significance and history of avant-garde, but also a vocabulary with which to discuss non-traditional work. I also gained an appreciation for her aesthetic and what she values in theatre, which helped immensely in creating my first abstract design.

When attempting to assess whether this production of *The Burial at Thebes* was indeed an avant-garde production, one might hesitate to put a version of a Greek classic and avant-garde in the same category. Many well-known artists and theorists, however, have used classics in their production of avant-garde theatre. Bertolt Brecht (a vastly influential twentieth-century German playwright and theatrical director) wrote a version of *Antigone* that is an example of an avant-garde adaptation of ancient Grecian theatre: Brecht changed the language, time, and location of the classic story to create a new drama. Jerzy Grotowski (mid-twentieth-century Polish director
and experimental theatre innovator) wrote *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, which was based on the Elizabethan drama by Christopher Marlowe. However, he used members of the audience as guests at the dinner and used the actors as props, thoroughly deviating from the traditional theatre experience. Peter Brooks’ (English film and theatre director) forays into Shakespeare were elaborate visual spectacles and explored new acting techniques. Therefore, classic and avant-garde are not mutually exclusive. All members of the avant-garde movement share the goal of pushing the boundaries, of not performing the classics the way they have been performed for centuries. But when does a performance of a classic work become an avant-garde piece? Where is that line?

Antonin Artaud (early twentieth-century French playwright, director, and actor) argues in his essay “No More Masterpieces” that our reverence for the past is stifling our present. Our regurgitation of the classics does not engage and affect the audience, since the message and overall experience of the work get lost in an archaic language, which the audience cannot follow.

One of the reasons for the asphyxiating atmosphere in which we live without possible escape or remedy—and in which we all share, even the most revolutionary among us—is our respect for what has been written, formulated, or painted, what has been given form, as if all expression were not at last exhausted, were not at a point where things must break apart if they are to start anew and begin fresh. (Artaud 382)

Artaud exposes the absurd situation, in which we exalt the great achievements and creativity of those in the past at the cost of ignoring our own creativity and opportunity for achievement. He rails against this tradition by creating a new type of theatre, known as the
Theatre of Cruelty, which he described as a “visceral attack on the senses” (Artaud 372). Artaud does not want the same old theatre experience of entertainment with, perhaps, a moral lesson. Rather, he desires an emotional journey that is jarring, one that forces you to reevaluate your mindset.

Others have paid homage to the past by reenvisioning classic scripts, whether by Shakespeare or by ancient Greeks. Peter Brook has had a successful career with new interpretations of classic Shakespeare in his long-standing association with the Royal Shakespeare Company, in which he would “mount energetic productions in which the entire stage is utilized and realistic sets are banished in favor of bold, abstract, and austere settings” (Brook). He mounted a reinvention of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that employed the use of acrobatics. In his production of *King Lear*, Brook used a “bleak visual vocabulary,” which was strongly influenced by Beckett (Irish avant-garde playwright whose minimalist approach to language won him a Nobel Prize in Literature) (Burstein 2). Brook took this idea of new exploration of classic works to uncharted territories with his dramatic staging, gleaning inspiration from many different facets of the avant-garde spectrum. He used the jarring, visceral qualities of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty and the irrationality of Beckett’s Theatre of the Absurd, as already mentioned, and the estrangement qualities of Brecht’s Epic Theatre (Brook). In an interview about his production of *The Tempest*, Brook spoke excitedly of allowing the actors to explore the text in search of violence and power and “whether they could find new ways of performing all the other elements which were normally presented in a very artificial way . . . and whether the actors could extend their range of work by using a play that demanded this extension” (Croyden 125). Brook obviously shares the same sentiment about “artificial”
reproductions as Artaud, but instead of damning our approach to classics, he gets on with the task of giving them new life.

The language in which scripts are originally written is a major obstacle for an audience’s connection to classic plays. While the stories and morals often may feel contemporary, if the audience becomes lost in arcane language, the impact is lost. Artaud suggests that the audience should not be expected to be knowledgeable of the language and the perhaps strange or unfamiliar cultural references presented in theatre pieces written long ago.

It is idiotic to reproach the masses for having no sense of the sublime, when the sublime is confused with one or another of its formal manifestations, which are moreover always defunct manifestations. And if, for example, a contemporary public does not understand Oedipus Rex, I shall make bold to say that it is the fault of Oedipus Rex and not of the public. (Artaud 382)

Bertolt Brecht chose to change the language of the classic Greek tragedy Antigone when he produced an avant-garde piece in his Epic Theatre style. Brecht was striving to keep the audience thinking critically about the story and not becoming emotionally involved. This style of estrangement keeps the audience thinking in terms of the issues their own society rather than engrossed in the fictional metaphor of the play (Brecht 305). Brecht’s Epic Theatre changed the way many people think about theatre; it has become a touchstone for the generation of directors and theatre artists who came after.

Many directors have used the principles of avant-garde theatre to revamp classics in a way that can reinvigorate a piece and use it to challenge an audience rather than merely entertain. Simply by creating a more linguistically accessible version of Antigone, Heaney had already
begun this journey into the world of the avant-garde. As the artistic team for the University of Central Florida’s production, we (the director and designers) aimed to take this production into a wholly avant-garde production.

The avant-garde principles and classic story created a beautiful duality, a theme that was recurring through the design. The costume design was not meant to inform the viewer of the physical location, time period, nor status of the characters in a literal manner; the most important goal was to evoke an emotional response to the situation of the characters while at the same time revealing their defining character traits.

The Design

The costume design for The Burial at Thebes was an abstraction of ancient Grecian attire, as well as a physical manifestation of duality and conflict. Based on the idea of a traditional Greek chiton (a large piece of fabric worn draped over the shoulders or shoulder), the garments were reminiscent of them only in silhouette. The basic form was taken from the chiton, but length and opacity were altered to allow for a more complex design. The costumes were to evoke a sense of ancient Greece, at the same time allowing for greater dimension and depth, by adding other components of the costumes from other inspirations.

The notion of every person comprising two (at times competing) personas (one ruled by humanity and the other ruled by the gods) was a driving force behind the costume design. Each costume (except for that of Tiresias) was composed of a transparent silk chiffon chiton, revealing a tattoo-like symbol on the character’s skin. The translucent chiffon layer represented the world of the gods: the ethereal nature of the fabric lent itself well to symbolizing spirituality, eternity, and a higher power. Beneath this layer, a flesh-toned leotard represented skin, which was
embellished with a drawn symbol. This component of the costume was the manifestation of humanity. The bare skin and tribal-esque tattoos resonated with the primal essence of man. These two realities and allegiances were ever-present, like the ethereal chiffon over the seemingly nude, tattooed skin. While each of us may identify more closely with the rule of deity or the rule of man, both are ever-present.

The symbol that occupied the torso area of each person was a variation on either Creon’s or Antigone’s personal tattoo. Creon was adorned with a starlike symbol known as Metatron’s Cube. This star was chosen for Creon because of its intricate overlapping lines, angularity, and rigidity, while Antigone was adorned with a Celtic symbol for eternity—three spirals originating from the same central point. This curvilinear shape, contrasted with the angularity of Creon’s, was free and heavenly. The rest of the characters each bore a symbol that was a variation or combination of these themes. The degree to which they resembled either Creon’s Metatron’s cube or Antigone’s eternity spiral was determined by where individual allegiance lay. The soldier, messengers, and boy had decidedly geometric symbols, which were simplified versions of the strong, angular lines of Creon’s Metatron’s cube. Eurydice, Ismene, and Haemon bore variations on Antigone’s spiral, with some of the angularity of Creon, symbolic of walking the line between the two allegiances.

The Chorus’ visual motif was unstructured and organic, reminiscent of vines stretching out from their origin on the torso, up the left arm, and up and onto the face. The Chorus was the only instance where we saw the design emerge from underneath the chiffon layer. The Chorus represented all of humanity and its deterioration. The deterioration became more apparent as they portrayed different characters. Deterioration and destruction are themes also seen in the overall
design of *The Burial at Thebes*, especially in the set. That theme was apparent in the Chorus as the overgrown vinelike design, which enveloped the arm and face. The women of the Chorus all wore the same strapless dress design, cinched at the underbust and waist to yield a ruched Greek look. They wore a maroon color, which although an earth tone, had a strong presence when seen in the large body of the Chorus.

The color palette for the rest of the characters was tans and browns for the civilians, while the royalty’s colors fell on a spectrum from blue to black. Creon was adorned in black, a manifestation of his strength and inability to bend. Haemon was a cool gray, tying him to his father, but softened somewhat. Antigone was the brightest and boldest color on the stage, bearing a cobalt blue—a sophisticated shade, but more vibrant than seen elsewhere. This represented her ability to stand strong in the face of her circumstances. Ismene’s dress was pale blue, to symbolize her familial connection to her sister, but with less vibrancy. Eurydice was also dressed in a shade of blue, but a darker navy blue to underscore both her familial connection to the girls (she is their father’s sister) and her connection to her husband.

The length of the chitons varied from character to character, the length being loosely correlated with their amount of devotion to the gods. Creon had one of the shortest chitons, along with those of the boy, soldier, and messenger. The female characters in the story all had considerably longer chitons. The extra amount of fabric they wore symbolized the ethereal. Antigone was the only one to possess the long, draping sleeves characteristic of the Hellenistic chiton.

Tiresias, the seer, possessed powers none of the other characters did. Tiresias did not live in this world the way the others did. For this reason, the character was dressed in a long, opaque
chiton, which was more reminiscent of actual chitons in ancient Greece. The garment was made of silk noil, a heavy raw silk with a characteristic nubby texture and gentle heavy drape, to give it weight and organic texture. The silk was dyed pale goldenrod, the lightest color we see in the fairly dark palette.

The women’s hair also served as an integral part of the overall design. To further separate associations with ancient Greece and emphasize abstraction, the women’s hair was tightly braided across their heads, in differing patterns. Antigone, Ismene, and Eurydice wore a continuous spiral, which was elegant and regal. The Chorus (again, all women) had an inverted French braid that crossed horizontally across the back of their heads, a style that has been used infrequently. “The boy” had simple cornrow braids going straight back from the forehead. All of each actor’s hair was worked back up into the braids, so that no hair hung off the head. This created an interesting visual that clearly took us out of any recognizable society and created a beautiful and uniform look. We could use this structure of uniformity and yet still emphasize individuality when needed. When Antigone appears after being captured, she has released her braids: the deterioration of the society is mirrored in her falling out of the dress of the civilization. Ismene does the same when she decides to follow in her sister’s footsteps. The two girls, with long hair draping across their faces, shoulders, and backs, create a stark contrast to the rest of the society, with their hair—whether short or long—tightly bound upon their heads.

Through abstracting the visual aspects of the characters outside of ancient Greece, the audience was forced to think more objectively about the characters and their story instead of dismissing it as merely something that happened long ago. The audience was given non-traditional cues in which to interpret characters, causing it to spend more time analyzing the
characters, the motives, and the story at large. By doing this, you demand more of your audience, by asking them to question not only the morality of the laws of the land but also the impact of gender stereotypes.

The use of costumes geared toward evoking an emotional response from the audience instead of a design based in historical accuracy fits the principles of the Theatre of Cruelty.

While this production did not embody all the elements of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty, some elements were implemented, from the stylized movement of the Chorus to the abstract costumes and scenic element, and the manner in which vocalization was used. The work of choreographer Pina Bausch served as the main inspiration for the movement of the Chorus.

Pina Bausch was groundbreaking in the field of dance and an important influence in the avant-garde theatre. Bausch was the first truly to combine the fields of theatre and dance to create a cohesive performance, instead of the two separate entities that had been the custom previously. Her dances were emotional, combining the influences of both Artaud and Brecht. Her movement is an emotional, all-encompassing experience, and at the same time has the estrangement quality of Brechtian theatre. Her movements were not poised and graceful, as the ballet that theatergoers had learned to expect from dance performances. Bausch was quoted as saying she was “not interested in how people move but in what moves them” (Wakin). This is a very Artaudian approach to dance: that it wasn’t about making a pretty picture but about the experience—which is often ugly and unpleasant—to bring out the most emotional response.

The influences of Bausch, as well as Artaud, could be seen in this production of Antigone. In Artaud’s work he implemented soundscapes, the use of constant sonorization in the form of “sounds, noises, and cries that are chosen for their vibratory quality” (Artaud 387). The
Chorus made great use of guttural keening—a sound unfamiliar to the American ear—when grieving the loss of Haemon. The keening not only paid homage to the playwright’s Irish roots but also created an atmosphere that was eerie, yet enticing. Whispering from behind the audience also created a ghostly effect of being surrounded by the spectacle. To establish an uncomfortable though entrancing environment, the Chorus also used random atonal vocalizations during portions of the performance.

Other design elements in this production were also influenced by avant-garde principles. The choice of strong color in the lighting evoked the unearthly and dreamlike quality of the surrealists. The set gave the impression of a stone wall that was in disrepair, as stones were missing and could be seen lying beneath the wall in the sand covering the stage. As the show progressed, different sections of the wall slowly and silently leaned in toward the audience, tilting slightly toward the actors. This movement created a crushing sense of collapse, of being trapped, and of claustrophobia. This served as a visual interpretation of the idea of your world falling apart around you. The notion of a moving set seems to be in the vein of Peter Brook, as he often utilized visual spectacle to create an emotional response.

