

Antiphonal Silences: *Thrēnoi* and Tragic Collectivity in Sophocles' *Antigone*

This paper examines the role of the chorus as the antiphonal respondent in the two threnodic *kommoi* of Sophocles' *Antigone*. The play stages two moments of *thrēnos*: the heroine's interaction with the chorus in the fourth episode, before she marches off to her death, and the final *kommos* of Creon, when he laments the deaths of his son and wife. In the first, though the chorus initially takes part in Antigone's lamentation, it gradually ceases to lament with her through the course of their exchange. Once the chorus has withdrawn its vocal support, Antigone is the only solo voice left to perform her own *thrēnos*. Similarly, the chorus of elders entirely abstains from singing during Creon's highly emotional lyric lament over his dead son; Creon's solitary *thrēnos* has no antiphonal response except for an occasional reply from the messenger (who, even then, speaks in iambic trimeter, the most conversational of meters, in direct contrast to Creon's expressive lyric). The refusal of the chorus to respond in both scenes illustrates the way in which Sophocles works to isolate the soloist in moments of tragic mourning. In both cases, Sophocles either gradually or straightforwardly silences the choral response while still operating within the larger framework of *thrēnos*.

In tragedy, *thrēnoi* are typically shared between the mourner and the chorus; it is not a wholly choral activity, but rather one that is entirely dependent on the interaction of the individual and the collective choral group. From this perspective, the two *kommoi* of *Antigone* constitute moments of broken antiphony, in which the chorus either partially participates in or simply does not contribute to the lament of a character on stage. My paper explores the reasons for which the ritual of mourning as a collective enterprise breaks down on the Sophoclean stage. I shall argue that the failure of collective expression in the *Antigone* illuminates the characteristic tension in tragedy between the individual and the collective.