

Western Sensibility

(A play starring Antigone and her brothers)

by Cristina Pérez Díaz

(Full black out. No setting. All the actors are visible but not in any particular position. Actors will be making up the setting as the scenes unfolds, at times in sync with what is being said, at times going ahead or falling behind, sometimes even completely independently. All the lighting will be internal, controlled by the actors with practical sources. Light is very important. There are no scene divisions, but all is fluid. Different spaces should be created as the text demands them. It all happens on the spot, on the stage. The stage is the world of the play.)

(Sophocles stands in a corner. As he speaks, someone turns on a lamp, someone brings him a chair, someone places a small table next to him, someone hands him a cup of coffee. He reacts naturally, becoming the character as he gets all his props.)

Sophocles

Hello to the sun, hello, to the beams of the sun. You, out there, light and sounds of birds, thanks. Thanks, small but dear beam coming through my window. You know me well, all you, absences of the city: interior companion of the light, darkness of the room; and interior companion of the sounds, noise. (long pause) Hello, phantoms of nature. (Breaking into a "Greek tragic" character) THERE IS A DOG OUTSIDE MY DOOR. (Back to

normal) Or I have that fear. My name is Sophocles. My parents,
(*pause*) well, who cares. I am a writer.

(The narrator approaches Sophocles.)

Narrator

I just dreamed there was a tree outside of a window.

(The actor who will play the Waste Management Employee walks-in in slow procession, carrying a table lamp in his hands, the lamp is on.)

Sophocles

A tree outside of the window? Last night I dreamed there was an army. I could see it from my window, it covered the tree and the natural light. But the natural light came in, somehow, in spite of the presence of the army outside of the window.

Narrator

So we will start by saying: There is a tree outside of the window, and that is pretty much all I can see.

Sophocles

You will start by saying 'There is an army outside of the window, and that is all I can see.'

Narrator

There is a small room, with two men. A window, allowing for day and night-light to come in. A cat sitting on the window,

allowing the tree to be outside, while they both grow under the circumstances of the light.

Sophocles

That is not what you are saying.

Narrator

I dreamed there was a tree and three siblings.

Sophocles

No, four.

Narrator

Three, the fourth will be missing.

Sophocles

Ok, let's start with three siblings. There are three siblings, and it all happens in one day, outside of the window. The middle of the story is now. It is noon.

Narrator

There are three siblings and a tree. One of them is looking out of the window, in the middle of the story.

Sophocles

Someone is going to die.

Narrator

No. No one is going to die.

Sophocles

But it is necessary that someone dies.

Narrator

I don't want any violence.

Sophocles

But it won't be aesthetic violence.

Narrator

Ok. Just enough violence for someone to die. No army.

Sophocles

Ok. Just enough for someone to die. No army, only three siblings. In the middle of the story. Two of the siblings are dead under the tree. A fir tree. Or an oak. The third one stands next to them, looks at the corpses. They just killed one another while she was looking from the window.

Narrator

She is looking through the window and talks to someone, one of the two men inside of the room.

(Antigone walks to a mirror, the narrator and her stand next to each other looking through "the window." The Narrator holds a flashlight and points it to the mirror, as if helping her to see.)

Antigone

There. What is the name of that young lady?

Narrator

I don't know. She is not part of our story.

Antigone

But she is there.

Narrator

Indeed. But keep going.

Antigone

Over there, who's that boy with the funny hat?

Narrator

Ha ha. He looks funny with his funny hat.

Antigone

And just down here, who are those two guys? They seem to be fighting. Do you see?

Narrator

Those are your brothers.

Antigone

My brothers. They seem to be fighting. I can't see, only the outlines. Something SHINES near their CHESTS. As if they had A BIG HOLE, black. Two beams of light come out of the two hearts.

Are they covered in bronze? *(Pause)* I BELONG down there. I'm going down, right now. *(Pause)* Where are my glasses?

(Another source of light is turned on, practical.)

Narrator

(Overlapping with Antigone's last line.) The tree shakes, she looks for the birds causing the movement of the branches, sees them flying away. The field of vision is cleared now. She puts on her glasses, looks down, there are her two brothers under the tree, killing one another. She screams:

Antigone

Don't kill...!