When does a classic become an avant-garde work? Few people would argue that the work of Peter Brook did not push the limits of modern theatre even though he worked with classics. Where is the line between a classic piece with avant-garde influence and an avant-garde version of a classic? This depends on your definition of avant-garde. Regardless of the definition you use, they are all subjective. Those within the avant-garde movement often hope that what is avant-garde will move the spectator to reevaluate the way they think about theatre, and existence as a whole. Even if your definition of avant-garde is “anything outside the box,” the “box” must
be defined and will be different for every person. Thus, it is nearly impossible to classify a piece as avant-garde or not. For some, our production may have been like nothing they have ever seen before and could have greatly affected the way they think about theatre and about life. For others, it may have been less influential. That is not necessarily a failure, because Artaud and Bausch wanted the relationship between the work and the audience member to be an intimate personal experience. In their view, if the performance is experienced as avant-garde for some but not for others, so be it.
SOPHOCLES AND ANTIGONE

When embarking on a design for a theatre production, it is important to have an understanding of the playwright’s motivation in writing the play. A familiarity with the life of the playwright is exceedingly helpful in uncovering the true meaning and themes of the piece. When a production team explores the emotions and culture of the writer’s world, the intention behind the play becomes clearer. From that point, the director and designers can decide how best to utilize the available themes and messages. Since *The Burial at Thebes* is Seamus Heaney’s translation of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, the production team I worked with chose to explore both Heaney and Sophocles, as well as both *The Burial* and *Antigone*.

Sophocles (496 to 406 BCE) was the second of three great Greek tragedians, between Aeschylus and Euripides. Fifth-century BCE Athens was the center of the Grecian world in what is referred to as the classical period. Though Greece was undergoing the Peloponnesian War during this era, art and theatre continued to flourish. Sophocles lived in Athens, where an annual theatrical competition, the Dionysia, was held; with his first entry, he beat Aeschylus for first prize (Storey 111). Sophocles is thought to have won the competition 24 times of the 30 that he entered works, far more than his tragedian counterparts, with 14 wins for Aeschylus and only four for Euripides (Britannica).

Unlike the other poets of his day, Sophocles also led a political life, serving as a treasurer and later as one of ten generals who led the state. Despite his impressive titles, he had greater
success as a playwright than as a government figure. Pericles described him as “a good poet, but a poor general” (Storey 112). One could argue that his political election may have been the reason Antigone gained so much fame, as it was written around the time of his election. Or, perhaps the play’s success boosted his chances for winning election to general; the order is unclear, but the two events coincided (Bagg 16). Regardless, it is likely that Sophocles’ familiarity with governance of the state gave him an advantage over his poet counterparts in writing compelling plays with political themes.

The Theban Plays, as they are known—Antigone, Oedipus the King, and Oedipus at Colonus—were not written to be a trilogy. All three present the same characters and follow the same story line, but they were written many years apart and submitted for different Dionysia festivals. Sophocles wrote Antigone first, then continued backwards in time with the saga to reveal the actions that produced the ill-fated events of Antigone (Britannica). This creates a peculiar relationship among the three plays, in that they are independent and nonetheless form a collection. Sophocles clearly regarded Antigone as a story strong enough to stand alone. When choosing whether to include all three of the Theban Plays in my research, their independent yet collective nature did not provide an obvious path. Sophocles wrote Antigone as a self-contained unit, but modern educators often create a trilogy of the Theban Plays. Because of this trend, I decided to include all three of them in my pre-design research.

With only seven of the dramatist’s estimated 123 plays extant, the Theban Plays (also known as the Oedipus Cycle) are his most well known (Britannica). Sophocles is known for his irony, and irony is clearly present in Antigone as well as his other plays. For example, Tiresias, the seer, is blind. Oedipus, who frees the city of Thebes from the curse of the sphinx, brings
about a new plague by his very presence. Oedipus, who, because blind, has unknowingly married his own mother, rips out his eyes when for the first time he “sees” who she really is. This tragic irony is what has made the writing of Sophocles so heart wrenching and intriguing (Storey 125).

When *Antigone* was first presented (around 442 BCE), the burial of soldiers fallen in battle was of great concern to Athenians because of the large number of deaths in the Peloponnesian War. The usual custom of anointing the body and mourning for several days was shortened by royal decree due to the sheer number of deaths. Athenians were told that patriotic duty was to replace the traditional grieving period (Bagg 163). Sophocles probably was not criticizing the new laws but rather using a topic that already carried great emotional weight with the audience. However, it is difficult to believe that the royal family could have overlooked this replication of current events. Regardless of Sophocles’ exact intent, he told of a civilian disobeying a royal decree and being hailed a hero for it. It is fascinating to note that politicized theatre and theatre as social commentary have been present since the origin of Western theatre.

While it is important to understand Sophocles and the social and political climate in which he worked, it is also imperative for a costume designer to have an understanding of what a production by Sophocles would have looked like in his time. The traditional costumes of ancient Greek theatre are thought to have been simply the garb of the usual Grecian: a long chiton made of wool or silk. Because all actors were male, the method of tying the chiton became important to signify gender. The outfits could be accessorized to indicate character and status with the use of additional properties (McCart 278). Masks were an essential part of Greek theatre. The tragic mask (which would have been used in *Antigone*) was not neutral but portrayed the pained expression of anguish at all times. Besides allowing everyone in the audience in the vast
Dionysian theatre to see facial expressions, masks allowed the actors to play female roles more convincingly, and multiple roles as well. The stage was empty by today’s standards. It was simply a playing space, with lighting provided by the sun. (During this time, the Grecians began using buildings behind the playing space to create a backdrop, but it was a nonspecific building used for all productions.) This meant all indication of location and time of day was traditionally established in the dialogue.

*The Burial at Thebes* has no references to the attire of the characters. Due to the minimal way in which costumes were used in ancient Greece, descriptions in dialog of costumes are rare. If I had decided to dress the actors in jeans and t-shirts, the text would not have contradicted that decision (the unity of the piece, however, may have suffered). From this research and visual research of ancient Grecian chitons, I decided to use the silhouette of the chiton to preserve the essence of ancient Greece, and to abstract it by using silk chiffon instead of heavy wool. Though I did not use the iconic tragic mask for the Chorus, a simple half-mask paid homage to the heritage of *Antigone* and created a unified Chorus. This Greek inspiration served as a jumping-off point for a more complex design, which included inspiration from Heaney’s Irish heritage as well, but a solid base in ancient Grecian attire set the tone for the design.
Layered on top of the rich history of Sophocles and *Antigone* is that of Seamus Heaney and his Irish roots in his adaptation, *The Burial at Thebes*. Political unrest and conflict, very much a part of the heritage of this Irish poet, recurs in his work. In the Foreword to his work *Preoccupations*, he asks, “How should a poet properly live and write? What is his relationship to be to his own voice, his own place, his literary heritage and his contemporary world?” (Heaney) While Heaney may struggle with this question, it doesn’t take much reading of his work to realize he believes personal heritage to be very important to include in one’s writing. Heaney is interested in language, particularly the linguistic heritage of Ireland. Readers can find Irish phrases even in his works unrelated to Ireland, as in *The Burial at Thebes*. Seamus Heaney writes mainly about what is immediately around him, infused with his Irish heritage. The Nobel committee that selected him as recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature described his output as “works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past” (Chaundy). The struggles of his personal past, intertwined with the historical struggles of Ireland, are inspirations for much of his work.

Seamus Heaney was born on a farm in County Derry in what is now Northern Ireland, on April 13, 1939 (O’Donaghue xiii). Heaney’s father, Patrick Heaney, an Irish Nationalist, owned a small farm and came from a family of cattle dealers (Nobel). His mother, Margaret, was of the prominent McCann family of Castledawson, the majority of whom were involved in the linen industry. This difference in industrial and agricultural heritage proved to be a continual source of
tension in his family. In 1951, Heaney received a scholarship to attend St. Columb’s College in Derry, where he excelled in English, Gaelic, and Latin (seamusheaney.org). His family moved to a larger farm across the parish in 1953, and in the same year his younger brother Christopher was killed in an automobile accident. This later served as the subject of multiple poems (O’Donaghue xiii). That Heaney suffered the loss of a brother perhaps influenced his decision to create a new version of Antigone, as the crux of the conflict is the resulting actions after the death of Antigone’s brothers.

In 1965, Heaney married Marie Delvin. Later the same year, he published his small collection Eleven Poems (O’Donaghue xiv). Heaney would publish twelve major collections of poetry from 1966 to 2010. He fathered three children: Michael in 1966, Christopher in 1968, and Catherine Ann in 1973 (O’Donaghue xv). Over the years, Heaney has served as professor at The Queen’s University, University of California, Berkeley, Carysfort College in Dublin, Harvard, and Oxford. Heaney’s works currently account for two-thirds of all book sales by living Irish and British poets (Chaundy). Throughout his illustrious career, Heaney has received many honorary diplomas and multiple prestigious awards, including the Whitbread Prize for his translation of Beowulf, the T. S. Elliot Prize and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995.

Besides writing poetry, Heaney also has an interest in the classics. He has written many translations, including his award-winning Beowulf. Before he produced his version of Antigone, he wrote The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles’ Philoctetes: The Burial at Thebes was not his first Sophocles. These two are the only versions of plays he has written (O’Donaghue xiv). Whereas many people consider poetry to be removed and inaccessible, Heaney has used it to make the text more accessible. Heaney believes there is a great potential for poets to become
playwrights: “Contemporary poetry is very colloquial, very speakable, and I wish more poets would write for the stage” (Grave Concerns).

Heaney’s deliberate decision to write a version of Antigone with multiple references to Greek locations and interspersing of Irish phrases in the dialogue serves as a rich inspiration for visual duality. What Heaney has done with language, I replicated in costume. Although originally one of my ideas for the tattoo motifs was Celtic knots (an obvious Irish reference), the final design was based on the ancient Celtic symbol for eternity, which is specific to the cultural heritage of the area. By combining this Celtic symbol with the silhouette of the Greek chiton, the linguistic combination was mirrored in costume.
Before embarking in a detailed script analysis, it is reasonable to ask why Seamus Heaney wrote a new version of *Antigone*. Through script analysis, you could perhaps gather what the playwright’s motives were from his changes. Because he writes openly about his reasons, looking into his alterations before pulling apart the script made sense.

Heaney is not the first to create a new version of *Antigone*. There have been numerous adaptations of *Antigone* over time, including many operas; there are even many avant-garde versions. *Antigone* is a story that tends to resurface during times of political unrest. Brecht wrote his version during World War II while in exile in Switzerland. Directly commenting on the horrors of the Hitler regime, his contemporized (*Berlin 1945*) version opens with Ismene and Antigone emerging from a bomb shelter. Brecht also shifted the fault of the fatal events of the play away from Creon personally, pointing the finger instead at a tyrannical political regime (*Malina*). French playwright Jean Anouilh’s version of *Antigone* also allowed Creon more humanity. In his version, Creon offers Antigone opportunities to save herself by executing the guards in her stead. Anouilh also removed Tiresias from the story, allowing the realization of wrongdoing to be completely Creon’s. This version was written in Nazi-occupied France, and in it Antigone strongly resembles a French resistance fighter (*Anouilh*). Anouilh’s and Brecht’s *Antigones* stray much further from Sophocles’ than does Heaney’s, but interestingly they all chose to give Creon more humanity.

Following the lead of his predecessors, Heaney found it timely to write his version in 2004, during a time of great political change. Heaney was commissioned to write a new translation of Sophocles’ *Antigone* by the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (*A Note 75*). The Abbey
Theatre is a company with a rich legacy of fostering Irish poetic drama, so the Nobel-winning Irish poet was an obvious choice (Llewellyn-Jones 7). With Ireland’s troubled past, it is not surprising that Irish theatre has actually produced many new versions of *Antigone* over the years. Heaney states that Greek tragedies work best in an environment when every individual in a society has something “deeply at stake” (*Irish Antigones*). He found this in the current political climate of the world, especially the war in Iraq, waged by the United States. Heaney draws a parallel between George W. Bush’s approaches to the war in Iraq and Creon’s approach to his decree about the burial of Polyneices (A Note 76). The mentality of “If you’re not with us, you’re against us” is the persuasive tactic used by both leaders. This created the societal connection that prompted Heaney to reintroduce this work into the theatre world.

Heaney also emphasized the political aspect of the story, not by changing the plot, but by adding language that people associate with current political turmoil. One critic writes: “The translation is faithful to its source, varied in its verse forms, with a markedly Irish diction and abundant use of the contemporary idiom of power politics” (La Mama). Heaney’s version of *Antigone* is true to Sophocles’ text (or at least true to accepted English translations). Each line fulfills its original purpose, but through rhetoric changes and small cultural additions, the entire thrust of the play is contemporized. Heaney’s gift of words gives new life to the more classic translations. By changing the rhetoric we associate with the contemporary political sphere, the story is instantly more relevant and relatable.

The original text is almost 2,500 years old, so it goes without saying that the language is far from modern and, naturally, has to be translated from ancient Greek. Heaney approaches the task of crafting a new version by saying, “I wanted to do a translation that actors could speak as
plainly or intensely as the occasion demanded, but one that still kept faith with the ritual formality of the original (A Note 79). He achieves this goal by giving characters the opportunity to differ from each other in their approach to language. One critic wrote,

Heaney’s translation constantly changes its colours, modulating between Creon’s autocratic, fiscally obsessed speechifying and the passionate panicked language of Antigone and Ismene. Haemon, meanwhile, has the quality of a serious, socially conscious teenager, appalled by his father’s behaviour; and there’s an engaging musicality to the chronic text. (The Times)

This approach is clearly effective and resonates with a modern audience. It gives the characters an opportunity to have depth not only of action but also of speech.

