

## *Antigone c. 20th Century*

In this uniformed century, Creon,  
I find my task is subtly other.  
Today they bury every soldier  
with pomp and glory: all brothers

under the skin of war. Flags draped  
and furled. Last posts. Posthumous medals.  
Plastic flowers. Eternal flames. Only the raped  
and massacred civilians left to rot and smell

under the burning sky. Do not think  
though I am obsolete or that you were right,  
Creon. When the complicit screens go blank  
and the pundits sleep their untroubled nights

I will take my sole way back  
where brothers lie in blooded earth.  
Uproot where once I planted, unmake  
the cosmetic beds and let death

be seen for what it is. Let the stench  
choke the secret rooms where councils of war  
meet: hang, like silence, over government benches  
before votes are cast: be the sour

taste wherever writers, actors, artists  
play boys' games with death's toys.  
You, smile, Creon, but the gods of my last protest  
are dead. They gorged on death and its juices

swallowed them whole. I go with no claim  
beyond our common flesh, its mystery,  
its urge to live, its awe to name  
the earth, to make a small history

of our loves and mercies. To tell the truth  
of what we are and what we do to one another.  
So, Creon, to these alone I make my oath  
and go to uncover the body of my brother.

PATRICK O'BRIEN