Sophocles

She beats her breast. Tum. Tum. The two brothers kill each other with guns. Pang. Pang. No, silenced. P' p'. They don't want to wake up the neighborhood, nor their sister, whom they believe to be sleeping upstairs. But she is watching them, since she can't sleep with daylight.

Narrator

She puts on her glasses, screams 'Nooooo!,' exits by the window, steps down the emergency stairs, jumps into the ground and her two brothers are already dead. A waste management employee passes by, picks up the guns, throws them into the trash can, keeps going. *(As the narrator delivers the following part of his monologue, the Waste Management Employee brings in Polyneices'*

corpse--a doll. The actor performing Eteocles lies down next to the doll carrying Aeschylus' Seven Against Thebes in his hands. Antigone approaches them, looks at her two dead brothers) (To Antigone) Was the cleaning person a woman or a man? How old? What race? What was she wearing? She didn't notice. She meant to ask for help, but could only say "Sorry for the mess, I'll pick up the bodies." But the birds come back to the tree, and it shakes because of their landing on the branches. There are dogs around the seven gates.

Sophocles

The sister struggles trying to figure out how to pick up the bodies. She can't carry them both. Maybe one. Not sure. She is rather small, but strength will come to her. The pain she is feeling right now, the moral commitment to give burial to her brothers, such things are biting her. She stands there, looking at the two bodies. In the end, soon, she will have to decide: take one of the corpses, leave the other one there, in the hope that waste management will deal with it.

Narrator

The sister struggles. She wishes she were stronger. But now, forced to choose, she doesn't love them both the same. There is one she will pick up for burial. She chooses Polyneices, carries him in her arms with difficulty. How he looks smaller now that he is dead. Eteocles' body lies on the sidewalk, under the tree and the light gently coming through the branches.

(The Waste Management Employee and the Narrator read the last choral song from Aeschylus' Seven Against Thebes, playing as first semi-chorus and second semi-chorus respectively. Antigone carries Polyneices around the stage. Sophocles approaches the Waste Management Employee and the Narrator, takes a look at the book, goes away and handles a trash cart to Antigone, in which she will carry the corpse of her brother from now on.)

[...]

(Antigone pushes her cart into the strip of land that the Narrator and Sophocles have marked for her on the floor of the stage. Sophocles helps her get inside of the cart.)

Narrator

She travels back with the empty cart. It is so much lighter without the corpse. Where should she park? No lot. There is a fine strip of land the Narrator and the author have traced for her. Somewhere she is gotta be. Where? This is only a thin strip traced on the stage. It won't last for long: the beams of the sun will soon erase the chalk lines, or the tape lines, her steps and the wheels of the cart will weary the lines even sooner. Where would she be? There were buildings all over the place, before the war. She would look through the window, see the people on the streets on the busy Sundays. *(Pause)* Who is it that divides the lots so arbitrarily? Who is the damned god of the cemeteries? *(Pause)* She is tired of going nowhere on this stage. And so, finally, she gets into the cart. *(Pause)* Anywhere

one finds a home, that's true. She looks at the other side of the border line: there is her brother lying on the ground. There is still something left of him. One could say that he is still her brother. *(Pause)* She will go back tomorrow. She will have the pieces back.

Sophocles

You there, wearing the crown. Why don't you come here?

(The Waste Management Employee pushes Eteocles' trash cart towards Sophocles)

Have a seat. I have some questions for you.

Eteocles

How can I help you?

Sophocles

I've been meditating.

Eteocles

Have you?

Sophocles

I don't understand.

Eteocles

I don't understand you, Sir.

Sophocles

Why did you kill him?

Eteocles

It was an order.

Sophocles

From whom?

Eteocles

Funny that you ask me that. (*Pause*) Well. You know. The circumstances.

Sophocles

I am asking you a question.

Eteocles

Why? Self-defense, Sir.

He was attacking.

Sophocles

Was he attacking you?

Eteocles

He was rioting.

Sophocles

Alone?

Eteocles

He was the leader.

Sophocles

Where are the others?