Specifically Irish culture makes a few appearances in the text. The practice of keening—the Irish practice of expressing grief—is mentioned a few times (Burial 17), as well as the will-o-the-wisp and “beyond the Pale” (Burial 31). These little additions to the text make it an unmistakably Seamus Heaney translation. As discussed earlier, Heaney’s Gaelic heritage, as well as the conflict that comes with this heritage, is deeply ingrained in him and enlivens this text.

Besides changing the language itself, or simply the manner in which the characters speak, Heaney complicates the characters by his approach to the story. He speaks of Antigone and Creon as the duel protagonists (A Note 76) instead of protagonist and antagonist. In so doing, he changes the moral approach to the play. By complicating the characters and giving them each a dignity in their own right, he creates a much denser story, a more interesting story that is not so black and white. Heaney also chooses to change the title from “Antigone” to “The Burial at Thebes,” which changes the story from Antigone’s perspective to a more neutral starting point.
We see conflict between the ideals and truths of Antigone and Creon. But by not naming one the protagonist and one the antagonist, it doesn’t give us an obvious moral path. While he politicizes Creon, he also makes Antigone more hostile and less of an obvious heroine. For example, when Ismene wants to share the blame with Antigone for burying Polyneices, in the traditional translation Antigone says, “No Ismene, You have no right to say so. You would not help me, and I will not have you help me” (Sophocles 34). But in Heaney’s version, she says, “I don’t allow this. Justice won’t allow it. You won’t help. We cut all ties. It’s over” (Burial 34, 35). This reveals a considerably harsher tone than has been traditional, and portrays Antigone in a different light.

This deliberate shift in character must inform the decisions about costumes. Heaney has purposefully removed Antigone from the status of martyr. She is given a harsh edge. The designer should not disregard this and costume Antigone in clothing read as simplified versions of good and evil: for example, Antigone in white and Creon in black. The unified look of the costumes in this production helped to keep all of the characters equally human. The royalty wasn’t lavishly accessorized nor the civilians having little in comparison. This approach of unity and relative equality visually works well with the idea that everyone is equal in the eyes of the gods, everyone can be punished for their wrongdoings be they king or commoner. While Creon, Haemon, and Eurydice had small circlet crowns to signify royalty, they were simple and unobtrusive. While I found it important to keep accessories to a minimum, Creon and the Guard wore arm shields to signify being part of the military. These helped to create character differentiation, and because militaristic action by the United States was a major motivator for Heaney in embarking on a new version of Antigone.
SCRIPT ANALYSIS

Analysis of the script is an essential first step to understanding a play in the design process. It’s the process of combing through the text to glean hints about the characters’ lives and environment. There are many methods for approaching this task. I took the approach of Rosemary Ingham, world-renowned costume designer. In her book *From Page to Stage: How Theatre Designers Make Connections Between Scripts and Images*, Ingham outlines one method for organizing the bits one can collect from the dialog of a script by asking the following questions: “Who are they? When are they? Where are they? What happened before the play began? What is the function of each character? What kinds of dialog do the characters speak? What happens in the play?” (Ingham). By answering these questions, you gain an excellent vantage point from which to design a costume spectrum that does justice to the characters and the world they dwell in. Also, by following a simplified structure for asking questions, you discover areas where the text is more complex than the questions you are asking. From this, you can pinpoint specific areas where you might use this complexity to create greater depth in your design.

When are they?

The references to time in *The Burial at Thebes* is one element for which the question “When are they?” may be too simple for the text. The time period of *The Burial at Thebes* is strongly associated with ancient Greece—when *Antigone* was originally written—but there is
scant textual basis to reinforce our outside knowledge of the time period. The only reference that places it in ancient times is the presence of the gods of Greek mythology.

*The Burial at Thebes* is more accurately placed in a metaphorical time than in a year based in our understanding of years. It is a time when the elements of the earth were ruled by the gods. The guard comes to Creon and speaks of the sky “vomiting black air” when Antigone performed the burial rites on her brother’s corpse (28). Tiresias speaks of the failed rituals he attempted to perform stating, “On every altar stone and temple step, and the gods / Are revolted. That’s why we have this plague” (58). These references place the events in a non-contemporary era, or at least in a world that most of the audience would not recognize as their own. The audience member mostly likely cannot relate to a world of polytheism, where the governing body of the state seeks the advice of a seer. Furthermore, I would argue that the modern audience member would not accept easily that the events took place in Thebes, Greece, in the fifth century BCE; rather, we are rationalizing the entire story as myth.

We also learn from the dialog that we are meeting the characters in a time after a great war. The city of Thebes is standing, but shaken from battle. Creon refers to the city as “a ship that nearly wrecked” (15). (The history regarding the war will be addressed in later sections of this script analysis.) This lack of textual reference to a year or specific event allows the designer to place the events in a time outside of ancient Greece, but the multiple references to supernatural phenomena ask the designer to create an alternate world to our own.

Where are they?

The location of Thebes is established in the title, *The Burial at Thebes*, and is continually referenced throughout the play. The Chorus describes the army of Argos being beaten back by
that of Thebes, but these fleeting references could be missed by readers unfamiliar with Grecian geography (13). The state or country of Greece is never mentioned, and the foundation for setting this play in ancient Greece is based more in the tradition of the play than in the text itself.

As for physical descriptors of the locations, there are few. The stage directions open the play in front of Creon’s palace, but it is never mentioned in the dialog; however, the constant appearance of the royal family would suggest the location is near the palace. The geography of the land surrounding Thebes is described in detail many times, but always describing other locations, not where the characters currently are. The guard describes the sand, dust, trees, and hills by which he observes the corpse of Polyneices (28). Creon later describes the rocky hill and cave in which he will lock Antigone. But again, this does not describe the location of the onstage action (48).

Who are they?

Much additional information about who these characters are can be found in the preceding Theban Plays. However, there are many indications of status, occupation, and demeanor of the characters if one looks only to the text of The Burial at Thebes. It is established early that the main characters are the royal family of Thebes; the stage directions before the first scene direct that it is in front of “Creon’s palace,” and just two pages later he is referred to as “King Creon” (7). When Antigone pleads with Ismene to be brave and join her in her mission, she reveals that she is Ismene’s sister and the sister of the feuding Polyneices and Eteocles, asking, “Are we sister, sister, brother? / Or traitor, coward, coward? (8)” Besides being in the royal family, Antigone is betrothed to prince Haemon (37). The Chorus refers to themselves as “old men” on multiple occasions, which in our version of The Burial at Thebes is particularly
interesting because the entire cast is female, by the choice of the director, which will be discussed during the design process journal. Other roles are established by character titles; “Messenger” and “Guard” are civilians of Thebes, in contrast to the royal family.

What kind of dialogue do the characters speak?

*The Burial at Thebes* is written in verse in a modernized version of Sophocles’ words. Following the script is “A Note on *The Burial at Thebes*,” in which the playwright speaks briefly of his motives behind writing this version and his approach to the text. He states, “Greek tragedy is as much a musical score as it is a dramatic script. I wanted to do a translation that actors could speak as plainly or intensely as the occasion demanded, but one that still kept faith with the ritual formality of the original” (79). He goes on to quote William Butler Yeats’ sonnet *At the Abbey Theatre*, which describes a theatrical audience’s displeasure if the language of plays is too “high and airy,” while the same people mock the theatre if it is “art of common things.”

In this postnote, Heaney describes the three-beat meter of the dialogue between Antigone and Ismene in the opening scene, the four-beat alliterating Old English style spoken by the Chorus, and the iambic pentameter used by Creon (78). Only once does Heaney stray from verse, using prose for the Guard’s first monologue. This use of prose allows the Guard to babble on in a nervous manner, without structure to his speech, allowing for comic relief and establishing that Creon’s presence makes him exceedingly nervous.

Obviously, Heaney is using poetry to create character. As a designer, however, even after reading this script many times, I did not catch on to the intricacies of his complex system of spoken words. The result—to the viewer who is not meticulously following the subtle shifts in and out of iambic pentameter and from three-beat to four-beat—is a strangely formalized version
of common vernacular. The words the characters speak are commonplace and used frequently, but they are organized slightly differently than one would use in speech today. The result lends a beautiful, formal air to the piece, one that cannot be ignored by designers. Either a designer must embrace the formality and create a design that is harmonious visually with the aural atmosphere or perhaps create a purposeful juxtaposition. I chose to embrace the formality and beauty of Heaney’s words and strove to create a clean design that would not upstage the aural experience. While allowing for complexity of theory, the actual visual was meant to be clean, with a small amount of costume pieces for each performer, and few to no accessories.

**What happens before Antigone/The Burial at Thebes?**

What happens before *Antigone/Burial* can be answered in two different ways: first, what previous actions are mentioned in the dialogue of the play, and second, what happens in the two plays preceding this in the Oedipus Cycle. First, I will attend to what is addressed in the dialogue of *The Burial at Thebes*, which may be sufficient since the life and misfortunes of Oedipus are addressed in the text. However, because there is more background to be explored in *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, I will briefly describe the actions of those two as well.

In the opening conversation between Ismene and Antigone, they discuss that both of their brothers have died in the war. Creon has decreed that Eteocles will be given a proper burial, because he died defending the city of Thebes; Polyneices, though, will be denied the rite of burial, as he died attacking the city. Ismene gives a brief summary of the life of Oedipus.

> We’re children of Oedipus—

> Daughters of the man

> Who fathered us on his mother—
The king they drove from their city.
No matter he didn’t know.
No matter it was Oedipus
Brought his own crimes to light
And then reached into his eyes
And tore them out of their sockets—
Still they drove him out.
Oedipus had to perish.
And then his wife, the mother
Who had bared her breasts for him
In the child-bed and the bride-bed,
She hanged herself in a noose.(9)

While this gives the viewer who is unfamiliar of the happenings of *Oedipus Rex* a quick summary, it does not inform the audience member that Oedipus was fated to live such a tormented life, nor that this fate is a part of his daughters’ heritage. More likely than not, most theatre-goers who are venturing to see a production of *Antigone* are familiar with the story of Oedipus, thus, it is important for the designer to be familiar with the portions of the Oedipus Cycle that precede the actions of *Antigone*.

**A Brief Summary of *Oedipus Rex***

The action in this story takes place before the action in the *Antigone* play. Oedipus’ father, King Laius, is told by an Oracle that he is to die at the hand of his own son, as punishment for raping a woman in his youth. When Oedipus is born, Laius instructs a servant to take his
newborn son, Oedipus, into the mountains to be killed, in an effort to thwart the prophecy. The servant does not kill the baby, and the infant Oedipus is raised by the neighboring King Polybus of Corinth. As a young man, after hearing rumors, Oedipus begins to question if the king of Corinth is in fact his biological father, and seeks out the Oracle. The Oracle tells Oedipus that he (Oedipus) will kill his own father and marry his own mother, while not making clear exactly who Oedipus’ blood parents are. Mistakenly believing the Corinthian royalty to be his real parents, Oedipus flees Corinth, rushing headlong into his fate.

On the road, Oedipus meets his real father, King Laius, and the two quarrel over whose chariot shall pass. Oedipus kills Laius, thereby unknowingly killing his real father and fulfilling the prophecy. Continuing on the road to Thebes, Oedipus solves the riddle of the Sphinx, which grants him kingship of Thebes and releases the city from its curse. Becoming the king, he marries Queen Jocasta, not knowing that she is his biological mother, thus fulfilling the rest of the prophecy.

All of this has taken place before the play begins. At the play’s beginning, the prophecies have been fulfilled, but the characters are unaware of that fact. In the opening, Oedipus speaks with his brother-in-law Creon as he returns with news from the Oracle saying the plague afflicting Thebes is the result of the murderer of King Laius remaining at large. Oedipus vows to find the culprit. He summons Tiresias, the seer, in hopes that his insight will aid in the search. Tiresias does not want to divulge the killer, and he and Oedipus argue, Oedipus accusing Creon of bribing Tiresias. Tiresias leaves, saying the murderer is one who fathered children with his own mother.
Creon confronts Oedipus after the bribe accusation, and Oedipus has him sentenced to
death but later recants by request of the Chorus. Queen Jocasta tries to comfort Oedipus by
saying that Tiresias has given false seeings before. She tells Oedipus of her former husband, who
was prophesied to be killed by the hand of his son, while in reality he was killed by highway
robbers. Upon further investigation, questioning witnesses of Laius’ death, and the shepherd who
rid Thebes of King Laius’ baby, it is revealed that Oedipus has indeed killed his father and
bedded his mother. Jocasta hangs herself from shame. When Oedipus finds her, he gouges out
his eyes with her broach pin. Oedipus begs to be exiled and leaves his daughters (and half-
sisters) Ismene and Antigone under the care of Creon.

This story is as well known as Antigone, and most likely the majority of a The Burial at
Thebes audience would be familiar with it. While Oedipus Rex gives us the history of Antigone’s
heritage, the most important lesson to be taken from Oedipus Rex is the idea of inescapable fate,
and furthermore a fate that transcends generations: a cursed family line. Oedipus almost had an
innocent Creon killed, which is an interesting parallel to Antigone and sets up an understandably
hostile relationship between the in-laws.

A Brief Summary of Oedipus at Colonus

The action in this play takes place after Oedipus Rex and before Antigone. Antigone, who
has become the “eyes” of her blind father after his exile from Thebes, has led the blind Oedipus
to Colonus, on the outskirts of Athens. They stop to rest and are told by a passer-by to move on,
as the spot is sacred to the Furies. Oedipus is reminded of a portion of the prophecy, which states
that he will die at a location sacred to the Furies, and that his death will be a blessing upon the
land. Oedipus refuses to leave, wishing to fulfill his destiny. He quarrels with the Chorus, who
urge him to leave. They decide to allow him to remain until Theseus, king of Athens, meets with Oedipus.

