

**SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE* REWORKED IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:
THE CASE OF HASENCLEVER'S *ANTIGONE* (1917)**

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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

This article examines a little-known example of *Antigone*'s reception in the twentieth century: the adaptation by the German expressionist writer Walter Hasenclever. This version is the first and arguably most innovative of several European adaptations of Sophocles' play to appear in the first half of the twentieth century. Although successful at the time of its production, Hasenclever's *Antigone* is scarcely read in contemporary scholarship and is discussed mainly in German-language scholarship.¹

Whereas Flashar's wide-ranging study, in German, refers to Hasenclever's drama (Flashar 2009: 127–29), in Fischer-Lichte's 2017 book *Tragedy's Endurance*, in English, Hasenclever appears only in one endnote (Fischer-Lichte 2017: 143). The only English translation of the play available (Ritchie and Stowell 1969: 113–60) is rather out of date and inaccessible. Hasenclever's *Antigone* is briefly mentioned in Steiner's essential reference book *Antigones* (Steiner 1984: 142; 146; 170; 218), in the chapter on *Antigone* in the recent *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Sophocles* (Silva 2017: 406–7) and in Cairns' 2016 book on Sophocles' *Antigone* (Cairns 2016: 133). However, it is absent in some of the most recent contributions dedicated to the play's modern reception, including Wilmer's and Žukauskaitė's edited collection on *Antigone* in postmodern thought (2010), Mee's and Foley's essays (2011) discussing adaptations of *Antigone* staged around the world, and Morais', Hardwick's and Silva's recent volume (2017).²

The absence of Hasenclever from contemporary scholarship can be explained by the fact that his *Antigone* lacks the complexity of later adaptations, such as Anouilh's and Brecht's. Its political allegory is rather transparent: the drama displays in clear terms the opposition between Antigone, the “good” heroine who sacrifices herself for the people, and Creon, the “bad” tyrant, transformed into a caricature of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Moreover, Hasenclever superimposes on the ancient drama Christian motifs and terminology and interpolates Expressionist features in his adaptation, such as the apocalyptic finale, Antigone's portrayal as a messianic figure, and the representation of large crowds; the essential and dramatic language, devoid of adornment, also responds to the Expressionist style.³ Because it is grounded in the historical-Expressionist context of 1916–17 and because it does not have the subtle complexity of later versions, Hasenclever's drama has not appealed to modern readers and scholars, hence its absence from these collections, which focus on the broader and more obvious tradition of the play.

Hasenclever's drama is indeed a notable example of the political and Expressionist reception of Sophocles' *Antigone*. It is particularly interesting because it explicitly situates the *Antigone* of Sophocles as a political work and invokes and expands the political questions raised by the play. This reading of the play, created in Hegelian and post-Hegelian reception, is favoured by the inherent features of the play itself and its interaction with the history of the twentieth century.⁴

It is in the twentieth century, a period of wars, dictatorships and resistance, that artists and playwrights once again engage with Sophocles' play and emphasize its political aspects in an unprecedented way. Significantly, the beginning of the century saw the rediscovery of Hölderlin's works, published by Norbert von Hellingrath in six volumes between 1913 and 1923. Hölderlin is one of the very earliest post-Revolutionary witnesses to the political understanding of Sophocles' *Antigone*, expressed through his highly innovative translation of the ancient Greek tragedy (1804). However, there are no visible traces of Hölderlin's text in Hasenclever's version. The play's motifs of love and brotherhood recall Romain Rolland's *À l'Antigone éternelle*, written in 1916, which presents Antigone as a figure of pacifism (Flashar 2009: 128). In France, four *Antigones* were published in Paris by Alfred Pozat, Jean Réboul,

Louis Perroy, and Jean Cocteau between 1920 and 1922. In 1927, Arthur Honegger's opera score of the *Antigone* premiered in Brussels and it was revived in Nazi-occupied Paris in 1943.⁵

Under similar conditions, Jean Anouilh wrote his *Antigone*, which premiered in Paris in 1944 in front of a mixed audience of German officers, collaborationists and pro-Resistance fighters (and was then performed after the Liberation). Together with Bertolt Brecht's adaptation, based on Hölderlin's translation, Anouilh's version represents the culmination of the process through which *Antigone* enters the realm of politics.⁶ In Anouilh's version, Creon can be identified with Marshal Pétain or his Prime Minister Pierre Laval; Brecht's Creon, addressed as "mein Führer", is immediately associated with Hitler; likewise, the speeches of Hasenclever's Creon recall the authoritarian rhetoric of the Kaiser Wilhelm II (Pöggeler 2004: 10).

Whereas Anouilh emphasizes the personal drama of the young heroine, trapped in her role, Hasenclever presents his *Antigone* as a radical rebel, and focuses on the social aspects of the play and the implications of the war for the People of Thebes. The framework of the war and its politics define Brecht's *Antigone* as much as Hasenclever's version. Brecht shifts the focus of the play from the conflict between the individual and the state to the disintegration of the society-*polis* and the "scattering of destruction" left by war (Brecht 2003: 199).

Hasenclever's, Anouilh's and Brecht's versions represent landmark moments of the reception history of *Antigone* and serve to explain why *Antigone* still matters today. They do not represent a dead-end, but rather a platform for other politicized re-evaluations and re-interpretations of the play that will appear in the twentieth and twenty-first century, such as Rolf Hochhuth's novel *Die Berliner Antigone* and, more recently, Athol Fugard's *The Island* and Seamus Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes*.⁷

Hasenclever's version represents a crucial step towards the development of such a political interpretation of the play, in which *Antigone's* meaning is transformed and integrated into the contemporary historical and political context. Although not as popular as Anouilh's and Brecht's versions today, it deserves to be included in the reception history of *Antigone's* politicization and transformation as a vehicle for contemporary political critique. With Hasenclever, Sophocles' *Antigone* begins to be established as a "canonical" drama of political and pacifist resistance: this version is as important as the original for the creation of later, politicized *Antigones* that followed and reacted to the First and Second World Wars.