Eteocles

Could only take care of him.

Sophocles

Was he armed?

Eteocles

Very much, Sir.

Sophocles

Did you see the weapon?

Eteocles

He had a gun hidden underneath his clothes. Typical posture of the criminal, Sir. He had his hands inside his pockets, he was running away.

Sophocles

After attacking you?

Eteocles

He would have hurt me if I didn't shoot.

Sophocles

So you shot first. But you weren't sure.

Eteocles

Sure? Sir, an idiot would wait to get the first shot.

Sophocles

Why were you carrying a gun?

Eteocles

Why? It's my job.

Sophocles

Where is the body now?

Eteocles

Funny question. I don't know.

Sophocles

You don't know.

Eteocles

That is not my division, Sir. We take care of them while they are alive, once they are dead, there are other people to take care of that.

Sophocles

The family?

Eteocles

Also.

Sophocles

But you were his family.

Eteocles

I am a soldier first.

Sophocles

So you didn't look after the burial of your brother.

Eteocles

I am first a kin to all the men who died for our country. I would have betrayed them if I honored a traitor.

(Silence)

Sophocles

What about his body?

(The Narrator gently fixes Eteocles' hair)

Eteocles

I'm sure that someone else buried it.

Sophocles

Who?

Eteocles

My sister,
as it's likely.

Sophocles

What about your parents?

Eteocles

That is none of your business, Sir.

(Silence)

They died in the previous war.

Sophocles

Where is your sister now?

Eteocles

I don't know. We fell apart.

Sophocles

Why?

Eteocles

She loved him better.

Sophocles

So you killed him.

Eteocles

You are supposed to praise me!

Sophocles

Well, I don't ... I'm confused.

Eteocles

(Agitated) You are getting things wrong. Don't mix things up.

(Pause)

Listen,
I killed a criminal.
When I killed him,
he was not my brother.

Narrator

Is it? I would like to have that proven. Are there any witnesses? Where is the waste management employee?

(To the employee) Come. You will now testify to what you saw. Start by saying 'A people that has escaped danger can be brutal.'

Waste management employee

I saw it all.

But I won't speak if you don't promise that I won't be punished for speaking.

(No one responds to his request. He eventually decides to speak, nervously, tries to make an impression with poetic language.)

(*From Euripides' Phoenician Women*)

Like wild boars that sharpen their savage tusks, they clashed,
Dripping with all kinds of sweat from their beards,
And they lunged with their spears, but they were hiding behind
their shields
So the spear points were just bouncing off the shield-metal
uselessly
If one of them saw the other's eyes peeking over the rim,
He stabbed at him, trying to snag him in the face.
But they were both really good at staying ducked behind their
shields,
So neither of them managed to get a hit on the other.
Everyone watching was sweating harder than they were,
Watching in terror, these people they loved.
But when Eteocles stuck his leg out from the side of his shield,
While he was trying to kick a stone out from under his feet,
Polyneices noticed, and seized the opportunity,
And stabbed him in the leg; it went right through the shin
guard.
The invading army cheered ! And in the confusion
Eteocles, though wounded, saw that Polyneices shoulder
Was exposed, and stabbed him, but the spear point broke off.
The citizens cheered! But now Eteocles was spearless
So he started backing off, but then he picked up a rock
And smashed Polyneices' spear right out of his hands!

So now it was equal: no one had spears.

Eteocles

(Interrupting the Waste Management Employee abruptly. To Sophocles) Tell me something. But tell me the truth. Do you really think that we all share the same mother?

(Pause)

Do you think we all share the same blood?!

Sophocles

I am not sure.

(Antigone comes back to Eteocles pushing her empty cart)

Antigone

Good morning, Sir.

Eteocles

Good... God, Jesus, how can I help you?

Antigone

Can you give me my corpse back?

Eteocles

(Exasperated) I'm afraid I can't, Miss. As of today, the law still prohibits it.

Antigone

How long?

Eteocles

How long what?

Antigone

How long will the law prohibit it?

Eteocles

Well, that's a funny question. You know, the laws don't just change like that. You can't really ask that question. It is not me and it is not you who make the laws.