Ismene arrives from Thebes, bringing news that Eteocles has usurped the throne from his brother, Polyneices. Polyneices is now gathering an army with the intention to gain back the throne. Ismene also reports that an oracle has told the brothers the outcome of the impending battle depends on where Oedipus’ body is buried. Creon is planning to retrieve the body of Oedipus and bury it at the border of Thebes, so no other land will receive the blessings bestowed by his burial. At hearing this news, Oedipus expresses his disgust with his sons, states that he will be buried at Colonus, and asks the people of Colonus for protection from Creon.

Oedipus recites his history of woe to the Chorus as Theseus arrives. Theseus is sympathetic to Oedipus’ plight and grants him citizenship in Athens. Creon arrives with a posse of guards feigning sympathy for Oedipus and tries to persuade him to return to Thebes. Oedipus is outraged. Creon then reveals his true motives and that he has already captured Ismene; he instructs his guards to seize Antigone, hoping Oedipus will follow his hostages and be lured back to Thebes. He is unsuccessful, however, as the soldiers of Athens overpower them and save the girls.

Theseus informs Oedipus that his son Polyneices has traveled to Athens to see him. At first, Oedipus refuses to see him, but Antigone’s persuasion prevails and he agrees. Polyneices explains his plight and begs for his father’s support, since his unfortunate fate was the curse of his father. Oedipus is not swayed and tells Polyneices he and his brother will die if he continues with this pursuit. Antigone begs her brother to give up his quest. Seeing that his visit is not profitable, Polyneices leaves.
After Polyneices’ departure, Oedipus senses the end of his life is near and instructs his daughters and Theseus to follow him to his place of death. A messenger then relays the news that Oedipus has died, after anointing himself and bidding farewell to his daughters and revealing the secret location of his tomb to the king of Athens. Theseus, Ismene, and Antigone return in mourning. Antigone asks to return to Thebes to try to prevent the impending battle. The rest leave in the direction of Athens.

Though this is the least-well-known of the three plays, there is still much information to be gleaned from this portion of the tale. We learn that Antigone is selfless in dedication to her father. We also learn the true nature of the brothers Polyneicies and Eteocles; they are not concerned with the well-being of their family, but powerhungry and willing to lie to Oedipus in order to gain the upper hand in this battle. Antigone shows unwavering devotion to her brothers despite their questionable morality. This devotion could be seen as noble or touching; however, it is also blind. Antigone’s continued support to those whose motives are not pure is perhaps not the quality of a martyr, as she is so often portrayed.

What happens during Antigone/The Burial at Thebes?

From what we have gathered from the previous two stories, Antigone is blindly devoted to her family, a family that is corrupt and cursed and continually turns on itself. We have also learned that Sophocles truly did not intend for the three plays to be read consecutively, as there are many inconsistencies. For example, at the end of Oedipus Rex, Creon is king, and Antigone and Ismene are left in his care. But at the opening of Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone is with Oedipus and Etocles is king. Also, in the transition into Antigone, at the close of Oedipus at Colonus, Ismene remains in Athens, but upon the opening of Antigone she is in Thebes. A large
portion of the audience will be drawing on their knowledge of these plays in assisting with their understanding of *The Burial at Thebes*. *Oedipus at Colonus* paints Antigone in a light of one whose familial devotion outweighs her moral compass, which would support the portrayal of her by Heaney in *Burial*.

We meet Antigone and Ismene after Polyneices has attacked Thebes and when both Polyneices and Eteocles have fallen in that battle. Creon, now the king of Thebes, has decreed that Eteocles will be given a proper burial, since he died defending Thebes, but that Polyneices’ body will be left unburied. Anyone who disobeys this edict is to be put to death. Antigone approaches her sister with a plan to perform the burial rites for Polyneices and implores her sister to join her. Ismene is too fearful and resists all her sister’s attempts to change her mind.

In the next scene, Creon speaks to the Chorus of elders about the state of Thebes after this battle. He enlists their support in making sure the body of Polyneices remains unburied. A guard enters this scene to tell Creon that the body has been covered with dirt: someone has performed some sort of burial. An angry Creon tries to accuse the soldier of being bribed and sends him away, instructing him to find the traitor. He returns with Antigone, telling Creon he saw her return to the body after their meeting.

Antigone does not deny her actions, declaring her allegiance to the will of the gods, not the laws of the land. Creon sends for Ismene, as he assumes she was involved in the plot. Ismene attempts to confess guilt with her sister. But an irritated Antigone says she acted alone, that Ismene had decided to take the safe path as opposed to the moral one. Through this dialog, we learn that Antigone is betrothed to Creon’s son, Haemon, but Creon nonetheless intends to have her killed. Antigone and Ismene are taken into custody.
Haemon enters and Creon is worried he has turned his back on his father. To Creon’s delight, though, Haemon pledges his undying loyalty to his father. But the pledge soon turns into a plea for Creon to reconsider. Haemon wants his father to spare Antigone—not for his own sake but because it is the will of the gods and because the people of Thebes support her. Creon is furious and Haemon leaves, declaring that if Creon kills Antigone, this is the last Creon will ever see of his son. Creon states his intent to lock Antigone in a cave above the city and leave her to die. Before she is led up the mountain, she expresses once more—in a scene with the Chorus—her conviction to do what she believes to be the right thing. The Chorus is sympathetic.

After Antigone has been locked away, Tiresias, the seer, visits Creon with ominous news: the gods are unhappy with this series of events. Tiresias declares that Creon should take heed and remedy the situation before it is too late. Despite Tiresias’ loyal service to the throne and accuracy in prophecy, Creon accuses him of being bought off by those wishing to see Creon fail as head of state. Tiresias warns him he will lose a son due to this stubbornness, and all of Thebes will turn their backs to him. Creon is unmoved and Tiresias leaves. The Chorus begs Creon to reconsider.

Finally, realizing the gravity of the situation, Creon relents and hurriedly goes to bury the body of Polyneices and to release Antigone. In the next scene, a messenger enters to recount to the Chorus what has happened, relating that when he arrived at the cave, he found Antigone had hung herself and that Haemon was there with her. Haemon lunges toward his father, Creon, with his sword before turning the sword on himself, choosing to kill himself instead of his father. Eurydice, Creon’s wife, overhears the story of the messenger and, beside herself with grief at the loss of her son, leaves to return to the palace. Creon enters carrying the body of Haemon while
the Chorus speculates about the possibility that the queen has killed herself. All doubt is removed when the body of Eurydice is brought out and laid before Creon. Creon is left with the bodies of his son and his wife. A broken man, he accepts fault for the events. The Chorus ends the play by stating the gods punish the proud, but with the punishment may come wisdom.

What is the role of each Character?

Antigone

In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Antigone serves as the sole protagonist, with Creon as antagonist. Seamus Heaney, however, creates a dynamic between Antigone and Creon as duel protagonists, forcing Antigone to share the spotlight. Antigone serves as the moral compass of the work, with her unwavering loyalty to her brother and to the will of the gods. Interestingly, since Antigone is a woman she has no political power. Although she is fully immersed in the world of the most powerful people of Thebes, the royal family, she is essentially a powerless civilian against the great Creon.

Antigone solidifies her role as a victim of fate right from the beginning, with her opening lines, “What’s to become of us? / Why are we always the ones?” (5). Antigone establishes that she has no choice but to follow the will of the gods; obedience to Creon’s edict is not an option. She buries her brother because it is her fate, and also because she is proud to, so much so that she attains an air of superiority and arrogance.

    If death comes, so be it.

    I’ll go down to the underworld

    Hand in hand with my brother.
And I’ll go with my head held high.

The gods will be proud of me. (11)

While we think of Antigone as the one who so loves her brother that she is willing to give her life to ensure his proper burial, she is just as stubborn as Creon and, at times, cruel. She is very harsh with Ismene when trying to persuade her to join her, and after Ismene’s refusal, says to her sister, “We cut all ties. It’s over” (34).

It would be easy to simplify Antigone’s character as morally superior, a saint and a martyr. But Heaney paints a verbal portrait much more complex than that. She is resentful of her situation, cruel to her sister, and superior and arrogant about her morality. By removing Antigone from a pedestal, we also allow Creon to be less beastly, more human.

When devising the costume design for this production, I debated whether to create an obvious parallel between Creon and Antigone, as the character traits seen in Creon are also seen in Antigone. An early version of the patterns on the leotards involving all-encompassing geometric shapes drew a tie between the two characters. Instead of creating a spectrum of allegiance that was symbolically represented in the tattoo designs, I entertained the idea of a personality spectrum with Antigone and Creon both occupying the same end of the scale, with their stubborn, proud personalities. However, the final design expressed their convictions about law, and because Antigone is governed by the gods, the curving lines of the eternity symbol represented her character.

Creon

Creon serves as our tragic hero—his tragic flaw being his pride—and we follow the journey of the demise of that pride, as well as his life as a whole. In the end, he does
acknowledge his flaws. But—this being a tragedy—his awareness comes too late. Creon is
governed by his stubbornness and pride. In response to pleas by his son to reconsider the fate of
Antigone, Creon states, “For of this you can be certain: I won’t be making / A liar of myself in
front of the city” (41). His response addresses his own reputation, not the morality of the
situation. As the story progresses, though, we learn that Creon’s motive to defend his law is
perhaps in the best interests of the city. He wants to prove himself to his new kingdom.

They must observe the discipline I expect
From every citizen. The city has to see
The standards of a public man reflected
In his private conduct. He has to be a man
Ready to abide by his own orders,
A comrade you’d depend on in a battle.
When discipline goes self-discipline goes as well
And once that happens cities, home and armies
Collapse, inevitably. Failure of rule
Is the most destructive thing. (42)

Creon’s obsession with his reputation makes him paranoid, and he continually accuses
people of taking bribes to tell falsehoods that he fears will lead to his downfall. First, we witness
Creon accusing the Guard who brings news of Polynceis’ burial of being bribed to do so,
saying, “There’s always money lurking and I never / Underestimate the lure of money” (19).
Later, Creon accuses Tiresias of being bribed to give him a false seeing to scare him into going
back on his word (60). This constant suspicion of plots to overthrow him shows his insecurity.
This is likely the result of having been sentenced to death by Oedipus, when Oedipus falsely accused Creon of bribing Tiresias to give an unfavorable prophecy (which, in fact, proved true).

In the end, we see a beaten Creon. He recognizes his wrongdoing, but it is too late to change the outcome. Before the door to Antigone’s cave the messenger retells, “‘Oh, hide me, hide me from myself’ he cries / ‘For I face the saddest door I ever faced’”(68). And when he returns to the palace with the body of his son, “Behold you king of wrong. / Wrong-headed on the throne, / Wrong-headed in the home, / Wrong-footed by the heavens.” Creon plays the role both of protagonist and antagonist, though he is the sole cause of the tragic events that transpire; he is also only a pawn in the sick will of the gods. He sees the error of his ways and eventually heeds the advice of Tiresias, but to no avail. He is left miserable and alone.

In contrast to Antigone’s curving spiral pattern, Creon was adorned with an intricate star tattoo. The rigidity and sharp corners represented his unwillingness to bend to the will of others, even when he had the best interest of all at heart.

Tiresias

The seer plays the role of immortality on earth, not that he cannot die but that he is more than human, a link to the gods. She (a female actor in this production) possess the power to see what others cannot and warns them of their potential wrongdoing (57). Tiresias tells Creon her birds are acting unusual, meaning the gods had not accepted the ritual sacrifice. “The rite had failed. / Because of you, Creon. You and your headstrongness.”

Tiresias is blind, which solidifies him more in the world of the gods than the world of the Thebans. He does not see the concrete world of Thebes, but “sees” prophetically. Another interesting aspect of his blindness is that it requires him to have a guide. “The man that’s blinded
always needs a guide” (56). This is an interesting irony in that the godliest of them is in need of the assistance of a small boy. It can be taken as a metaphor for every situation in which one might be lacking a single but important virtue. Without vision, wisdom, or courage, a guide is needed. Tiresias is the guide for the Thebans.

Ismene

Ismene serves as one who wants to do what is right by the gods, but lacks courage. When Antigone accuses her of dishonoring the gods by her inaction, she replies, “Dishonour them I do not / But nor am I strong enough / To defy the laws of the land” (11). This is probably a role with which much of the audience will identify: a person knowing what they think is right but lacking the willpower, courage, or stamina to act accordingly.

Ismene also represents unconditional familial love to Antigone. After her hostile interaction with her sister, Ismene leaves Antigone with the lines “Nothing’s going to stop you. / But nothing’s going to stop / The ones that love you, sister, / For keeping on loving you” (13). When they meet again, after Antigone’s arrest, Ismene changes her mind and wants to suffer the consequences for a crime she did not commit, wanting to be with her sister in the end: “I want to throw myself / Like a lifeline to you in your sea of troubles” (35).

Haemon

Haemon is a noble character and probably the most likable of all. He has strong convictions about the situation at hand. Before acting on them, however, he attempts to change the situation. After Creon accuses him of being a pawn to Antigone—siding with a woman he retorts, “Are you a woman? I’m on your side” (45). He does not turn his back on his father,
despite the fact that he disagrees with Creon’s decision. He makes the distinction between hating his father and hating his father’s actions, saying, “Not against you. Against you going wrong” (46). Haemon proves that while he does not support his father’s decree, he still loves his father. Only after all these noble attempts does Haemon give up and resort to the action he had hoped to avoid.