HASENCLEVER'S *ANTIGONE*: THE CONTEXT

Hasenclever wrote *Antigone* during his military service in Macedonia. He then completed the tragedy between 1916 and 1917 while in Dresden. After he was given military leave to oversee a production of *Der Sohn*, Hasenclever feigned mental illness in order to escape further military service. Therefore, he was admitted to Dr Teuscher's Sanatorium outside Dresden, where he completed the tragedy. Here he continued an active social and literary life, committing himself to the cause of the Activists, that literary branch of Expressionism that flourished under the leadership of Heinrich Mann, Kurt Hiller and Ludwig Rubiner (Hoelzel 1983: 55).

In the political works written during the years of the First World War, including *Der Retter* (1915), *Tod und Auferstehung* (1913–1916), and *Der politische Dichter* (1919), Hasenclever renounces the youthful rebelliousness characteristic of his early works in favour of a politically-oriented opposition aimed at activating a change in society. *Antigone*, too, is an Expressionist work that belongs to this particular phase of Hasenclever's oeuvre.⁸ In the post-war years, Hasenclever expressed his disillusion towards political activism (Kasties 1994a: 11), abandoned the Expressionist style and wrote more conventional comedies.

When Hasenclever was composing his *Antigone*, the German offensive at Verdun and the Allied counterattack on the Somme had resulted in an unprecedented loss of human life. Under such conditions, burial was a difficult task to perform: many soldiers were buried in mass graves, or on the spot where they fell, in foreign soil isolated from the home front. The German State was often unable

to return soldiers' bodies to their families. Many corpses were in fact unidentifiable or missing. The German people therefore shared the same trauma of loss and negation of burial experienced by Antigone in the Sophoclean tragedy: the repeated return to the corpse and the unsuccessful attempt to bury Polynices reflect Germany's desire to access the war dead during the tragic years of the First World War. Informed and enriched by the events occurring in contemporary Germany and Europe, the modern play thus provides a framework for confronting the shock of human fragility and for expressing a "communal mourning" during the tragedy of the First World War.⁹

In a letter to Albert Ehrenstein, written shortly after completing the drama, Hasenclever suggested that he aimed to contemporize the ancient play and that he knew Sophocles' *Antigone* only superficially (Kasties 1994a: 286). Yet the classical tradition had been prominent in Germany from the eighteenth century thanks to German poets (from Goethe, Schiller and Hölderlin to Rilke). Butler reckons that the extent of Greek influence "is incalculable throughout Europe; its intensity is at its highest in Germany" (Butler 1935: 6). *Antigone* in particular had become part of the "classic" repertoire in Germany since the Tieck/Mendelssohn production of Donner's translation in Potsdam (1841).¹⁰ Thus, it seems likely that Hasenclever was influenced, in his choice of *Antigone*, by such a classical tradition. Ancient influences characterize Expressionist dramas such as Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* (1904), Reinhard Sorge's *Odysseus* (1911), Otto zur Linde's *Charontischer Mythos* (1913), Rudolf Pannwitz's *Dionysische Tragödien* (1913), Gottfried Benn's *Ithaca* (1914), Franz Werfel's *Die Troerinnen* (1916), Oskar Kokoschka's *Orpheus und Eurydike* (1918) and Georg Kaiser's *Der Gerlettete Alkibiades* (1920), among others. In particular, Hasenclever had been an extra in Max Reinhardt's spectacular production of Sophocles' *King Oedipus* in Leipzig in 1911 (Pinthus 1963a: 14–5).¹¹

It is evident in the correspondence with his friend and fellow writer Kurt Wolff that Hasenclever was aware of the marked political and contemporary stance of his critical play, which reflects his own experience of these turbulent years.¹² In a letter of May 1917, he spoke of his *Antigone* as "an abstraction of the personal and experienced" (Zeller and Otten 1966: 255) and in another letter he claimed that his version clearly belonged to 1917 (Kasties 1994a: 286). The choice of adapting *Antigone* therefore relied both on the political relevance of the ancient play and on the opportunity to draw parallels with the contemporary reality of the time, favoured by the versatility of the original.

Hasenclever employs the same basic plot as Sophocles' *Antigone*, its classical setting and dramatic structure; yet, he introduces many changes to the original: he treats his classical source freely and shifts the focus of the play onto the horrors and misery caused by war and the need to promote love and peace against an autocratic ruler. This is evident both in the revolutionary speeches of the heroine and in the immediate identification of Creon with the Kaiser Wilhelm II. In addition, the chorus of Theban elders is replaced in Hasenclever by the crowd of people, the first of the dramatic characters to appear on the stage; through their voices, Hasenclever emphasizes the suffering of common people, as well as the violent instinct of the masses.

Hasenclever's heroine appears before the crowd as a fiery revolutionary and social agitator: her call for peace and resistance reflects the political ideals of contemporary political leaders such as Rosa Luxemburg and Constance Markievicz, to whom Hasenclever dedicated a poem.¹³ Both women were intellectuals and political activists: Countess Markievicz was born of noble stock, in comfort and luxury, but she chose to fight for the unfortunate against the privileged – like Hasenclever's Antigone; Rosa Luxemburg, together with Karl Liebknecht, was the founder of the anti-war *Spartakusbund*, a revolutionary movement radically opposed to the war that sought to promote in Germany a revolution similar to the one that occurred in Russia. Hasenclever's extant writings do not mention Rosa Luxemburg (who was to be released from prison in 1918), but he dedicates a 1917 poem, "The murderers sit in the opera" to Karl Liebknecht, later published in *Der politische Dichter* (1919).

