

long time, smiling as one.  
**Dom Phillips**

**Theatre**

## Shaken and stirred

**Antigone**

Old Vic, London

★★★★★

I came home to hear John Major on television comparing his rift with Margaret

Thatcher to Greek tragedy — a sublime example of political vanity after one had sat through an event of such clarity, wit and scorching emotional force as Declan Donnellan's adaptation and production of Sophocles's masterly *Antigone*.

The stock image of the play is of the heroine bravely defying the tyrannical Creon to insist on the burial of her brother, Polyneices; but resistance to state power is more

the theme of Anouilh's and Brecht's rewrites than of Sophocles's original.

The first thing that Donnellan has realised is that the play's central figure is Creon. Blinded by a rigid belief in law, Creon defies both the divine gods and earthly love. Every decision he makes recoils upon him, so that by the end he is left not only publicly discredited but bewailing the deaths of his son Haemon, who was Antigone's be-

trothed, and his own wife Eurydice.

*Antigone* is the agent of Creon's downfall but it is he who embodies the key Sophoclean theme: that life has its own unbreakable laws, which we deny at our peril. And Donnellan, staging the play on Nick Ormerod's vast open platform that occupies most of the Old Vic stalls, realises this by placing Jonathan Hyde's Creon at the centre of the action.

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