Eurydice

The role of Eurydice is small but significant. She serves as someone who had no open conflict with Creon but, like the others, is destroyed by his stubborn ways. She has no problem with the decree or even with his intention to kill Antigone. But the radiating effects of Creon’s actions affect her so much that she chooses to take her own life, and curses Creon for having to do so (72).

Guard

The Guard is a narrator, telling the audience and Creon about the events of Polyneices’ burial. He also serves as a point of comic relief. His manner of speech is long-winded and convoluted, compared with the structured speech of Antigone, Creon, and the Chorus.

Messenger

The Messenger is in much the same role as the Guard, giving an account of offstage action so the other characters—and the audience—are aware of what has taken place.
Boy

The Boy is a supportive role in that while he/she does not speak, the role allows for many metaphors about blindness. It is important to the story that Tiresias be blind. As a consequence, a guide must be added to the cast of characters.

The Chorus

The Chorus of elders is important in *The Burial at Thebes*, as are all Greek Choruses in classic tragedies. They speak for all of Thebes, all of humanity. Creon addresses them to gain support and their trust as he makes his proclamation about the fate of Polyneices’ body (18). They, in turn, beg Creon to reconsider and set Antigone free, to set things right again (63).

The Chorus acts as narrator when they retell how Thebes beat back the Argonauts before the opening of the play (13), and they serve also as poetic narrator. Though giving us no new information, they reinforce the story in poetic fashion.

I see the sorrows of this ancient house
Break on the inmates and keep breaking on them
Like foaming wave on wave across a strand.
They stagger to their feet and struggle on
But the gods do not relent, the living fall
Where the dead fell in their day
Generation after generation. (39)

This gives us insight into the psyche of the population at large. The Chorus observes the situation but is not directly involved in the dialogue of the characters. It also offers up prayers to the gods in these times of trouble (49). The Chorus does not move the action forward but is a
sounding board for the characters, allowing conversations that would otherwise be internal to be verbalized, allowing for continual unfolding analysis.

What are the themes of the play?

One of the major themes of *The Burial at Thebes* and *Antigone* is the struggle between obedience to the gods or the rule of man. Those who choose to ignore the will of the gods in allegiance to the state will be punished until they see the error of their ways. The Chorus leaves us with these closing lines at the end of the play:

Wise conduct is the key to happiness.
Always rule by the gods and reverence them.
Those who overbear will be brought to grief.
Fate will flail at them on its winnowing floor
And in due season teach them to be wise. (74)

This idea of allegiance appears not only in terms of “with the gods” or “with the rule of man” but also weighs heavily on the characters, who become caught between religious, national, and familial allegiances. As Creon is momentarily relieved that his son Haemon is expressing loyalty to him, he states, “Nothing cuts as deep / As when the one who’s closest turns against you” (41).

Antigone ridicules her sister with taunts of improper allegiance. When trying to persuade her sister to help bury their brother, she says, “It’s a test you’re facing. / Whether you are who you are, / True to your seed and breed / And generation” (8). Thus, by not taking part in the burial ritual for her brother, Ismene is turning her back on their entire heritage. Later in the discussion, after Antigone has told Ismene the dead will not be pleased with her inaction, Ismene
responds, “The dead will have to forgive me / I’ll be ruled by Creon’s word” (10). While the question of allegiance for Antigone seems to be the will of the gods versus the rule of Creon, for Ismene it is allegiance with Antigone versus safety.

Pride and stubbornness are character traits exemplified in both Creon and Antigone. It is easy to realize how Creon is unbending and how it causes his demise in the end. But Antigone is equally unbending in her own right, which is acknowledged even by the Chorus when they say, “You were headstrong and self-willed / And now you suffer for it” (53). Though Creon and Antigone are often oversimplified as one being good and the other evil, their characteristics are similar. Had they been in each other’s positions, perhaps they would have acted exactly as their opponent acts.

Fate is the determining component of all the stories in the Oedipus trilogy. Oedipus was paying for the crime of his father, and the children of Oedipus were under his curse as well. The entire family was doomed before their unfortunate conceptions.

**CHORUS**

But now you’re halted and hauled
Before implacable Justice,
Paying perhaps, in your life
For the past life of your father

**ANTIGONE**

There. You have hit home.
Over and over again
Because I am who I am
I retrace that fatal line
And retrace that ghastly love I sprang from. (52)

At the moment when Creon’s will breaks, he utters, “It goes against the grain. But I am beaten. / Fate has the upper hand” (63). Feeling as if he has no choice but to give in, he will not be granted any reprieve for it in the end.

These themes of allegiance, conviction, and fate are expressed in all the characters. Manifested in different ways, all their allegiances are tested, their convictions challenged; ultimately, fate has the upper hand. The theme of combating allegiances was a major inspiration for the duality of my design. The chiffon layer represents allegiance to the gods, and the tattooed layer, allegiance to the law of man. Creon and Antigone both have their convictions tested and are stubborn and headstrong in their stances. The unity of design reminds the viewer that they are similar creatures, and that we all have those characteristics. If the characters had each been dressed drastically differently, it might have been more challenging to see the merit in each person and the similarities between them and all people.
**THE BURIAL AT THEBES AND CONFLICT**

In addition to combing through the text with a thorough script analysis, a reader will discover that a theoretical lens is helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of a play. The world of academic theory is vast, and choosing a theory or theories that will best aid your exploration of the script can sometimes be challenging. Feminist theory may seem an obvious choice as a lens through which to analyze the script, but since my focus has been to give Creon more humanity, I chose to keep looking. In trying to show both sides of the story without preconceived notions, I wanted to view the conflict through an objective stance, and therefore chose to use conflict theory. Sociologists use conflict theory as a structure through which to study societal conflict.

*The Burial at Thebes,* as well as *Antigone,* has an obvious central conflict that drives the plot, one that all humans can relate to, as conflict is the inevitable result of collective society. Aside from the original textual conflict, Heaney brings new richness to the characters and situation, which further complicates the scenario. Sophocles’ *Antigone* is structured around the irreconcilable conflict of incompatible interests. Heaney’s personal experience with social, religious, and political conflict has played a significant role in his understanding of *Antigone* and composition of *The Burial at Thebes.*

Sociologists approach conflict as an aspect of our social nature that follows certain patterns and expectations, as do so many actions in our lives. Conflict theory provides a framework and vocabulary for studying conflict (John 42). The basic assumptions are (1) that
conflict arises from incompatible goals and/or from hostility (12 Bartos) and (2) that hostile actions are based on emotions, not logic (13 Bartos). Sophocles masterfully presents the conflict so that the goals of Antigone and Creon seem incompatible. Antigone wants to bury Polyneices and live, while Creon wants to kill whoever buries Polyneices.

In conflict theory, the goal and payout are analyzed; the goal is simply the action or item sought and is as important as the payout, or reward. The payout is what is accomplished by achieving the goal. Antigone’s goal is to bury her brother. The payout for this deed is to fulfill the will of the gods. Creon’s goal is to enforce the decree he has established, the payout being to create order in his war-stricken country and to establish himself as a strong leader. The initial purpose of the decree was an attempt to establish a sense of nationalism by punishing the person who tried to usurp the throne. Both of these payouts are noble pursuits. How does one compare the will of the gods to the stability of a nation? Either goal, removed from the competing interests in this complex situation, would be said to portray a good person with the best interest of humanity in mind.

It is also important to consider what failure would mean for each party. Antigone would disappoint the gods, who could wreak havoc on humanity—it is unclear what might actually happen. Creon would lose credibility with his people in their time of need and suffer wounded pride—it is also unclear what exactly that would mean for the nation. Both outcomes have potential for disaster.

Antigone and The Burial at Thebes are particularly tragic because the goals of Creon and Antigone are not actually incompatible, but the means by which they are attempting to accomplish them force them into conflict. Creon could create stability for his nation and
Antigone could appease the gods if Creon had chosen other means by which to establish order. In traditional versions of Antigone, Creon is portrayed as the source of the conflict. Heaney, however, and his avant-garde predecessors, recognizes that Creon is a victim of circumstance. Heaney speaks of Creon and Antigone as duel protagonists, restoring some measure of humanity to Creon.

The manner in which each party tries to achieve his or her goal is another interesting aspect in light of conflict theory (Bartos 24). Creon uses a coercive method by threatening violence along with persuasions, while Antigone uses persuasion and initially attempts avoidance. Antigone buries Polyneices under cover of darkness in an attempt to avoid the consequences she knows await the burier, if identified. Afterward, Antigone also tries to convince many people that her goal of burying Polyneices is actually beneficial to them as well—that it is pleasing to the gods. She uses this method to try to convince her sister, Ismene, and then later attempts to sway Creon to her side. Creon, however, uses multiple methods of achieving his goal: he attempts to persuade the citizens that the strength of the state depends on that action, to make them believe that his goal is also their goal. He also threatens to kill anyone who disobeys.

Heaney uses language to contemporize the themes of Antigone and make Creon more accessible. By choosing to use words that are well-known political rhetoric of today, the listener is instantly familiarized with the emotions of the topic. When comparing excerpts from the two plays, we see that Heaney has obviously changed the play from prose to blank verse but has managed to keep the content the same, while heightening the intensity of the emotion. First, we
will look at the section from *Antigone* in which Creon is explaining his political ideology in relation to his decree about Polyneices’ body.

I am aware, of course, that no Ruler can expect complete loyalty from his subjects until he has been tested in office. Nevertheless, I say to you at the very onset that I have nothing but contempt for the kind of Governor who is afraid, for whatever reason, to follow the course that he knows is best for the State; and as for the man who sets private friendship above the public welfare, —I have no use for him, either. I call God to witness that if I saw my country headed for ruin, I should not be afraid to speak out plainly; and I need hardly remind you that I would never have any dealings with an enemy of the people. No one values friendship more highly than I; but we must remember that friends made at the sake of wrecking our Ship are not real friends at all. (Sophocles 197).

This passage seems to be a fairly Creon-centric speech, not mentioning how this decree should affect the citizens, except for what the people can glean from Creon talking about his own ideology. When we compare it to the corresponding excerpt in *The Burial at Thebes*, there is an obvious change in meter that is new to this version from prose to blank verse. However, Heaney kept the *intent* of each line; he merely changed *how* it was said. He kept the same message and kept the same order of each line—very rarely adding or leaving out anything—but enhancing the political language.

Until a man has passed this test of office

And proved himself in the exercise of power,

He can’t be truly known—for what he is, I mean,
In his heart and mind and capabilities.

Worst is the man who has all the good advice
And then because his nerve fails, fails to act
In accordance with it, as a leader should.

And equally to blame

Is anyone who puts the personal
Above the overall thing, puts friend
Or family first. But rest assured:

My nerve’s not going to fail, and there’s no threat
That’s going to stop me acting, ever,
In the interests of all citizens, Nor would I,

Ever, have anything to do
With my country’s enemy. For the patriot,

Personal loyalty always must give way
To patriotic duty.

Solidarity, friends,

Is what we need. The whole crew must close ranks.

The safety of our state depends upon it.

Our trust. Our friendships. Our security.

Good order in the city. And our greatness. (Burial 16)

Heaney adds a few lines at the end of Creon’s speech about solidarity. He mentions patriotism multiple times in the excerpt, which is not stressed in the traditional translation.
Through this, we can see that Heaney is complicating the character of Creon by giving him something of a nobler goal. Creon is attempting to rebuild the country after it has been left in ruin. However, this is also an opportunity Heaney has taken to parallel the current political situation in Iraq. George W. Bush took this same approach to gain support for his decision to invade Iraq. By complicating the plot, Heaney forces the audience to analyze the conflict in the play and then draw comparisons to their own world, in traditional translation. It would be much easier for a modern audience to write off the play as Creon-bad, Antigone-good.

The “weight of the outcome” for each individual or party is another aspect of friction emphasized by conflict theory (Bartos 15). It is based on the idea that a given outcome will have a different impact on the different parties. In the example of a billionaire and a pauper fighting over five dollars, although the outcome is the same, the weight is different. Antigone is fighting for her personal moral duty, while Creon is fighting for the stability of a nation. It is difficult to compare the two because they are so intrinsically different: the salvation of one soul versus the well-being of all the citizens of Thebes. This opens up the whole philosophical/spiritual aspect of Antigone/The Burial at Thebes. Which is a greater good: the fate of one person’s eternal life or the mortal life of thousands? Which is a greater truth?

Conflict theory does not necessarily provide answers but can be a helpful tool when analyzing the play’s tensions. As shown in the new translation, although the central conflict does not change in Heaney’s version, by changing the language used to approach it, the relevance of the conflict is heightened as he makes it more accessible to the contemporary audience by placing the conflict in a vocabulary the audience is more familiar with. In fact, by analyzing the conflict in this manner, it does not bring you any closer to finding a right and wrong, and in fact
pushes you further from that destination. The beautiful complexity of this conflict makes me wonder about the true intent behind Creon in Sophocles’ original text. Could it be that Creon had become demonized over centuries of lackluster translations and tradition? Heaney did stay true to the intent of Sophocles’ text. He did not add more action to emphasize the conflict; he only created a more accessible language through which to communicate it. Sophocles composed this tragic combination of motives and means of seeking their end, but perhaps it is human nature to attempt to create direction in what is unclear. And through that desire, we have lost some of the density of the tale, depth that Heaney, Brecht, and Anouilh saw within the story and sought to bring closer to the surface.
CONCLUSION

My experience in creating the costume design for the University of Central Florida Conservatory Theatre’s production of *The Burial at Thebes: A Version of Sophocles’ Antigone* was immeasurably rewarding. The rich histories from which I drew inspiration—combined with the freedom to stray from realistic attire—provided an incredibly fertile environment in which this young designer could blossom. I continue to be pleased with the outcome of the costume design. The aims of creating an avant-garde production were met. We created a work that was visually evocative, intellectually stimulating, and strange in the eyes of some audience members based on conversations overheard in the lobby. The intricate costume design—drawing inspiration from multiple cultural heritages, expressing competing emotions and humanity as a whole—allowed the design to abstract into the world of avant-garde design.