Although Hasenclever had finished his *Antigone* before the Russian Revolution (and before the abdication of the Kaiser), his adaptation is remarkably prophetic and demonstrates that revolutionary politics were already impending in the background of 1916–17. After the end of the war, once the audience had experienced the Russian and Spartacist revolutions, Hasenclever's play achieved additional resonance and it was acclaimed as a "revolutionary manifesto" (Garten 1959: 132). Hence

the play was readapted in 1927 in the Kamerny Theatre in Moscow, directed by Alexander Tairov, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Russian Revolution (1917).¹⁴

Despite the marked political significance of the play, Hasenclever's *Antigone* was able to avoid censorship: during the war it went through eight reprints as a book and received the Kleist prize for Expressionist drama in 1917, under the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II (Kasties 1994a: 166).¹⁵ Scenes from *Antigone* were first published in *Das Flugblatt Wien* in 1917; in the same year, it was printed in its entirety in *Die weissen Blätter* and published by Paul Cassirer. Hasenclever gave a public reading of his own work in Leipzig in 1917 (Pinthus 1963a: 26).¹⁶

After the end of the monarchy and the lifting of censorship laws, *Antigone* was performed at the Frankfurter Schauspielhaus under Richard Weichert's direction with Gerda Müller in the title role on 20 February 1919 (Kasties 1994a: 166). It was a particularly crucial historical moment since only a few days before (6 February 1919), a parliamentary democracy had been established and Friedrich Ebert was elected first *Reichspräsident* (Rühle 1967: 146). The play was then restaged in Berlin with Karlheinz Martin as director at Max Reinhardt's Großes Schauspielhaus on 18 April 1920.

When Hasenclever's adaptation was first published, the critics' opinion of the play was divided, depending on their political affiliations (Flashar 2009: 129). The director Richard Weichert wrote enthusiastically of the play as a "document humain" (Weichert 1919: 118-19). Most critics felt "Hasenclever's changes to Sophocles' *Antigone* captured the essential spirit of Germany's wartime trauma" (Henderson 2001: 49). Yet the play was criticized by Bernard Diebold, who condemned the "intrusion" into the legend of the World War and the caricatures of such leaders as the Field Marshall, perhaps intended to depict Ludendorff (Rühle 1967: 148).

Written at a time when the censorship of the arts was widespread, it is indeed quite surprising that Hasenclever's politically oriented play was able to elude it.¹⁷ Hasenclever's other tragedy *Der Retter* encountered numerous obstacles with publishers and censorship.¹⁸ By contrast, in *Antigone*, the classical facade allowed the author to address sensitive political issues openly if indirectly, by means of mythical subject matter. Hasenclever himself argued that his *Antigone* was a "political manifestation" and that he gave the ancient classical play a contemporary interpretation in order to confuse the censors (Pinthus 1963b: 507). Therefore, his polemic against an authoritarian Germany was camouflaged under the mask of classical tragedy (Spreizer 1999: 76): the topical allusions to contemporary government and the critique of Prussian tyranny did slip past the censors, who believed it to be an innocent classical play.

The inter-war period is therefore a crucial moment for the canonization of the *Antigone* of Sophocles as a political work: the character of Antigone was particularly attractive because she allowed playwrights to present their political ideals within the classical tradition. The ancient story is politically reinterpreted by Hasenclever and transformed into a completely new and independent work of art, which reveals the significance of classics in addressing the urgent questions of twentieth-century life.

THE LAW OF "LOVE" AND THE "SECULAR RELIGION" OF HASENCLEVER'S ANTIGONE

Stand up! I am just like you.
I am Antigone –
A small being who, in the face of the great shadow
Of death, sinks impotent in the path she has traced.

(Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 54)¹⁹

Hasenclever's drama consists of five acts, marking a rhythmic progression: from an apparently re-established order to a crucial confrontation, disorder and final destruction. It opens with the herald's proclamation that "the war is over" and "the City is free", and culminates with the final disintegration of Thebes. The climax of the play is reached in the third act, which sees the confrontation of the main characters.

In Hasenclever's play, Creon is a tyrannical ruler, who disregards the sufferings of the common people and encourages them to "arm for new deeds" (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 27). The people of Thebes are mostly opposed to the war, and they are quickly converted to Antigone's "revolutionary pacifism". However only Antigone's death and a vision of war victims called by Tiresias cause Creon to learn his mistake. After giving the order to set the city on fire, Creon renounces his rule. The mob rushes triumphant to the palace and it is stopped by Antigone's voice coming from the grave, calling for peace, reconciliation and moral responsibility.²⁰

The play's first scene is drastically changed: while Sophocles' *Antigone* begins as Antigone and her sister Ismene exit the palace, Hasenclever's adaptation sees the entrance of the herald, followed by the cacophony of voices from the downtrodden masses. The herald announces the end of the war; yet, despite this proclamation, the establishment of peace is undermined from the start. The crowd, appearing in its many components, identified simply as Citizen, Warrior, Woman, or Voices, laments the worsened living conditions, as well as the loss of their kinsmen and the scarcity of food provisions: "Our men are dead. We are hungry. Give us food"; "We must work. Work for the rich. They give us nothing" (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 16; 29). This opening scene exemplifies the contemporary and political stance of Hasenclever's play. Hasenclever represents the struggle of the people of Thebes who, exactly as the German people, have experienced a dramatic, lengthy conflict and a traumatic moment of massive human loss.

