

10-20-2011

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Recommended Citation

Goodman, Nick, "The Journey of the Damned (2011)" (2011). *The Valpo Core Reader*. Paper 8.
http://scholar.valpo.edu/core_reader/8

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The Journey of the Damned

By Nick Goodman

In every story there are only two things that are commonly shared. There is a beginning to every story and therefore an end. To believe otherwise is to ignore fact, but with every end there is also another beginning; every war must be followed by peace, every frown by a smile. To have one you must have the other; without the opposite there is no way of knowing that one is missing. If a country has always been at war, then no one could know that peace even exists—how could they? They have never seen it.

Our tale begins like most others, with the ending of another story. We find ourselves in the aftermath of King Kreon's short-lived reign. To say the tale of Antigone shows sorrow would be a gross understatement. With Oedipus's lineage almost extinguished, his daughter Ismene is all that remains. It seems that death travels swiftly in Thebes, like a disease on the wind. Beginning with Ismene's brothers, Polyneice and Eteokles, it quickly led to the death of Antigone, which in turn brought about the suicide of Haimon, and ended with Eurydice taking the gods' work into her own hands. With the death of his entire lineage and the failing of his kingdom, Kreon fell into a state of madness, isolating himself from his kingdom. Kreon locked himself in his chamber making his last act as king; Kreon took his own life. To follow a tale with such sorrow is no small act, but that is exactly how our adventure begins.

In the now distraught city of Thebes we find a very unsettled kingdom. With the gods enraged and no king to lead them, the people of Thebes face extinction. In hopes of righting the wrongs that have been done, Thebes intends to seek advice from those who brought about the terror that rains upon them now. For Thebes to start rebuilding its people must first know for sure what went wrong the first time, in hopes of preventing future holocausts. Unfortunately, all of those who held the guidance sought by the kingdom of Thebes happen to be enjoying an eternity of damnation across the River Styx. Few have crossed the river and even fewer have returned. To make this journey one must be willing to sacrifice his very life. For only those who show no fear in the face of death can hope to stand before Hades and live to tell of it. There was only one such person in all of Thebes; Ismene was the only one able to make this journey. Her life had ended long before, leaving only a shadow of her former self. Ismene is only a girl hoping to prove that she is able to stand for what she believes in, like her lineage before her. Ismene had lost everything to the world of the damned, leaving nothing worth living for. Ismene was not forced or conned into this journey; rather, she chose to be a part of it.

To begin her journey to Hades and back, Ismene was escorted to the murky banks of the River Styx. There she found a rather pleasing sight; Teiresias stood awaiting Ismene's arrival. Upon asking him why he was at the River Styx, he replied that he had foreseen that only with his guidance could Ismene hope to achieve her goal. They paid tribute to the ferryman, as is required to cross from one world to the other. The ferry ride was no luxury cruise. Surrounded by a dark abyss, Ismene rode the journey with the blind prophet and showed no emotion. After several hours of silence she could make out the towering kingdom of the underworld. Landing, Ismene showed no hesitation and headed into the bowels of the damned.

It was not long before Ismene and Teiresias happened upon the shadowy figure of what appeared to be the soul of Kreon walking aimlessly around. He seemed to be unaware of Ismene's presence. In hopes of getting his attention Ismene called out to him, with no reply, so she approached him only to discover the gruesome disfigured remains of a man who once stood so tall. Teiresias explained to Ismene that upon entering the afterlife the gods deemed it necessary to make a martyr out of Kreon to show those who deem themselves Gods the all but mortal truth. He walks in the underworld unable to see, talk, or hear another mortal being, while still being able to feel the excruciating pain that surrounds him. Filled with sorrow Ismene spoke: "His fault was only to fear, too much, the outcome of admitting the error in his ways, does he not deserve pity?" With great anger Teiresias replied "Show him no such thing, for to have error is human but to disregard the gods is to deem thyself equal to the gods; no, he had his chance for forgiveness and pity yet he chose not to listen." Kreon defiled Teiresias's name; by calling him a prophetic profiteer, he showed Teiresias disrespect when he brought guidance. So no grief should be paid to that man. Yet with great sorrow Ismene left Kreon and continued her journey with Teiresias into the smoldering bowels of hell.