I am especially pleased with the design not only because I accomplished my desired outcome but because the message was successfully conveyed to the audience. The Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival Adjudicator Allison Steadman wrote:

> The choice of silk chiffon gave the costumes a sense of ethereal earthiness. The spiral was brought in under the sheer fabrics in ways personal to each character. The Chorus had a deconstructed spiral that broke out of its sheer overlay and onto the skin and masks, evoking a sense of vines and growth or cracks in stone. In addition to the spiral introduced under the costumes, the spiral was brought into the hair of the sisters, Antigone and Ismene, and was used to reflect the characters’ relationship to the law of the land.
I couldn’t be more pleased that she was able to pick up on the intricacies of the design. I had worried that much of the rationale behind the design would be lost in translation, but Ms. Steadman proved an astute observer. The design was nominated by multiple people to compete for the Regional Barbizon Award for Costume Design at the Regional Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, which satisfied me that the design successfully engaged the audience in an intellectual and aesthetic manner.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to design a piece that allowed for such possibilities of expression through design. While all costume design is challenging and expressive in its own right, *The Burial at Thebes* begs for a rich, complex design, especially *The Burial at Thebes* under the direction of Dr. Julia Listengarten. Being asked to design a production that encourages abstraction is a great gift to a young designer. *The Burial at Thebes* is a work whose audience is likely to accept the director’s—and designers’—created world without skepticism and without the accusation of having “tried too hard.” Of the plays in the University of Central Florida Conservatory Theatre 2009–2010 season, *The Burial at Thebes* was the single greatest opportunity for a conceptual design, and I am pleased to have received the chance to work on such a production.
APPENDIX A: CAST AND CREW
Artistic Team

Director: Dr. Julia Listengarten
Choreographer: Christopher Niess
Scenic Designer: Joseph Rusnock
Lighting Designer: Vandy Wood
Costume Designer: Grace Trimble
Sound Designer: Martin Wooton
Stage Manager: Grace Richardson

Cast
Antigone: Danielle Kimberly
Creon: Trent Fucci
Haemon: Zachary Layner
Tiresias: Pacsha Weaver
Boy: Selena Bass
Eurydice: Brooke Haney
Guard: Ian Kramer
Messenger: Kyle Adkins
Chorus:

    Erika Diehl
    Melissa Fricke
    Elisa Goldman
Katie Hensley
Courtney Imhoff
Corinne Mahoney
Lesley Noyes
Joanna Eliza Stevens
Hallie Wage
APPENDIX B: TIMELINE
TIMELINE

August 31: Realized we weren’t doing Sophocles

September 5: Read Oedipus Rex

September 6: Read Oedipus at Colonus

September 7: Read Antigone (Sophocles)
Read Burial at Thebes

September 15: Concept Meeting

September 16: Met with Assistant

September 21: See-through chiton idea

September 25: Spoke with Julia about conflict theory

September 26: Researched conflict theory, inspiration images

September 28: Met with Assistant

September 30: Costume Shop Area Meeting
Design Meeting #1

October 2: Presentation on The Burial at Thebes and conflict theory

October 10: Got page breakdown from Assistant
Watched 300
Callbacks

October 11: Line-by-line comparison of Antigone and The Burial at Thebes

October 13: Researched Celtic knots and tribal tattoos

October 14: Budget change to $2,500

October 16: Discussion with Julia in Design Class

October 18: Design Meeting #2

October 23: Showed Julia roughs
October 30: Played with light and chiffon with Vandy

October 29: Design Meeting #3 non-color prelims

November 10: Design Meeting #4 colored prelims

November 17: Discussed mask options with Julia for the Chorus

November 18: Costume Area meeting

January 6: Design Presentation

January 11: Ordered fabric

January 13: Met with Assistant about ordering shoes

January 15: Met with Julia and Choreographer about tattoo options

January 19: Ordered shoes and leotards

January 20: Met with Assistant about hair

January 25: Julia stopped by the shop to see garments

January 26: First fitting, Trent

January 27: Masks bought

February 15: First Dress

February 16: Second Dress

February 17: Final Dress
Prior to Design Meetings

Upon being assigned “Antigone” as the work to be my thesis design, it was still unclear which version of the script was to be performed. The word around the theatre department was that Antigone had been chosen partly because, as an ancient text, there would be no royalties to be paid (which would be easier on the strained budget of the theatre department). However, Director Dr. Julia Listengarten chose Seamus Heaney’s The Burial at Thebes: A Version of Sophocles’ Antigone, which was not really surprising given Julia’s love of the avant-garde; this version is reworked in a way that the poetry lends itself to metaphor and abstraction.

I chose to read the entirety of the Oedipus cycle before reading The Burial at Thebes, in order to re-familiarize myself with the traditional translations and history before embarking on this new version. While I had read Oedipus Rex and Antigone in the past, I had never read Oedipus at Colonus. It was very helpful to have a full understanding of the characters’ individual histories before the audience meets them again in Antigone. I struggled with choosing to what extent I wanted to draw character traits from texts that precede Antigone/The Burial at Thebes or to do my analysis using only the dialog presented to the audience in Antigone/The Burial at Thebes. Because the Oedipus Cycle is so well known, much of the audience probably would be familiar with the “back story.” Familiarity with the character of Oedipus is essential in Antigone/Burial: although he is no longer alive at this point in the cycle, he is very much a character. That being said, much of the audience that would attend a drama such as The Burial at Thebes would probably be familiar with the plight of Oedipus proceeding the Antigone story;
since this is an intellectually demanding play, it most likely would attract seasoned theatre-goers. As a portion of the audience would probably be familiar with the Theban plays, they would be expected to infer information about the characters, time period, atmosphere, and mood from all three of the plays, not just from *Antigone/The Burial at Thebes*. So I chose to do so as well. (However, if one were to present this play to an audience who was not familiar with these other tales of Sophocles, it would not be important for the designer to infer information from them.)

**Concept Meeting**

Julia is a generous director, who encourages collaboration at every point. Instead of presenting her own personal concept at the first meeting, she presented a list of questions she wanted to explore. What is order? What is chaos? What is the nature of truth? Is Creon a tragic hero? Whose truth is this? Julia called our attention to the title shift, that this is no longer Antigone’s story, and she wanted to give Creon back his humanity. As Heaney had already taken the heroine status away from Antigone by changing the title to a character-neutral one, we would have to be careful not to place Antigone back on her tradition pedestal.

Julia brought in an image of a production of *Antigone* in which Antigone is lying on the ground, dead. What stuck with me about the image was her hair, which was done up in corn-row-style braids. Not only did I appreciate the angularity and geometric aspect of the style as a visual element, I was particularly intrigued by the way in which it takes the story out of the context of ancient Greece. I knew after seeing that image I wanted to do something to achieve the same effect. Other visuals Julia brought with her were of a production that utilized a moving wall, which tilted towards the audience throughout the performance. While this is not a costume-
related image, it was greatly helpful in my understanding of the direction this production was heading. The visuals were not meant to be “realism” but evocative.

At the concept meeting, Julia also spoke of her intention to cast the Chorus and Tiresias and possibly the Boy as females. There is an obvious gender conflict imbedded in the script. For example, Creon has the power, and Ismene mentions that it is not a woman’s place to stand up to Creon. Also, the entire power dynamic between Creon and Antigone (king versus citizen) is mirrored in the gender dynamic as well. Creon has power over Antigone because he is King and she a civilian, as well as because he is male and she female. Julia thought it would be interesting if Creon’s advisor and his council (the Chorus) as well as the prophet were female. Because Creon respects these people and heeds their advice (though, not without resistance), he obviously respects them. This shift in power dynamic creates a new struggle to the story. It invites the audience to question the power dynamic associated with gender.

As we progressed through the process of creating characters that were written as male and cast as female, we encountered the problem of contradictory language. Should we change the proper nouns so the characters become wholly women? Or should we leave the text intact so these women are addressed as men? Eventually, we decided that the characters are women and were to be dressed as women, but were simply addressed as men. The audience was then more apt to recognize the gender issues, and analyze them further than if we simply completely changed the gender of the roles.

Research and Inspiration

After the concept meeting, I had a lot of valuable information, but no inspiration for a direction. Many people say it is easier to be creative when there are restraints, that asking
creativity to occur when there are no boundaries is many times more challenging. I couldn’t agree with that more. Knowing Julia, I knew that she would be willing to at least entertain any idea and would not shy away from the non-traditional, that she would, in fact, encourage it. So there were essentially no boundaries.

I spent the next few days with the looming feeling of non-creativity and an approaching deadline for research and ideas. I knew I wanted to draw some inspiration from traditional Greek chitons to pay homage to the history of the story. But I didn’t know how much inspiration to draw from ancient Greece, and of course I didn’t yet know what would be the inspiration for the rest of the design. I continued to do visual research of chitons so I could have a good understanding of their construction and how they were worn, while hoping creative inspiration would strike.

Somewhere in that week after the first design meeting, I became aware that sheer fabric was a visual that kept popping up in the back of my head. I didn’t really know why or how to use it, but it kept occurring. Finally, I realized I could use sheer fabric for the chitons, which could thinly veil something underneath, but I didn’t yet know what. I was very excited about the idea of the chiffon chitons: it really embodied the ethereal and otherworldly quality I was seeking with the costume design. And as since its properties allowed for another aspect of the costume to be beneath it, the concept of duality could be physically manifested in the costumes.

The ever-present silhouette of the human form was also an important decision in choosing the sheer fabric. So much of the play revolves around compassion for fellow humans (or lack thereof) that to have the human form of every character present at all times—a great reminder of the equality of all of us—would be always to see the human beneath the clothes.
The first idea I had was to juxtapose the flowing organic nature of the chiffon against geometric shapes beneath on a leotard. The pattern would be all-encompassing of the actors’ bodies. After wrestling with that idea for a while, I realized that the beauty of seeing through the chiton is that you get the feeling you are seeing through to their vulnerability, their skin, their nakedness. I decided that it needed to look like flesh underneath the chiton. This allowed for the humanity of each character to be visible throughout this conflicted circumstance. We are all human regardless of our motivation and actions, and I wanted that to be apparent visually.

I presented the idea thus far at the first design meeting. Julia seemed very intrigued by the concept and was excited to see where it was going. The portion of the design that needed some attention was the issue of body type, as this concept would ask a lot of the actors’ confidence, and our actor playing Tiresias had a considerably larger build than the rest of the cast. Another issue that needed to be addressed was the fact that our Tiresias, the Boy, and the Chorus are cast as females, though referred to as men in the dialog.

Symbols

As the design meetings progressed, the symbols on the bodies of the characters went through many manifestations. Initially, they were simply geometric patterns, then “tribal” designs. We also explored having different symbols that related to gender. Soon those were replaced with Celtic knot symbols to pay homage to the Irish influences of Heaney and ancient geometry, with each character having a different symbol. While Julia liked the idea of using ancient symbols, she wanted to make sure each had a purposeful meaning. That later morphed into having a very strong and clear symbol for Antigone and Creon, and having the other characters be variations on those two.
Antigone ended up with a tri-spiral, which is a Celtic symbol for eternity. This symbol eventually came to have a larger significance in the production as a whole. The Chorus utilized it in their choreography and even drew it in the sand when burying the fallen at the end of the production. Creon was manifested in a very angular star known as Metatron’s Cube, a portion of sacred geometry. The Chorus did not follow the same convention of theme and variation but a vine-like pattern that began as angular and branched out into a jagged, knarly branch representative of the deconstruction we see throughout the play.

Lighting

Lighting designer Vandy Wood and I spent some time playing with the combination of lighting direction and opacity of the chiffon, which proved a very interesting and enjoyable exercise. The chiffon functioned much like a scrim, in that depending on how light is applied to it, it can appear either opaque or translucent. We found that side and back lighting did not enhance the transparency of the fabric, while lighting it from the front created an opportunity for the underneath layer to be seen much more clearly.

Color

The color scheme of this production was a challenging aspect for me. When one is working with the idea of chitons, the mind immediately jumps to white or varying shades of off-white, as that is the color most strongly associated with ancient Greece. I find it particularly interesting that I found the same to be true of transparent fabrics: when one thinks of transparent fabrics, the first image that comes to mind is a white fabric. Working with both the inspiration of chitons and see-through fabric, I found that a lot of effort was needed mentally to push through
the assumption of white. It also took a lot of mental struggle to work through the question of whether your mind immediately goes to white because of habit, or because it is the best choice, or perhaps even that it is habit because it is the best choice?

After much back-and-forth mental wrangling, I came to the conclusion that while white or off-white could have been a logical choice, the option of color is a much more expressive choice. One image that was particularly helpful in forming the beginning of a color scheme was one Vandy brought in of women in a desert, clad in crimson and grouped together in the distance in a circle. All of the design team and director were moved by this image, by the sense of group, femininity, and vibrant colors that this image evoked and expressed. Based on this image, I decided to have the Chorus in red, or at least some shade of red. Since our set was going to be a desert with “sand” as the set, the image could be nearly replicated and that feeling could be evoked on our stage.

