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Antigone (Hackett Classics)



Synopsis

Woodruff's work with Peter Meineck makes this text one that is accessible to today's students and could be staged for modern audiences. Line notes printed at the bottom of the page bring a reader further quick assistance. . . . The choral odes as rendered here deserve special notice. After giving a succinct analysis of each in his introduction, Woodruff translates the lyrics into English that is both poetic and comprehensible. . . . Woodruff's rendering of the dialogue moves along easily; these are lines that any contemporary Antigone, Creon or Haemon might speak. Antigone's words on the gods' unwritten laws keep close to the Greek and yet would be authentic for a modern speaker. . . . Woodruff's introduction is a strong, clear, and clever blend of basic traditional information (to those who know Greek tragedy) and fresh insights. . . . Should our drama department ask for my advice as to a playable text, I would certainly suggest Woodruff's new version. --Karelisa Hartigan, The Classical Bulletin

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Researching translations is never an easy task, and in this case, where you'll have to search on for the title and the translator to find what you want, it's particularly difficult. Here's what I've found by comparing several editions:

1. David Grene translation: Seems to be accurate, yet not unwieldy as such. My pick. Language is used precisely, but not to the point where it's barely in English.
2. Fitts/Fitzgerald translation: Excellent as well, though a little less smooth than the Grene one.

Certainly not a bad pick.³ Fagles translation: Beautiful. Not accurate. If you are looking for the smoothest English version, there's no doubt that this is it. That said, because he is looser with the translation, some ideas might be lost. For instance, in *Antigone*, in the beginning, *Antigone* discusses how law compels her to bury her brother despite Creon's edict. In Fagles, the "law" concept is lost in "military honors" when discussing the burial of Eteocles. This whole notion of obeying positive law or natural law is very important, but you wouldn't know it from Fagles. In Grene, for example, it is translated to "lawful rites."⁴ Gibbons and Segal: Looks great, but right now the book has only *Antigone* (and not the rest of the trilogy) and costs almost 3x as much. I'll pass. But, from a cursory review, I'm impressed with their work.⁵ MacDonald: This edition received some good write-ups, but I wasn't able to do a direct passage-to-passage comparison.⁶ Woodruff: NO, NO, NO. Just NO. It's so colloquial it makes me gag. Very accessible, but the modernization of the language is just so extreme as to make it almost laughable. You don't get any sense of the power of language in the play.

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"Antigone" is that kind of literary work that invites opposing views. The state and the individual, the duties to family and country, the boundaries of legitimate government and the extent of personal choice, are all elements that find a voice in this play, an extraordinary gift of Western culture to the world. The young and stubborn Antigone finds herself breaking the law that her uncle, the old and stubborn Kreon, has enacted. This is Oedipus' family, so there must be bloodshed. The conflict develops out of the vengeful and, ultimately foolish law that Kreon has come up with, which denies burial rituals to one of Antigone's brothers (Polyneices) because he had sided with foreigners and made war against his city. Antigone claims that Justice (dikē) tells her to care for her brother's body in spite of his treason. This is what Kreon, blind with hatred, cannot see. Just as Oedipus, and even worse, Kreon imagines conspiracies where there are none, and is convinced that the entire city is seething with traitors waiting for a signal to bring him down. With such a state of mind, he charges against Antigone, and she is very much her father's daughter: she will not bow before her uncle although the consequences are grave. Kreon represents the state, but a state whose laws are capricious at best, and simply bad and hurtful at worst. Antigone is not easy to love or like: she is bent on following a path that will lead to her death, welcoming such a release from the terrible burden of being who she is: daughter of her brother Oedipus and granddaughter of her mother Jocasta. But Antigone's own prickly character makes her struggle all the more admirable, since it is so difficult to like her. It would have been relatively easy to create a soft, misunderstood heroine who dies for her convictions.

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