Deeper into Hades Ismene went, and as she walked she noticed that her breathing was fast and her feet were heavier, as if she was being affected by the underworld. She didn't have time to think too deeply about it before the figure of a man lying on his back appeared. It was Haimon. He cried out something but Ismene was unable to understand. He tried to sit up but his body failed him, and he fell back into his lying position with a thud. He looked saddened to see her. Ismene asked, "Why do you look so upset to see me, Haimon?" He replied in a faint voice, "If you are here then Thebes must have fallen further than I had imagined; a person only visits the dead when the living have no other guidance to offer." Unable to hold back the truth, Haimon saw right through Ismene. "Does my father seek forgiveness for his ignorance? I wish my words had held more truth in his eyes." Haimon's words came with much sorrow. With no emotion Ismene divulged "Your father was blind to the truth till the end and now walks in darkness as punishment for his actions." Seeing the sorrow that filled Haimon's face, Ismene realized that Haimon was unaware of his father's death. "He doesn't know of his father's death?" Ismene asked Teiresias. Teiresias replied, "How could he, his death came before his father's, he only knows what he knew prior to his death." "How did he die?" Haimon asked. "He perished at the acknowledgement of what his leadership had brought upon his kingdom," replied Ismene in a

cold tone. Saddened Haimon said “He wasn’t always like that; he used to be a great leader. But with the war and his kingdom depending on him to lead them he cracked under the pressure.” “You would stand up for him even after he killed your future wife, my sister,” Ismene yelled, in outrage. Haimon replied, equally outraged, “He was my father, a good man. If you refuse to look past his flaws then you will never be able to learn from his mistakes.” Perplexed by these words, Ismene decides to take her leave, venturing even farther into the darkness that lay before her.

As her body seemed to be able to take no more of this place of darkness and sorrow, Ismene and Teiresias happen upon a figure that Ismene knew all too well. Seeing her sister made her feel so much joy, she quickly ran to her ready to embrace her; before she could reach her though she was stopped by Teiresias. He spoke, “It is not good to touch the dead, for it is easy to forget what it feels like to be alive.” “She is my sister,” said Ismene. “She would never wish wrong upon me.” “She would not intentionally harm you, no, but unintentionally she would make your mind forget what you have come here to do,” Teiresias spoke with affection. Fighting the urge to embrace her, Ismene called out to her sister. Antigone, recognizing the voice, turned to see that her ears weren’t playing tricks on her. Seeing her sister, she did not show the same affection, asking, “Why are you here?” “To seek guidance from those who better know how to help our kingdom,” replied Ismene, taken aback by her sister’s bluntness. “I already gave my guidance to you once and you turned it down. Why should I help you now?” Antigone replied with no affection. “That was before I saw the terror that Kreon was capable of, but now I see and know that such tyranny should never befall our nation again,” Ismene replied angrily. “Kreon was not to blame for his actions; he was not able to handle the power that he controlled and it went to his head,” said Antigone. In shock Ismene replied, “How can you say that, he murdered you; his evil is the reason you rot in this hell.” Antigone answered “Sister, if you get nothing else out of this journey hear this: those who hold power above that which they can control often lose themselves to that power. Do not blame Kreon for his error but instead make sure you know why he made that error,” Antigone stated. Confused, Ismene replied, “What do you mean?” With inflection Antigone spoke, “One man can rarely ever control as much power as Kreon held, make sure then that no other man can be allowed to control all of Thebes ever again; for it will inevitably end the same way.” “Our time is running out—we cannot linger here any longer,” Teiresias said with concern. Ismene felt that she understood what the souls of her fellow companions were trying to tell her.

Upon realizing what she had begun her journey for, Ismene along with Teiresias hastily made their trip back to Thebes. Upon arrival in Thebes, Ismene called a meeting with the nobles and explained to them what she had learned. She told of Kreon’s disfigurement and how the gods use him as an example to those who intend to follow in his footsteps. Ismene told of Haimon and how he didn’t blame his father for his actions because he knew that he was only a mortal man in a difficult situation. Finally, Ismene told of how even her own sister, the one who was persecuted at Kreon’s hand, held no anger toward him for she knew in her heart that he was simply a man put in a position that only a god could handle. The council of nobles was shocked to hear of her

tale. Taking every word to heart, they immediately began preparation for the establishment of a new government for their future protection, a government in which those who are chosen to rule obtain their divine powers from the consent of the people that leaves no peasant unheard. The council, learning of their mistakes and injustices toward their people, constructed this new form of leadership, to insure those ideas that they held to be important remain as such to secure the rights of the kingdom.