The first set of prelims I colored were muted tones, with a wide spectrum of colors—oranges, greens, reds, blues, purples—all with the same quality of vibrancy, but of many different colors. When I presented this at the design meeting, the tone of the colors was appreciated, but Julia thought the palette needed to be narrowed. After some consideration, I was glad we decided to change it. The finalized color palette had the Chorus in burgundy, civilians (Boy, Messenger and Guard) in tans and browns, and the royal family on a spectrum from black to blue, with Antigone being in the most vibrant color on stage. The earth tones of browns and tans created a unified look among the non-royalty. This color group is solid and grounded. The color spectrum of the royalty is much more vibrant and a spectrum of black to blues, bolder choices for those who wield more power.
Masks

Both the director and I felt strongly about masks for the Chorus. Julia mentioned the idea of having masks that are perhaps not ever-present, or are able to change throughout the show. Another idea that was considered was the idea of masks made of makeup, reminiscent of the symbols that were being discussed for the tattoos. As the design concept developed, we settled on a simple half-mask that covered the face, on which the branching pattern of the Chorus crept.

Once the basic mask was decided upon, we discussed having a veil attached to the back, to be used during portions of the choreography, since a veil is often used as a sign of mourning. However, that was later cut, as it was not very likely to stay in place, and the costume and choreography were strong enough that a veil was not necessary.

An idea that was bounced around that didn’t make it into the final design was a veil for Antigone. The symbolism of a veil that serves as both a wedding veil and a veil of mourning was a beautiful dual image. It was a little disappointing that it did not make it into the final design, because it is such a great opportunity to utilize the very different cultural symbols of a veil. However, we decided to use the letting down of bound hair as a strong visual for Antigone, which I think was the correct choice.

Footwear

Finding footwear that both supported the artistic vision and provided the actors with the correct protection was a challenge. Both the director and I agreed that barefoot best portrayed the world we were attempting to achieve. The look we were attempting to achieve was that of
“another world” and one that was organic, natural, and earthy. Barefoot actors have that presence onstage; however, due to the safety limitations of having a steel set, this was not permissible.

To accommodate the safety requirements of the set, a full sole was needed. The role of the Chorus was very much dance based, so something that is amenable to dancing was also a requirement. Since the ideal design choice was no footwear at all, it was decided that the best alternative would be a uniform look for all the characters and a shoe with as minimal design and mass as possible. The other option that was considered was a strappy roman sandal, which would have drawn attention to the footwear as part of the design, instead of minimizing the presence of the shoe. This could have worked but would have placed the characters in a more realistic time period instead of the abstracted location that we were trying to establish. Upon looking through many dance catalogs, a leather-soled sandal with very thin (about 1/8 inch) crisscrossing straps that hold the sole onto the actor’s foot were chosen. They came in a light beige color that nearly disappeared on the actor’s foot.

Hair

The hairstyles of the women in the cast were all variations on intricate braids. Luckily, my design assistant was very proficient in braiding and was able to create designs for each character. Initially, we hoped that the women would be able to keep their hair in braids for multiple shows, but that proved difficult and undesirable to the actors. We discussed Antigone and Ismene removing their braid during the show as part of their emotional journey, which was an excellent visual. My assistant generously volunteered to re-braid the actresses’ hair before each performance.
APPENDIX D: JOURNAL OF BUILD PROCESS
Construction Techniques

One of the most exciting aspects of working on *The Burial at Thebes* is that see-through chitons with tribal-type symbols on spandex have never existed as an outfit. There was nowhere to turn for hints as to the best way to accomplish the look. When constructing a garment that has been worn for centuries, you can assume that the construction methods were perfected over time and that if something didn’t work as far as assembly, wear-ability, or aesthetics, it was tweaked or replaced with something that did work. We were not afforded this luxury. However, it granted us (the Costume Shop staff and me) great opportunities for exploration and creativity.

Leotards

A persistent challenge was trying to figure out the best way to create the illusion of bare skin on which to draw the symbols. We went around and around with this: there are numerous ways to accomplish this look, and they all have their benefits and drawbacks. One option was to use as much of the actors’ real skin as possible, using covering only where absolutely necessary and drawing symbols on their actual skin. This method would have been the most esthetically pleasing from my perspective. It would be the closest to the idea of nakedness as possible. However, it would be the most logistically challenging. We would have to come up with a way to draw the symbol on every day, which would be time consuming and expensive not to mention challenging to find a non-toxic option. The next option was to have a leotard that would cover the torso and serve as a permanent canvas on which to draw the symbols. The benefit to this method is the audience would still be able to see the actors’ arms and legs in their natural state.
However, now you would have to deal with the issue of any shoulder straps and there would be a panty line at the edge of the leotard.

The final option was to use a full-body unitard on everyone. While this did not allow us to see any real skin, it is a uniform look that does not run the risk of creating awkward lines at the transition point between leotard and skin, or at least the line would be in locations as inconspicuous as possible—at the ankle, wrist, and throat. The down side to this approach is that it doesn’t allow you to see any skin, and it moves the ensemble into a more dance-like realm. While discussing the benefits and drawbacks of each, we discussed the fact that while this look is more “dance-y,” it is an established convention within performance arts that the audience is willing to accept unitards as “skin.” The willing suspension of disbelief allows us such latitude.

Deciding which of these options to go with was not a one-discussion-then-decision situation. We discussed and discussed. I spoke about it with the costume shop manager and workroom supervisor. I spoke about it with the director, with my academic adviser, and with my roommate. I asked everyone I knew what he or she would rather see as an audience member. What was particularly interesting is that while I couldn’t make a decision, neither could anyone else. Fairly early, we ruled out drawing the tattoos on their skin. There wasn’t a good way to do that, I didn’t want to redraw them every night, and I didn’t want to ask the actors to be adorned with emblems of the show throughout the run plus however long it would take the permanent marker to go away. But that still left us with leotards or unitards.

Several times I thought I had reached a decision, but always reconsidered and went back to the pros-and-cons list and reevaluated. Eventually, we decided to go with leotards, leaving the actors’ bare legs and arms exposed. I am satisfied that this was the best option. It combined the
illusion of skin underneath the chiton plus the actual skin of the exposed areas of the body. For modesty’s sake and to avoid panty lines, I wanted a unitard that had shorts instead of the usual leg holes. Because I couldn’t find ones with shorts and criss-cross straps (which we needed for the best support of one-armed chitons) we had to buy unitards with full-length legs to be cut to shorts specific for each actor. If I were to do it again with the same resources, I would chose this method; however, if I had the means to repaint or draw on the bare skin every night, I would prefer that method.

**Budget and Purchasing**

This show was relatively uncomplex budget-wise (and as far as paperwork was concerned), due to the uniformity of the concept. All of the actors wore variations on the same outfit. I made very few purchases, but each purchase was large (which proved to be advantageous because so many merchants give discounts on large orders). I purchased leotards, hundreds of yards of silk, shoes, masks, dance belts, permanent markers, and Wonderflex to make the armor and crowns. In the grand scope of productions, we spent a phenomenally low amount on purchases. With the budget at $2,500, I came in below budget at $1,856.

**Dyeing the Silk**

Dying the silk was a fabulous experience. Silk takes dye beautifully, which makes the whole process enjoyable. The first step was to get the silk into manageable sizes. As the silk came in a bolt of 100 yards, I obviously couldn’t put it all in the dye vat at the same time, and needed to make certain the dye lots were uniform. Kyla, the Costume Shop Workroom Supervisor, and I had worked through yardage estimations for the various characters, so I needed
to cut the bolt into the designated lengths, being sure to keep them labeled so I would know which mound of white chiffon was whose. I decided that exact measurements were not necessary, since these garments were so organic anyway. Precision was not essential. After cutting my 100 yards into manageable sizes, and surging the raw edges, I began dying to the specified colors.

For the most part, the silk was a joy to work with. Dark colors are more difficult in general, and black is notoriously difficult to get in dying, which is why we purchased black chiffon for Creon. So when dying Haemon’s garment to dark gray, I initially didn’t dye it dark enough. Overcompensating for the initial shortcoming, I re-dyed it with lots of gray and black. This time to my horror (and pleasure), the silk emerged black. I then had to run it through the washing machine with a color remover three times to get it back to a recognizable gray color and not so dark. As for the rest of the chitons, if the color needed to be adjusted further, it always needed to be darker, so it could simply be over-dyed.

I did have some issues with the silk noil used for Tiresias. It did not dye evenly, with some places significantly lighter than others. That was unfortunate, because once fabric has dyed unevenly you can’t fix it (you can’t re-dye only the lighter portions). I was able to explain the less-than-amazing results to the first hand who had patterned the garment and would be constructing it. She was able to work around the worst of the splotches. However, it wasn’t perfect.

The main issue we had with dyeing was a change in texture. When the silk was soaked in water during the dying process and then air-dried, it took on a fabulous rougher texture, creating a more earthy and organic feel. This was great and worked really well with the show. However,
the black chiffon that we purchased (and didn’t need dyeing) did not have this texture, and we ran into issues with discrepancy in levels of transparency. Creon’s chiton seemed much more translucent than the rest of the cast’s. The logical explanation was that it had not been through the same dyeing process that the others had. After attempts to compensate for the discrepancy, we ended up purchasing more white chiffon and dying it black so it would have the same texture and same translucency of the others.

Crafts

In order to differentiate royalty and military from the average citizen, a few pieces of armor and crowns were needed. These were constructed out of Wonderflex, a fabulous plastic material that softens when dipped in hot water and then hardens into its newly formed shape. Haemon, Creon, and Eurydice all had small circlet-style crowns made of Wonderflex, which were adorned with different beads, buttons, and rhinestones, and then spray-painted a bronzy gold color to create the illusion of cast bronze. Creon also had small brass-looking arm shields, which were bordered with black leather and tied to his forearms with black leather (to tie him to the military). The guard had brown leather arm shields, which were made of Wonderflex, then covered with leather.

Mock-ups and Fittings

Because the final design was not a replica of an actual garment from a historical period, there was much more problem-solving and exploration in the fittings than in any play I have worked on thus far. We had decided to mock-up some of the chitons before cutting the chiffon, to get an idea of fullness and how we wanted to go about creating the garments. We decided that
for wearability the costumes should have specific pattern pieces to be assembled, not simply the
draped cloth that would have been used in a traditional chiton. This would create a costume that
did not need to be redraped each night: it would look the same each night because the sleeve was
a set-in sleeve, not just a draped portion of the large fabric piece.

For the first round of fitting we fit the mock-ups we had made for Antigone, Ismene, and
Tiresias. The mock-ups were made of a cotton weave, so the drape of the fabric was not the same
as the silk chiffon would be, but we got an idea of fit and fullness. I’m really glad we did mock-
up fittings because the fullness of the garments desired was not achieved in Round One.

Unlike most fittings, where the bulk of the work is completed before the final fittings, we
went into the fittings with only the initial steps completed. The designs on the leotards were to be
sketched in during the fittings to get a sense of scale on the body and to allow the leotard to be
stretched in the correct proportions for each person’s body. The length of the leotard legs was
also determined in the fittings, so the legs were still intact going in.

The first few actors to have their fitting in the chiffon were scheduled before we had
received the leotards. Those fittings were conducted while the actor wore his or her underwear.
Those fittings were a little unorthodox; usually when an actor is removing their clothes we exit
the fitting room; however, since we were only going to be adding a translucent chiton, it seemed
pointless to leave the room while they stripped to their undergarments only to return once they
had stripped. The actors were all very professional about what might have been a fairly
uncomfortable situation.

Each of the chitons that was not patterned was pre-draped on a form, to get a general idea
of the look; the excess yardage was not cut. When we got into the fitting, we attempted to
reconstruct the draping on the actor. At this point we marked the final length, pinned the shoulder in place and marked where we wanted it to be cinched at the waist. Once we received the unitards, the remaining fittings (which was for most of the cast) were conducted by initially having the actor change only into the unitard and then the symbols were drawn on them. This was actually a little more problematic than I had anticipated. I realized that the canvas on which I was going to be drawing these shapes was not a flat one, but I didn’t take into consideration the boundaries of propriety that would be pushed in these settings. I used a ruler to get a straight line, and moved it around the body in order to create the perfectly straight lines that were necessary for the geometric nature of the symbology to take form. I neglected to think beforehand that the process of drawing might be tickling the actor wearing the unitard. That was something that we had to troubleshoot in the fittings, as I first began to draw the shapes with pencil, lines that needed pressure and to be drawn multiple times. This resulted in fits of laughter from the first actor who experienced application of the symbol. We later switched to water-soluble fabric markers, as they did not require the heavy hand that a pencil did. The actors were all very professional regarding their nontraditional fittings and this explorative organic process seemed very apropos for this show. This show probably pushed the actors outside of their comfort zones in many aspects, and the costume fittings were only a small portion of the larger exploration.

Construction

After the fitting, we finished the edge of the hem, deciding on a simple zig-zag stitch instead of a roll hem. I wanted the zig-zag because a roll hem requires that the chiffon be rolled up on itself three layers thick, which would create a nontranslucent line at the bottom. I didn’t want to give a hard edge to the garment whose defining characteristic is that it’s transparent. The
shoulders were then tacked in place where they had been pinned, in order to keep the draping that had been aesthetically created in the fitting. Any additional bulk in the shoulder was removed and any additional fullness was removed.

One of the more difficult constructional challenges to overcome was figuring out a decent way to cinch in the waist of the garments in a way that was flexible and not visible. The solution was one that I am actually quite proud of. Kyla, the Workroom Supervisor, suggested running a band of bias tape on the inside of the waist to create a channel for elastic to be strung through. I thought this was a great suggestion, in that it kept the mechanism on the inside of the garment, and held it fast in a permanent place so it couldn’t ride up the chiton, nor become loose and fall off. Using elastic also allowed for the movement that was necessary to perform the choreography of the piece. While I was mostly satisfied with this solution, I suggested tweaking that solution and instead of running bias tape, I created a laundry tuck (a horizontal fold in the body of the garment stitched down to adjust for length). We used that as a channel for elastic to avoid getting a black band underneath the translucent chiffon.