Hasenclever's decision to omit the Sophoclean chorus and let the people speak first is a rather innovative and striking departure from the original. In his adaptation, Sophocles' great ode to man is omitted, as are the other choral odes, but their substance is partially absorbed into these mob scenes. The function of Hasenclever's mob is indeed different from that of the Greek Chorus which repeatedly intervenes in the action and serves to comment on and explain the story and its moral content. In Hasenclever, the voices of the masses are never extended to the lyricism of the choral interludes of ancient Greek tragedy; yet Hasenclever gives the mob a greater and more active role: people effectively rebel against Creon and his unjust government, which forces them to pay taxes, suffer privation and the loss of their kinsmen. Their discontent leads to actual disobedience and rebellion, enhanced by Antigone's compelling call to peace and justice.²¹

By contrast, in the Sophoclean original, the chorus, because it is more inclined to support Creon, disapproves of the heroine's boldness. In their eyes, the transgression of her act moved by her "self-willed temper" is the ultimate cause of her own death (Sophocles, *Antigone* 862–65). As Creon remarks, Antigone is alone in all Thebes (Sophocles, *Antigone* 508) and she is extremely isolated throughout the play. At line 505, Antigone provokes Creon by arguing that the people are on her side, but "fear grips their tongues" and Creon immediately suspects a political revolt (Sophocles, *Antigone* 289–94). Haemon also claims that "the whole populace of Thebes" approves of her action (Sophocles, *Antigone* 733). However, such a claim is not substantiated: no popular revolt is enacted or even attempted in the ancient original, as people respect the rule of the state.

In Hasenclever's play, the crowd does not succeed in overthrowing the state. It is characterized by contrasting voices: a citizen says, "War is beautiful", while other people claim "We want peace!" (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 16); the youths want military glory whereas the elders and women desire peace. The crowd is also divided in its opinion about the legitimacy of the King and his law. This is because the mob is a mutable and eclectic corpus, made of people of different gender and of different social and age classes; what they all share is a sense of frustration and grief. They have experienced the same horrors and loss during the war. In Antigone's own words, they are "brothers in suffering!" (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 56). Nonetheless, Antigone's "brothers in pain" do not show a collective conscience nor any ability to organize a political action. Rather they follow their instincts. At the beginning, Hasenclever's crowd is hostile towards Antigone and wants to kill her; only after her speeches is it converted to peace. However, the violence is turned against Creon at the end of the play, and only Antigone's voice from the grave holds back the masses from destroying themselves.

Therefore, the masses are represented in a negative light in Hasenclever, who expresses his pessimism and disillusionment towards the effectiveness of popular rule (Kasties 1997: 7). It is through their

actions, rather than through the lyrical Sophoclean odes, that Hasenclever teaches a similar lesson: human skills, though great, are limited, and can easily relapse into confusion and ruin. Such pessimism towards the progression of humanity reflects the famous second *stasimon* of Sophocles' *Antigone* (Sophocles, *Antigone* 583–625) in which the chorus speaks of man's capacities together with his limits: although the source of incredible progress, man is also the cause of much catastrophe and destruction.

The confused and malleable crowd, changing sides from the beginning to the end of the tragedy, stands in opposition to the potency of great individuals, namely Creon and Antigone. Hasenclever's Antigone entertains the highest ideals for the masses but she soon realizes their crude and materialistic instincts. Initially, the heroine is able to convince the people to act and rebel through her speeches, delivered in a crucial moment of the tragedy. After her encounter with Creon, Antigone appears before the audience as a "popular leader" who calls for revolution and freedom against the principle of power, manifested in the authoritarian dictatorship of Creon (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 55–7). Antigone exhorts the people to rise, unite against oppression and to become brothers. Such a public call to revolution and humanity, directly addressed to the people, comprises a large part of the action, whereas it is absent in the ancient original.

In her speeches and throughout the tragedy, Hasenclever's Antigone constantly invokes brotherhood and humanity and speaks of the necessity for men to love each other in order to prevent war. Hasenclever's Antigone, like her Greek predecessor (Sophocles, *Antigone* 523), is born to join in love and not in hatred. In the original version, love appears in the form of *erôs* and *philia*, and both are closely related to the institution of the *polis*. The deceiving and powerful force of *erôs* emerges in the Sophoclean third *stasimon*, which follows Creon's dialogue with Haemon, also centred on the notion of love. For Sophocles' *Antigone*, the bond of *philia* represents a dedication to all her dead family members, by virtue of a higher unwritten law (the law of the gods), and is not extended to the enemies, *echthroi*. Sophocles stresses the *philia* between blood-relatives: Ismene and Antigone, Antigone and Polynices, in contrast to the hostility towards the enemies.²² The classical Antigone desires to "rest with Polynices, loved one with loved one", *philos* with *philos* (Sophocles, *Antigone* 72), and wishes that, if she is proved right, her *enemies* will suffer evils equal to those unjustly inflicted on her (Sophocles, *Antigone* 925). Moreover, she argues that she would not have accomplished the same sacrifice for a husband or child, but only for a brother, whose loss is irreplaceable.

Hasenclever enriches the Greek archaic notion of *philia* towards one's kinsmen and expands Antigone's love towards Polynices in a wider love that includes the whole of humanity. Unlike the classical Antigone, his Antigone is animated by an all-encompassing love that transcends any distinction between enemies and friends, family members or foreigners. Despite the changed meaning, her defiant words to Creon closely recall the original:

For it was not Zeus who made that proclamation for me
Nor did the justice that dwells with the gods below
Define such laws among mankind.

(Sophocles, *Antigone* 450–53)

I know a law, still unwritten,
Announced in the world by no herald,
As old as you and me:
It is called Love.

(Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 40)

Hasenclever's Antigone invokes a different law. From Antigone's perspective, justice is not represented by the law of the state (which has proved to be repressive and authoritarian) nor by the law of the gods (who have permitted that such sufferings could happen). She only has faith in the law of love, which Creon has transgressed. In an encounter between the two lovers, Antigone and Haemon, that is not found in the original, Antigone explains the meaning of "love". According to her, to love is to help the weak, to fight for the world, but above all, love is the ultimate expression of true humanity.