(Sad) If it were that easy.

(Pause)

(Even sadder) You don't know how hard...

(Long silence)

Antigone

What happened to your brother?

Eteocles

I told you, he attacked. Why do you keep coming?

Antigone

And after he attacked, what happened?

Eteocles

(Cold again) That's confidential information, Miss. I'm afraid I can't give you an answer.

Antigone

But I would like to know.

Eteocles

Well, you can't.

Anything else I can do for you today?

Antigone

Would you marry me?

(Long silence)

Eteocles

(Unexpectedly nice) Ha. You are funny. You've amused me quite a bit. Ha ha.

(Changing abruptly) It stinks in here like a thousand corpses.

Now get the fuck out of here. Why do you keep coming?!

Antigone

To see if anything has changed.

Eteocles

So fast?

Antigone

Not fast enough. Oh, God, wish I could speed it all. The laws are so slow. So slow. Have you noticed how slow they are? Turtle laws. Wish I could speed them. Or slow the rotting of my brother's corpse. It establishes the pace, and is fast, is too fast. Wish I could slow it down. Brother, stop. Let's keep it all together until...

(Silence)

Did you leave your brother out there too?

Eteocles

Miss, you need to calm down. Calm down or I'll have to call the police.

Miss.

Go back to your cart,

go back to your strip of land.

Why don't you forget about all this,

and go back.

Take a rest.

Don't you need to eat something?

Take a nap?

You need to eat

you need to sleep

have a drink.

It's been a hard time for all of us. But, you see,

they have made you a spot...

Things are not altogether bad! God presses the rope only so much.

And true,

anywhere one finds a home.

Isn't it?

Go back. Forget about the war, forget about your brother. He doesn't exist anymore. Aren't we a nice piece of unsubstantial matter? One day here, the next one ... gone.

You know I could have been the good one, but this was my lot.

You know your brother was a soldier as well, he killed and got his share of death. Now he shares the same cemetery with the ones like him.

Just more dust on the streets.

We take care of them. We clean the streets. We all breath the dust.

We all live with our phantoms, isn't it?

Now, I live here, you go and live there.

(Sophocles pushes Antigone back into the strip)

Antigone

Look at me, citizens of this land, as I make my -last?- journey. I am seeing the -last?- light of the sun. I will go to sleep. Anywhere one finds a home, they say. *(Long pause)* You know, I really didn't get married. Why would I marry my brother? Although, that could have been a nice substitute for his tomb. But well, it was all too late. Look at me, now, citizens of this land, how I find a home on this strip of the stage.

Sophocles

(While he pulls out a long piece of tape off the floor and hands it to Antigone) A barren stage from where you will be able to look at your brother, as his limbs fade away from the landscape with the passing days. You gave your fight, you did your best, you should feel proud. It is hard to go against power, especially after a war.

(Silence)

Don't you feel that you depart with glory and with praise?

You go of your own will.

(Pause)

Now I have to leave you here. It's time for me to go.

Antigone

(Surrounding her neck with the tape) Of my own will? If you call this 'will.' I heard that a foreigner once died so sadly. She was sent to the top of a mountain, Sipylus. A rock pressed upon her without interruption, but she doesn't drown completely. Instead, she melts away indefinitely, as rain and snow never leave her. Her eyes soak the ridges of the mountain. *(Pause)* I feel like her now.

Sophocles

It is good, that you identify with a character like that.

Antigone

You make fun of me.

Why?

(Long pause)

Beam of light,
you alone I can call to witness under what
laws
I've come to my strange
tomb.

Sophocles

You were well intentioned, but power belongs
to whom it belongs.

Antigone

I don't care about power
I just really love my brother.

Sophocles

Your husband, you mean.

Antigone

You keep playing games with me.

My brother, my only brother!

Sophocles

What about Eteocles, don't you love him too? He seems lonely.

Eteocles

(to Sophocles) Where are you going?

Sophocles

I need time.

Antigone

I don't want to die.

Sophocles

And here you are. He didn't kill you.

Antigone

I am dead.

Sophocles

Displaced.

Antigone

Why would you allow that?