Dress Rehearsals

One challenge we met was modesty. I realized that this design was asking the actor to have a lot of confidence in her or his body. No one complained to me outright, but I did hear a lot of teasing among the actors backstage, or complaining about their bodies. One modesty issue I did encounter was the desire for the Chorus to wear dance tights under their leotards. I understand that it made them more comfortable, but the line created by the bottom of the tights was very noticeable above the ankle. I had to ask them to stop wearing them. I am grateful that they agreed without resistance.
The quality of transparency was a reoccurring issue throughout the three dress rehearsals. Creon’s chiton was much more translucent than the others. Because we had ordered the black chiffon already dyed instead of dying it ourselves and air drying it, the quality was different. As discussed before, the first solution we had was to simply wash it and air dry it, which helped a little bit, but still the chiton was more see-through than the rest. The costume shop manager, shop supervisor, and I decided it needed to go through the exact same process as the rest of the chitons, so yardage of white silk was purchased, dyed, and air dried all in the 24 hours between second and final dress. This was actually a beneficial solution on two fronts, as Creon’s chiton was considerably shorter than the others, so re-constructing it gave us the opportunity to add the desired length.

Getting all of the girls’ hair braided in a timely fashion proved to be challenging throughout the dress rehearsal process. We went through multiple solutions, ending with hair-braiding appointments throughout the day to lessen the load right before the show. While this helped, the best solution was to utilize the cast members who were proficient at braiding.

Besides these few issues, the production was progressing beautifully. The colors looked stunning in the world of the set. The translucent nature of the chiffon was subtle but notable.

Adjudication

The adjudication by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival adjudicator Allison Steadman went fabulously. Steadman is an Assistant Professor of Costume Design at Jacksonville University, which was such a blessing. Usually, design elements are an afterthought in the adjudication. However, Steadman had lots of comments and questions about the costumes. She picked up on the idiosyncrasies of the design, asking me about our construction choices and
fabric. She offered many words of inspiration in her written adjudication, including “ethereal” to describe the chiffon and earthiness. She picked up on the theme of constructed/deconstruction and how that was mirrored in the vinelike tattoo on the Chorus. For me, it was a wonderful experience to have someone knowledgeable in my field to critique my work. She nominated the design for *The Burial at Thebes* to compete for the Barbizon Award for Costume Design.

**Personnel Issues**

Something particularly interesting about working in an academic setting, as opposed to a professional setting, is the assignment of assistants. As a graduate student, I was assigned an undergraduate assistant with whom I would unlikely work in the professional world. Our communication styles and, more important, personalities are not complementary. Realizing that as her supervisor in this project I could not shy away from her as I might choose to do in the professional world, I had to take her under my wing and involve her in the process.

My assistant’s ability to braid hair beautifully led her to take the lead in the styling of hair before each performance. This resulted in a lot of interaction with the actors. Her sense of humor and seemingly negative attitude created an unpleasant energy in the dressing room and some of the actors complained to the assistant director about the issue, who in turn came to the director and me. After discussing with the costume shop manager, we explained to my assistant that concerns about her behavior had been raised with the director, and that her attitude would need to be adjusted. Needless to say, it was an emotionally charged conversation.

I learned a lot from this experience. I think an ounce of prevention would have been worth a pound of cure in this situation. If I had sat my assistant down before the dress rehearsal process and explained that her manner of humor was inappropriate for backstage a lot of hurt
feelings could have been spared all the way around. And while it would have been a difficult conversation to have, the damage control due to the lack of such a conversation was much worse.

Reflection

I learned many things from the situation that I will choose to do differently in the future. Most of my regrets have to do with my lack of supervision of my assistant. However, in the professional world, it is much less likely a designer will be required to work with an assistant that they would not choose different arrangements would be made in negotiations if that situation presented itself. Despite the situation having its many difficulties, I was able to learn a lot about my delegation style and what tasks I am willing and not willing to leave to an assistant for completion. I also learned that if you have an assistant you don’t trust, it is probably wasting your time (and someone else’s money).

There were a few aesthetic issues I wasn’t entirely pleased with as far as construction was concerned. It is often difficult for me to stand my ground as designer in the rare instances in which I disagree with the costume shop. Knowing that UCF’s Costume Shop personnel have the best interest of the show in mind, and being aware of their many years of experience, I hesitated to disagree even when, as the designer, I would have liked things done differently. For the most part, I don’t think this is something I will overcome anytime soon but need to work on continually.

This design component was particularly rewarding, as I was working with an otherwise all-faculty design team. In the past, many of my design teams have been mostly students, but this opportunity allowed a glimpse into how professionals communicate their ideas to each other. The
added dynamic of a student and faculty mentor on each design faction streamlined the process without differences of opinion and communication issues.
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Table 1: Page Breakdown
APPENDIX F: VISUAL RESEARCH
Due to the difficult nature of obtaining permission to reprint copyrighted material, I am not able to publish all of the inspiring images I used while designing *The Burial at Thebes*. The following images are representative of the types of visual research I used, but are in no way a complete collection.
Figure 1: Nike (Victory) Adjusting Her Sandal
Figure 2: Nike of Samothrace (Victory of Samothrace)
Figure 3: Artemis Left Side
Figure 4: Tattooed Thigh
Figure 5: Tattooed Back
APPENDIX G: ROUGH SKETCHES
Figure 6: Roughs, Creon and Guard

Figure 7: Roughs, Antigone and Ismene
Figure 8: Roughs, Tiresias and the Chorus

Figure 9: Roughs, Haemon and Eurydice
APPENDIX H: SYMBOLS
Figure 10: Creon’s Symbol

Figure 11: Antigone’s Symbol
APPENDIX H: FINAL COLOR PALETTE
Figure 12: Final Color Palette
APPENDIX I: FINAL RENDERINGS
Figure 13: Creon Rendering
Figure 14: Antigone Rendering
Figure 15: Haemon Rendering
Figure 16: Eurydice Rendering
Figure 17: Ismene Rendering
Figure 18: Chorus Rendering
Figure 19: Tiresias Rendering
Figure 20: Messenger Rendering
Figure 21: Guard Rendering
Figure 22: Boy Rendering
Figure 23: Production Photo, Antigone and Ismene
Figure 24: Production Photo, Antigone and Ismene
Figure 25: Production Photo, Tiresias
Figure 26: Production Photo, Creon
Figure 27: Production Photo, Guard
Figure 28: Production Photo, Antigone and Chorus
Figure 29: Production Photo, Eurydice and Chorus
Figure 30: Production Photo, Antigone and Creon
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Table 4: Modified Check-In/Check-Out
Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Adjudication

Written Response

Professor Allison Steadman

Choice of Play

I think this play was quite appropriate for a university production. The selection of a modern adaptation of a Greek tragedy gives students the opportunity to experience theatre history in a relevant context. By producing a Greek text, students get to take classroom theory and see it in practice. The choice of a modern adaptation provides students with a practical application for the theory. This interpretation in particular draws contemporary political parallels which demonstrates to the students how historical plays can serve as a vehicle for the modern political voice. In addition to providing historical context, this play gave the students experience in speaking verse as well as experiencing the unique convention of a Chorus. The students handled both of these challenges with seeming ease and comfort.

Direction

The director chose to develop the play through collaboration with her cast, assistant directors, choreographer and designers. The result was a production with a true ensemble feel in which every element was cohesive. The blocking made excellent use of the stage. She was restrained in her use of the upper levels in the scaffolding. This made the use of them particularly significant. Using these levels a little more may have helped integrate them more. Collaboration with the choreographer brought a wonderful sense of flow and purpose to the performance, especially with the Chorus. The director chose to cast females in what would have traditionally been male roles. The most notable was the nine-person female Chorus. The cross-gender casting
of this particular text in which a woman dare defy the state encouraged the audience to view the gender issues from a new perspective. The production also made great use of the repeated element of the number three. This was evident in the 9-person Chorus, the use of the Celtic spiral of life that represents the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, and in use of triangles in the stage pictures. The text itself was written to draw parallels to the regime of George W. Bush and the director allowed this text to speak for itself without making it conspicuous. This allowed the audience to draw their own comparisons while keeping focus on the story itself.

**Acting**

The acting in this production was nearly flawless. All of the actors were thoroughly committed to their roles and the performance as a whole. They were a complete ensemble and seemed to breathe as one. They created multi-faceted characters with dimension and conviction. Every actor on the stage had a strong grasp of the nature of the style of performance. They handled the verse of the text beautifully. The ensemble all had fully developed characters with a strong connection with the text and one another.

Danielle Kimberley as Antigone was more than just stubborn and defiant. She was able to capture and convey a sense of internal struggle and vulnerability combined with an innate strength of character and conviction. She had a true sense of purpose that seemed beyond her control. We were able to see her wrestle with the need to honor her family and her understanding and acceptance of the consequences that fulfilling that need would bring. Carine Gaito’s Ismene was full of passion and emotion. She had tendency to punctuate her lines with gestures, as may have been the style in Ancient Greece. Overall her performance was heartfelt and connected to the character.
Creon in the hands of Trent Fucci was masterfully developed. He managed to balance out Creon’s uncompromising sense of wrong and right with a heartfelt conviction of service to his people. Each action, no matter how harsh, came from his true dedication to his country and his subjects. We were able to feel his struggle to overcome his original definition of what was right to accept the words of the seer. Trent brought a sense of humanity to a character that could easily have been a one-dimensional misogynist. Beyond his emotional development, he showed great command of his voice and physicality, using both to full advantage. In a cast full of strong performances, Zachary Layner was no exception. His performance of Haemon was very direct and true. He gave a deeply passionate portrayal of a man torn between loyalties. He was truly committed to the character and the character’s convictions.

The blind seer Tiresias as portrayed by Pascha Weaver was entrenched in a world of uncontrollable clairvoyance. Pascha’s vocal and physical control was unmatched in this production. Her interpretation of the seer was unique and powerful. She truly seemed a woman possessed. Pascha’s Tiresias was a woman who had given herself over entirely to the visions sent to her by the gods. She took the characterization right to the edge of caricature without crossing over. I found this interpretation to be very exciting and grounded in the mythology of the character, but it may have been just outside of the style of the rest of the play.

Ian Kramer’s Guard was humorous and realistic. He was able to bring comic relief into a Greek tragedy without detracting from the seriousness of the text. His delivery was spot on and honest. The Messenger from Kyle Adkins was impassioned and desperate to bear witness to the tragedy of the day. He seemed to be unable to stem the tide of events from pouring from his lips.
The Chorus of nine women was wonderfully crafted and delivered. The actresses seemed as one from beginning to end. They had a strong sense of connection with each other and the play. They were grounded in their movement and voice. They were unified in every way. Their command of the vocal and physical choreography connected the play from moment to moment.

**Design Elements**

The overall design of the show was phenomenal. The set, costume and lights had a feel of “constructed deconstruction” that reflected the structure and intent of the text. The set made innovative use of a black box space with a three paneled scaffolding structure, harkening back to the use of the number three, with varying stages of broken and ruined stone blocks that created interesting windows and silhouettes for the director to play with. Throughout the play, the set pieces began to tilt imperceptibly forward to reflect the precariousness of Creon’s rule. The scaffolding was set on a bed of sand with fractured stones scattered throughout. The stones were brought together to build an altar in the space. In addition to bringing to life the metaphors of the text, the set gave the director a multitude of options for creative and powerful staging.

The lighting brought the set and costumes to life. The designer took care to reflect the tension and fractured nature of the play while rising to the challenge of lighting in an intimate space. The seamless execution and development of the lighting throughout the play was disrupted just a bit by the final sequence. The last moment of the play seemed to jump from cue to cue which was in juxtaposition to the design up to that point. It made the end feel a bit jarring in comparison to the rest of the production.
The costume design carried the idea of “constructed deconstruction” onto the actors. The designer took the traditional Greek silhouette and created a sheer, deconstructed version for the production. Her use of color was subtle and sophisticated. The spiral motif was brought into the costumes in varying ways. The choice of silk chiffon gave the costumes a sense of ethereal earthiness. The spiral was brought in under the sheer fabrics in ways personal to each character. The Chorus had a deconstructed spiral that broke out of its sheer overlay and onto the skin and masks, evoking a sense of vines and growth or cracks in stone. In addition to the spiral introduced under the costumes, the spiral was brought into the hair of the sisters, Antigone and Ismene, and was used to reflect the characters’ relationship to the law of the land. As each of the women chose to break with the state, they broke with the bonds in their hair. I loved this convention, it was a wonderful reflection of the inner life of the characters. I also felt that the opacity of the seer’s costume compared to the transparency of the rest of the characters was an interesting choice. It almost put the audience in the position of being seers themselves. It was a strong choice and thoughtful point of view.

The sound design was an integral part of the production and had a wonderful balance between live and recorded sound.

**Tech Elements**

I could not see any flaws in the execution of the design elements. The set worked seamlessly and subtly, the lighting brought emotion and focus to the production without compromising the comfort or sight of the audience, and the costumes seemed effortless in their wearability and execution, and the sound flowed perfectly. The stage manager called the show wonderfully, causing the show to run with ease. I appreciated the practicality of the use of cork
for the sand, but integrating some real sand or possibly pea gravel may have heightened the sound element that the handling and interaction with the sand brought to the production. Front of House seemed well organized, if a little casual. I was a little bit disappointed that the production crews and technical director, etc. were not given credit in the program.
LIST OF REFERENCES