By the same token, Oedipus' crime is reinterpreted by Hasenclever as a crime against humanity rather than against God's law. In Antigone's words, he becomes a prophet of love, a man who has shown the nature of human goodness (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 41). In virtue of such values, Antigone does not condemn her enemies, she is exclusively animated by love and compassion, and strongly believes that all men are brothers and capable of mutual love. Even Creon is included in her category of *philoï* or "brothers". Thus, Antigone's specific act of love towards Polynices becomes a pretext, in Hasenclever's version, to express his call for peace and love, even towards enemies.

The universal and unconditional love that animates the heroine, her will to sacrifice and her final martyr-like death, may be associated with the Christian notion of mutual love, *agape* or charity. The term refers to the comprehensive divine-human love, as well as to the pure, ideal, "brotherly" love for one's fellow man.²³ Hasenclever was educated in a Lutheran family; only as he grew up did he begin to question the teachings of orthodox Christianity and denounce their incompatibility with the waging of war, with its slaughter of countless people.²⁴ Overall, Expressionist writers expressed a profound disillusionment with God's role; yet, despite their critique of institutionalized and dogmatic religion, they still believed in the existence of a transcendental force and occasionally used Christian symbols in their works, as Hasenclever does in his version of *Antigone*. Some of Antigone's words retain religious overtones: "I want to starve for you. I want to bleed for you." (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 60). With religious fervour she claims: "I enclose myself into God's grief. / My hair, ashes, fall on my body / By the grave of mankind." (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 52). She also exhorts Creon to "crucify her", since she shall arise again and again (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 41). Moreover, Antigone accuses herself harshly for not having done enough for humanity: "I accuse myself ... I lived and knew: we are killing each other" (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 53); she feels guilty for having lived in comfort while others suffered. Thus, she claims the necessity to sacrifice herself for humanity and accept her "punishment".

In the original, too, the Greek Antigone calls on the people of Thebes to look upon her sufferings (Sophocles, *Antigone* 942–43) and shows a constant obsession with her death and sacrifice. For example, in the encounter with Creon, she provokes the king with these words: "What do you want more than to capture and kill me?" (Sophocles, *Antigone* 497), which are echoed in Hasenclever's version: "Kill me, kill me!" (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 59). Both heroines express, throughout the play, the will to die. Sophocles' Antigone already knew her destiny of death (Sophocles, *Antigone* 559–60). Yet her sacrifice is accomplished in order to fulfil her own desire to lie beside her brother, father and mother, in virtue of a one-sided *philia* addressed simply to her family members, and in particular to her brother; she does not express any desire to sacrifice herself for the whole people of Thebes as Hasenclever's Antigone. The struggle of Hasenclever's and Sophocles' Antigone is thus different: whereas the Greek heroine fights for the assertions of familial and religious duty, Antigone in Hasenclever is moved by the desire to establish love and peace in every human being through her pious act of humanity.

By the same token, Hasenclever's Antigone also expresses disillusionment towards religious faith. For example, she refuses to invoke a god who was silent and permitted war and death to occur:

Do not speak of God!
 Did God allow men to kill each other?
 Did God, as Creon resolved
 To step on the poor body of the dead,
 Send fires and earthquakes,
 To suffocate the mouth of the mocker?
 God was silent.

(Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 20)

Christian love demands an unconditional love towards God; yet Hasenclever and his heroine repudiate a god that is silent in front of people's suffering and wonder whether such a god is worthy of love. Antigone also claims: "God did not rouse me to be a saviour" (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 53); "God is also with the enemy" (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 42). Through Antigone's speeches, Hasenclever expresses the refusal to proclaim God's love in a world stigmatized by war and destruction. In the

original text, Antigone wavers once (Sophocles, *Antigone* 922) and complains that the gods have abandoned her. Apart from such temporary doubt, Antigone regards the honour that she pays to her dead kinsmen as a service to the gods, imposed by a law of the gods which transcends any other duty.

Therefore, the law of love of Hasenclever's Antigone is ultimately distinct both from an authentic Christian *agape*, since Christian love and martyrdom without authentic faith in God would be impossible, and from Sophoclean *philia*, since the latter is only directed towards *philoï*, friends. Hasenclever expands the motif of *philia*, already present in the Sophoclean original, by adding ethical implications of brotherhood and universality; yet Hasenclever's notion of *philia* is still deprived of an authentic love for a god who kept silent in the dramatic years of the First World War. In these years, characterized by hatred amongst nations, people started to express disillusionment with the role of God and religion. In this sense, Antigone's traumatic loss and negation of burial also assume a contemporary significance. Hasenclever's audience could easily identify with the mourning heroine and with her call for love and humanity: not love dictated by a god unconcerned with humans' sufferings but rather love dictated by a universal sense of humanity and peace amongst nations, necessary to avoid wars in the future.

