

Poker-backed and haughty-profiled, Hyde brilliantly embodies the myopia of narrow statecraft, and its repugnant chauvinism, as he says of the discarded Antigone, "My son can plough another field." But it is hard to withhold one's pity when, at the end, Hyde's body crumples and he emits staccato, stabbing cries of pain musically reinforced by the Chorus. Acquiring understanding at a terrible price, Creon achieves tragic status.

But this in no way diminishes the other lead actors, who all play multiple roles. Tara Fitzgerald first appears as a bespectacled Antigone who is less political rebel than a figure possessed by death. But she also returns, to stunning effect, as the crop-haired Messenger, who announces the devastation wrought by Creon. Anna Calder-Marshall plays the triple roles of the sisterly Ismene, the urgently prophetic Teiresias and the stately Eurydice who, in a brilliant touch, quits the stage even before she has heard the full details of her son's death. And, for those who think Greek tragedy is all entombed reverence, Zubin Varla gets a lot of laughs as a quaking guard fearful of a "cockup" before reappearing as the defiant Haemon.

Above all, it is the clarity of this production that astonishes. Every line of Donnellan's version rings out loud and clear. Greek drama is all too often swathed in piety; here it comes across both as stinging dialectic and as a tragic study in the denial of nature. I emerged both shaken and stirred.

**Michael Billington**

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