

Classicists may be familiar with some of the numerous European adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone*, but few are aware of the African dramas that are based on Sophocles' *Antigone*: the Nigerian Femi Ọ̀sòfisan's *Tegonni: An African Antigone* (1999), the Ghanaian Kamau Braithwaite's *Odale's Choice* (1967), the Congolese Sylvan Bemba's *Black Wedding Candles for Blessed Antigone* (1990), and the South African Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona's *The Island* (1973). The *Antigone* is metamorphosed in these African adaptations through the use of metatheatricality and various cross-cultural elements so as to highlight the themes of political oppression and resistance, social and economic injustice, and the triumph of the human spirit in the face of overwhelming odds.

The African dramas based on the *Antigone* follow its basic plot structure, with the exception of *The Island*, which along with *Black Wedding Candles* features the performance of Sophocles' *Antigone* with black Africans in leading roles. In *The Island* Creon, played by Kani, embodies the oppressive power of apartheid, while Antigone, played by Ntshona, represents individual freedom and human rights. In *Black Wedding Candles* Melissa, a black student from a fictitious African country at a British university, does not merely play Antigone in a production of *Antigone* but gradually merges her identity with Antigone, which foreshadows her defiance later on back in her own country when she denounces the tyrannical regime that has replaced the government of her fiancée and declares her intention to have a public funeral for him. The cross-cultural metatheatricality of *The Island* is used to expose the tyranny of apartheid and its dehumanizing effects in South Africa, while in *Black Wedding Candles* it serves to highlight the political injustices taking place in any number of African countries. In *Tegonni: An African Antigone* this metatheatricality is apparent not from the performance of a play within a play but from its very title and the emergence of its plot.

These dramas are hybrids of African and European cultural elements that reflect the plays' postcolonial and classical origins. This cultural hybridity is most strongly evident in the dramas' African figures, whose names are usually Africanized. When names are not Africanized, it is sometimes significant, as in *Odale's Choice*, where tyranny is symbolized by the figure of Creon, whose name provocatively remains European although he is an African. This hybridity is also evident in the various cultural practices depicted in the plays, as in *Odale's Choice* when Odale (Antigone) gives her brother Tawia (Polynices) a rough burial in accordance with African and Greek customs. Such cultural hybridity needs to be viewed in the social and political context of the plays, as in the *Tegonni*, which is set in Nigeria at the end of the nineteenth century during a period of British colonialism.

All these plays meditate on the theme of tyranny in ways that have a direct application to political events in modern Africa. *The Island* is primarily a political drama that has appropriated and adapted a classical form to explore the human costs of apartheid. In *Odale's Choice* Odale chooses to die in the process of resisting tyranny rather than to submit to it by accepting Creon's pardon without the burial of her brother. Because of the drama's lack of application to a specific country or culture, its message of resistance in the face of political oppression is applicable to any number of African countries. The *Tegonni* explores issues of colonialism, imperialism, racism, slavery, and capitalism but also connects these issues to modern Africa, where military oppression and a lack of political freedom continued long after the departure of the colonial powers, as shown in *Black Wedding Candles*, which features a military coup and an oppressive regime.