However, in Hasenclever's version, the people are not yet ready to be "converted" to Antigone's "secular religion" of love. In the end, the violence of the masses is turned against Creon, as the people want to kill him and consider him responsible for the tragedy. Their final regression into violence and irrationality demonstrates the fallibility and vulnerability of the human mind. The German people, too, at the end of the war, desired to punish the Kaiser for the war, on the assumption that he was partly to blame for the war, and responsible for its bloody course. Behind Hasenclever's absolutist Creon, Kaiser Wilhelm II can be easily detected. Like Hasenclever's Creon, the Kaiser eventually abdicated, following a period of popular unrest and violence.²⁵

Especially during the first months of the war, Wilhelm II frequently appealed in person to the patriotism of his people, publicly proclaimed his absolute power and threatened to "smash" all opposition to his will: "the word of a Kaiser is not to be trifled with." (Röhl 1976: 420).²⁶ In September 1900, he said of the conservative nobility: "if the dogs dare to turn against me, on whatever issue, in an open, systematic and dangerous way, then several heads will roll. For this is high treason." (Röhl 1982: 32).²⁷ He alone was the master of the Reich, he announced in a speech of May 1891 at Düsseldorf, and he would tolerate no others (Obst 2011: 42). His speeches testify to his claim to autocracy and his absolutist ambitions, as reflected in Creon's addresses to the people of Thebes. The Kaiser also appealed to God and divine help, which would allow the Germans to win the war; likewise, Hasenclever's Creon retains a political as well as a religious authority. In the original, too, Creon invokes Zeus in his opening speech (Sophocles, *Antigone* 162; 184) and claims the need for strong leadership and authoritarian rule (Sophocles, *Antigone* 173–74). Yet the tyrannical attitude and reactions of Hasenclever's Creon are more violent and dehumanized than in Sophocles' play, and preclude any possible sympathetic response. Like the Kaiser, he emphasizes that it is his right to decide the law, against anyone else (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 34).

To the people who lament their misery, Hasenclever's Creon responds: "I need your money and your sons. Thebes will be strong!" (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 28). As the crowd protests against cold and starvation, Creon orders the soldiers to charge the mob and to double the taxes (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 110–11); he even threatens to let them starve to death (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 59) and claims: "whoever opposes my law / I will crush" (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 30). Creon calls upon the heroism of his citizens: everyone is required to sacrifice for the maintenance of the State. Yet he does not understand that their patriotism – as it happened for the German people – is long since dead, suffocated by the suffering and privations of war. The final expression of Creon's absolute power occurs at the end of the play: he instructs the Captain to set fire to the city when he gives the signal, thus becoming responsible for the final tragedy.

Hasenclever therefore expands the already negative depiction of the authoritarian ruler of Sophocles' play to an extreme degree. Sophocles' Creon seeks, after all, to be a good ruler for his city, whereas Hasenclever's Creon arrogates to himself the arbitrary right to rule and vindicates his individual interests. His Creon, behind whom stands the German Kaiser, is significantly addressed by his own

people as “murderer” and “King of corpses” (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 93). Through such a completely negative representation of the “Imperial monarch”, Hasenclever expresses his critique of an Imperial dictatorship in the age of Wilhelm II in Germany and Tsar Nicholas II in Russia. The play raises questions about the legitimacy of such autocratic and personal rule, the absurd and anachronistic pretention of divine right, and the dictators’ responsibility for the course of the “tragedy” of the Great War.

CONCLUSION

Hasenclever’s tragedy ends as Creon abdicates. He is converted by Tiresias’ prophetic speech, but also by an apocalyptic and supernatural vision of the masses, a recurrent feature of Expressionism. The mob appears on the stage in a climax of grief and agony: a girl, an old man, a half-clothed man, a burnt man, an old woman, a mother, a blind man, all of them confused in a collective voice of misery and protest:

A GIRL:

Where is my father?

AN OLD MAN:

My house in ashes. My bread burnt. Where am I to live! What am I to eat! I am seventy years old.

A HALF-NAKED MAN:

Give me a shirt! I am naked. My nakedness! I freeze.

(Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 103–4)

In this terrifying scene, which increases the mournful and dark atmosphere of the play, the suffering of common people is shockingly emphasized. A mummy appears, the product of the fire which has burnt down the city. Particularly striking is the confrontation between the poor and the Queen. Eurydice has lost her beloved son Haemon. But her pain is no greater than the pain of the crowd crying out: “He who owned everything, has lost everything.” (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 108).

The people’s grief quickly turns into violence as soon as the people identify the one responsible for all this suffering: the King. In the end, the violence that Creon himself has exercised throughout his rule backfires. People want to kill him. Hatred and exaltation take hold of the crowd as everyone claims:

VOICE:

The king is gone!

SECOND VOICE:

We have no king anymore!

THIRD VOICE:

We are free!!

(Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 114)

Hasenclever represents the effects of an authoritative government and the consequent social disintegration: once again, the violent outbreak and sudden reaction of the masses testify to the aggressive impulses and frenetic energy typical of the mob. The German people, too, at the end of the war, desired to punish the Kaiser for the war, “on the assumption that, as the highest-ranking person in charge of German policy, he was partly to blame for the war, and responsible for its bloody course” (Afflerbach 2003: 195). Total anarchy is only avoided thanks to Antigone’s voice coming from the grave.

Hasenclever is thus exemplary of the ambiguous feeling which took hold of his generation, expressed by Expressionist writers and artists in their works: utopian faith in human rationality on the one hand, and bitter disillusionment regarding its successful application on the other. Like Sophocles’ original, Hasenclever’s adaptation is a philosophical reflection on the contradictions of humanity, on its weakness and greatness. In the former, the gods legitimize Antigone’s act and the chorus teaches that man can still learn something in old age; in the latter, gods are absent and the masses relapse into the same mistakes, without learning anything from Antigone’s example. Through their voices, Hasenclever is able to represent powerfully the horrors of the War and to express his pessimism about popular rule

and the maintenance of peace. As Antigone wonders “what sacrifice is great enough” (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 87), so the Sophoclean Chorus-leader wonders who would be so foolish as to crave death (Sophocles, *Antigone* 220). Is Antigone's heroic determination to sacrifice herself for the right thing just a folly? It can be questioned whether her sacrifice is ultimately sufficient to change the world. In Hasenclever's play, Antigone proclaims that “Love has conquered” and that her “work is fulfilled” (Hasenclever, *Antigone* 1917a: 87). The great love that Antigone embodies echoes the contemporary Expressionist desire to build a new society based on love for other human beings. However, events spin out of control at the end of the play and, once again, violence triumphs. In Hasenclever's pessimistic view, man is responsible for his own fate, simply determined by his actions and their dreadful consequences. His destruction is not caused by the gods, by hereditary guilt or by an external fate. God does not desire violence or war. Man alone is responsible for the bloody course of events. This teaching is directly addressed to Hasenclever's contemporary audience, fully aware of the disastrous consequences of human action and hatred which led to the First World War.

Hasenclever's choice of adapting *Antigone* in these crucial years is thus determined by the hope of speaking to his audience through the ancient play. The divergences from the original represent a displacement which inevitably occurs when an author employs a classical work, as compelling as *Antigone*, for the modern stage. But they also reinforce the continuing power of the original, and its ability to speak forcefully to modern as well as ancient audiences.

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¹ While Hasenclever scholarship has generated relatively few studies from the early 1960s, work on Expressionism has been extremely productive. The most recent contribution to Hasenclever's life and works is Kasties (1994); Kasties, co-editor of Hasenclever's letters, makes extensive use of Hasenclever's *Nachlass*, housed at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach am Neckar. Spreizer (1999) is the first general study in English on Hasenclever, contextualized within the Expressionist literary movement. Hoelzel (1983) presents an overview of the major themes of his works. Henderson (2001) is the most recent article on Hasenclever's *Antigone*.

² These recent contributions focus mainly on the reception of *Antigone* in the twenty first century: Wilmer's and Žukauskaitė's *Interrogating Antigone in Post-Modern Philosophy and Criticism* (2010)

deal with feminist, philosophical and psychoanalytical readings of the play and Mee's and Foley's *Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage* (2011) traces the performance history of a number of versions/productions of *Antigone* ranging from the US to Africa, Indonesia and Japan. Morais, Hardwick and Silva (2017), *Portrayals of Antigone in Portugal: 20th and 21st Century Rewritings of the Antigone Myth* focuses on Portuguese rewritings of the ancient drama, but also considers important French models such as Cocteau's and Anouilh's *Antigones*. Other important contributions include Belardinelli's and Greco's *Antigone e le Antigoni: Storia, Forme, Fortuna di un Mito* (2009), Duroux's and Urdician's 2010 *Les Antigones Contemporaines (de 1945 à nos jours)* and Chanter's and Kirkland's *The Returns of Antigone* (2014).

³ Biblical and classical features characterize Hasenclever's Expressionist works written during the war, including *Antigone*. In Hasenclever's *Antigone* the language is reduced to its bare essentials: the use of short sentences and simple co-ordinate constructions, and the abrupt and emotional style, are all stylistic features characteristic of Expressionist works. On Expressionist style and language, see Samuel and Thomas (1939: 146–70).

⁴ For an overview of the "philosophical" readings of the play, not only by Hölderlin and Hegel but also by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Lacan, Irigaray and Butler, see Cairns (2016: 122–32). In her monograph *Antigone's Claim* (2000), Butler argues against Hegel and claims that Antigone cannot represent the "family" opposed to the "state" because of her incestuous origins and the pure relationship with her brother; see discussion in Žukauskaitė (2010).

⁵ Honegger had collaborated with Cocteau for the music of his *Antigone*. The opera was performed in Essen in 1928 (in German translation) and in New York in 1930, before the production in Paris in 1943. Despite the ideological control over the art and culture enforced by both Vichy and German authorities in this period, Honegger's opera, playing on the contradictions and compromises of Vichy France's policies, was able to avoid censorship and was a success in 1943. See Fulcher (2006). Almost contemporary with Honegger is the Portuguese adaptation by António Sérgio de Sousa (1930), which continues this trend of politicization of the Greek tragedy; see Morais (2017: 113–59).

⁶ Both Anouilh and Brecht adapted Sophocles' play for occupied France and post-war Germany/Europe and redefined the central opposition between Antigone and Creon. In the prologue of Anouilh's adaptation, a single actor who replaces the chorus explains that the characters on the stage are about to play the story of *Antigone* and anticipates their doom, pointing to the arbitrariness and inevitability of the tragedy. The play was performed during the German occupation of France and then in a radically changed climate after the liberation in September 1944, and it was restaged 645 times until 1945, Flashar (2009: 173). Brecht's *Antigone* opens with a contemporary Prologue set in Berlin in the closing hours of the war, in April 1945, as two nameless sisters find out that their deserter brother has been hanged. The *Antigone* of Sophocles is transformed by Brecht in an allegory of the decline of the Third Reich and National Socialism.

⁷ Rolf Hochhuth's *Die Berliner Antigone* was written and published in 1963; Athol Fugard's *The Island*, written during the apartheid in South Africa, was first performed in Cape Town in 1973; Seamus Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes* was commissioned to mark the centenary of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in 2004; see Wilmer (2010).

⁸ In particular, *Der Retter* ("The Saviour") bears resemblances with *Antigone*: both plays see the contraposition of opposed points of view – the Poet and the State minister, Creon and Antigone. Both the Poet and Antigone oppose the established rule of the king and sacrifice their life to help humanity. Like Antigone, the Poet of *Der Retter* encourages the rulers to "love" (a pregnant word in Hasenclever's *Antigone*) the enemies: Hasenclever (1919a: 40). For a comparative analysis of the two dramas see Hoelzel (1983: 59–76).

⁹ According to Henderson (2001: 64), the unfinished burial "invests the drama with a common frustration felt by mourning groups in Germany throughout the war".

¹⁰ Ludwig Tieck staged the translation of the play by Johann Jakob Donner; Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy wrote incidental music. This performance followed soon after the ascent to the Prussian throne of Friedrich Wilhelm IV, celebrated in the play: he could be associated either with Creon, presented as a noble ruler and "saviour king", or with Dionysus. On the political implication of this

production, see Flashar (2009: 63–74) and Fischer-Lichte (2017: 45–62). The production was a success also in the second half of the century: it moved to the Royal Theatre in Berlin, to the Odéon in Paris (1844), to London (1845), Dublin (1845), Edinburgh (1845), New York (1845) and Athens (1867). However, the historicizing approach of this production, evident in the staging, costumes and chorus' songs (which followed the original metre), differs from Hasenclever's adaptation, focused on the contemporary reality of his time.

¹¹ On this production, see Fischer-Lichte (2017: 108–15); Hasenclever was inspired by Reinhardt's use of the masses.

¹² This correspondence is housed at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach. In these letters, Hasenclever recognizes the danger of publishing his politicized version of *Antigone* and demands extreme prudence and discretion. For published collections, see Haak (1982); Kasties (1997).

¹³ Even if Hasenclever was unconcerned with political parties and did not associate himself with a political doctrine, he supported the political cause of any leader who championed the cause of the poor and promoted peace and freedom; he sympathized with the political left-wing and opposed the monarchists and the conservative right-wingers. Hoelzel (1983: 83).

¹⁴ In order to bring the tragedy closer to the Revolution, Tairov's performance emphasized the spontaneous uprising of the masses, Creon's dictatorial oppression and the rise of Antigone as a spokesman who inflames the crowd. See Levy (1977: 508–19).

¹⁵ An illuminating parallel can be drawn with Anouilh's *Antigone*. The play, although performed during the German occupation of France, was able to avoid censorship: it had been approved by the German censors already in 1942; however it did not premiere until February 1944, a few months before the liberation of France by the allied forces. Hasenclever's play, too, was published during the war and it was then performed in 1919. Because of the unique historical circumstances of its performance, Anouilh's play produced controversial and indeed opposite interpretations: some critics found overt political allusions in the tragedy, arguing with equal fervour that it was pro-Resistance or collaborationist, whereas the author claimed political ignorance. The play was indeed tolerated and performed both before and after the Liberation because of its classical subject matter and Anouilh's sympathetic treatment of Creon. See, further, Flügge (1982), Witt (1993), and Fleming (2006).

¹⁶ Pinthus (1963a: 26) reports that, after his release from the sanatorium, Hasenclever toured the country giving public readings of his work "as a wandering poet". This anecdote is also mentioned in a letter to his brother; see Haak (1982: 175). According to Pinthus (1963a: 26) and Elwood (1972: 50), the play premiered at the Leipziger Stadttheater on 15 December 1917. More recently, Kasties (1994a: 166) argued that the premiere took place in Frankfurt on 20 February 1919.

¹⁷ It has been argued that, although the play carries marked political connotations, "the political agenda remains vague, and universal themes of love and humanity remain on an abstract level", Elwood (1972: 76). In Hasenclever's play, Creon is never referred to as "dictator" but only as "king". More explicit is Brecht's 1948 version of *Antigone*, where Creon is referred to as "mein Führer".

¹⁸ *Der Retter* was written between 1914 and 1915, during Hasenclever's military service in Ghent and in Galicia. Hasenclever had been trying to find a publisher or theatre for *Der Retter* since 1915 and the play premiered only in 1919. Despite the pressures of censorship, Hasenclever managed, in a private printing, to send copies of the play to fifteen literary and political figures; however, in 1917 the police seized and destroyed the printing plates. See Spreizer (1999: 71–5).

¹⁹ All quotations are taken from Hasenclever (1919), *Antigone, Tragödie in fünf Akten*, 8th edition, Paul Cassirer, Berlin. Translations are mine.

²⁰ Antigone appears in every act. Her presence is perceived, if not physically, then through her voice coming from the grave in the last act.

²¹ This characterization of the masses is in stark contrast with Brecht's use of the chorus of Theban elders in his version of *Antigone*, transformed into a group of collaborators who slavishly follow Creon.

²² Even though, in the classical play, Antigone rejects Ismene's help, Antigone retains a special predilection for her brother and her *philia* is especially addressed to Polynices. By contrast, in Hasenclever, Ismene supports her sister: Hasenclever (1917a: 68–70).

²³ On Christian love and the relation between *erôs* and *agape*, see Nygren (1953). The *agape-erôs* motif also appears in Hasenclever's early works; if *erôs* appears, it is often spiritualized, for example in *Der Sohn*, where the motif of *agape* "a pure ethical love, love for one's neighbour", Hoelzel (1983: 39), prevails.

²⁴ Hasenclever's views on religion are expressed in his works, including *Nirwana* (1909), *Irrtum und Leidenschaft* (1969) and the poem *Christus*, in *Tod und Auferstehung*, Hasenclever (1916: 67). See also Hoelzel (1983: 75; 168).

²⁵ On the day of the Kaiser's abdication, Hasenclever expresses his optimism and enthusiasm in a letter written with his friend and collaborator Oskar Kokoschka and addressed to Albert Ehrenstein, asking him to come to Berlin and to bring along "his entire patriotic production"; see Kasties (1994a: 190). This letter is emblematic of Hasenclever's anti-authoritarian political position.

²⁶ Telegram of Wilhelm II to Bismarck, 17 January 1890.

²⁷ This speech, dated from 26 July 1900, is quoted and translated by Röhl (1983: 32). Röhl (2014: x) reports that Wilhelm II's rule was characterized by "an ostentatiously autocratic rule, a sabre-rattling militarism, a startling narcissism" as well as the "insistence on his divine right". Some of the Kaiser's speeches are recorded in Elkind (1904: 292–94), Penzler (1912) and Obst (2011).