ANTIGONE UNINTERRUPTED:

SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE* IN THE CONTEXT OF THE *THEBAN PLAYS* AS ANTIGONE'S BIOGRAPHICAL TALE OF LEARNING FROM TRAGIC COUNSEL

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

The plot of Sophocles' *Antigone* is that Antigone performs the burial rites for her brother, Polyneices, despite the ruling king's decree that anyone caught doing so would be sentenced to death. My project surveys the Antigone legend and demonstrates that current scholarship on Sophocles' *Antigone* would benefit from reading her story in the context of the three *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth, by which I mean a biographical reading of her legend as provided by Sophocles. Though I find nothing wrong with incorporating the characters or actions from tragic drama into current political and ethical discourse, I argue that tragic insights are overlooked when the straightforward explanations of the characters are no longer trusted. My chapters reconstruct scholarship that analyzes Antigone's statements in a manner I call indirect, meaning seeking new interpretations for the purposes of staking a claim upon a philosophical, psychological, or political argument by appealing to her timeless authority or by undermining it.

By laying claim upon what is unsaid, her interpreters are able to make Antigone a mouthpiece for whatever it is they would like to say. Each of my chapters also examine how reading the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth provides a context for responding to the most prominent questions about Antigone's motivations discussed in recent scholarship. My examination reveals that once we listen to Antigone directly throughout the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth, her tragic insights about living with the acceptance of mortality support the straightforward reasons Antigone gives for the choices she makes. Contemporary discourse on Antigone tends to consider it limiting to keep with the traditional reading of tragedy being centrally concerned with death, loss, and the way human action affects human life. I argue that it is limiting to dismiss what we can learn from the traditional tragic themes of mortality.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Antigone: Will you take up that corpse along with me?

Ismene: To bury him you mean, when it's forbidden?

Antigone: My brother, and yours, though you may wish he were not./ I never shall be found to be his traitor.

Ismene: O hard of mind! When Creon spoke against it!

Antigone: It's not for him to keep me from my own. [1]

The lines in the epigraph above are the first lines from Sophocles' *Antigone*. I think it is important to begin this project with an introduction to the play and the character the project concerns. To begin my introduction, I will first introduce the play with a summary of its most notable parts. Then, I will introduce the scholarly conversation regarding the character the play is named for, Antigone. Finally, I will discuss the objective of the project, its main thesis, and the outline of the chapters that follow.

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[1] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 43-48].

Summary and Transcription of Pertinent Parts of Sophocles' Antigone

The opening discussion of Sophocles' *Antigone* is between Oedipus' two daughters, Antigone and Ismene. The topic of discussion is the burial of their brother (one of Oedipus' two sons), Polyneices. Oedipus' two sons die fighting each other. Upon their deaths, Creon (Oedipus' brother-in-law and uncle to Oedipus' children) becomes king and decrees that no one is to bury Polyneices because he attacked the king and is therefore an enemy of the state. Under Creon's rule, the punishment for anyone who attempts to perform the burial rites for an enemy is death. The play begins in the same location as *Oedipus the King*—in front of the palace of Thebes.[2] Antigone speaks the first line and is speaking only to her sister, Ismene. Her first line expresses the deep suffering she feels Zeus has brought upon their family line. She is concerned about a new law that has been declared for the citizens of Thebes.[3] Ismene does not know about the news Antigone has come to tell her; the last news she heard was of their two brothers dying in battle with each other.[4] She can see that Antigone is really upset about whatever it is.[5] Antigone tells her that Creon has determined that one of their brothers should be honored with a

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[2] Ibid., Scene: *Thebes, before the royal palace. Antigone and Ismene emerge from its great central door.*
[3] Ibid., Antigone: My sister, my Ismene, do you know/ of any suffering from our father sprung/ that Zeus does not achieve for us survivors?/ There's nothing grievous, nothing free from doom,/ not shameful, not dishonored, I've not seen/ Your sufferings and mine./ And now, what of this edict which they say/ the commander has proclaimed to the whole people?/ Have you heard anything? Or don't you know/ that the foes' trouble comes upon our friends? [1-10]
[4] Ibid., Ismene: I've heard no word, Antigone, of our friends./ Not sweet nor bitter, since that single moment/ when we two lost two brothers/ who died on one day by a double blow./ And since the Argive army went away/ this very night, I have no further news/ of fortune or disaster for myself. [11-17] Antigone: I knew it well, and brought you from the house/ for just this reason, that you alone may hear. [18-19]
[5] Ibid., Ismene: What is it? Clearly some news has clouded you. [20]

proper burial and the other should be left above the earth to be eaten by the buzzards. Furthermore, the punishment for violating this decree is death "by public stoning in the town."[6]

Ismene asks what she could possibly do to help Antigone given the circumstances.[7] Antigone asks Ismene to decide if she will help her with something.[8] Ismene asks what exactly Antigone has in mind.[9] Antigone asks Ismene if she'll go deal with their brother's corpse with her.[10] Ismene confirms that Antigone really means to *bury* the corpse, despite the decree.[11] Antigone reminds her that he was their brother and it is their duty.[12] Ismene calls Antigone "hard of mind" since Creon has spoken against it.[13] Antigone says that Creon has no right to forbid her in the case of her own brother.[14] Ismene tells Antigone to think of all the awful things that have happened to their family and to remember their place: the misfortune, infamy, and self-mutilation of their father; their mother's suicide; their brothers killing each other; and the fact that (because of all of that) the two of them are all alone and as women must obey the men in

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[6] Ibid., Antigone: It has indeed. Creon will give the one/ of our two brothers honor in the tomb;/ the other none./ Eteocles, with just entreatment treated,/ as law provides he has hidden under earth/ to have full honor with the dead below./ But Polyneices' corpse who died in pain,// they say he has proclaimed to the whole town/ that none may bury him and none bewail,/ but leave him unwept, untombed, a rich sweet sight/ for the hungry birds' beholding./ Such orders they say the worthy Creon gives/ to you and me—yes, yes, I say to *me*—/ and that he's coming to proclaim it clear/ to those who know it not./ Further: he has the matter so at heart/ that anyone who dares attempt the act/ will die by public stoning in the town./ So there you have it and you soon will show/ if you are noble, or fallen from your descent. [21-38]
[7] Ibid., Ismene: If things have reached this stage, what can I do,/ poor sister, that will help to make or mend? [39-40]
[8] Ibid., Antigone: Think will you share my labor and my act. [41]
[9] Ibid., Ismene: What will you risk? And where is your intent? [42]
[10] Ibid., Antigone: Will you take up that corpse along with me? [43]
[11] Ibid., Ismene: To bury him you mean, when it's forbidden? [44]
[12] Ibid., Antigone: My brother, and yours, though you may wish he were not./ I never shall be found to be his traitor. [45-46]
[13] Ibid., Ismene: O hard of mind! When Creon spoke against it! [47]
[14] Ibid., Antigone: It's not for him to keep me from my own. [48]

power.[15] Antigone tells Ismene to do as she wishes; but Antigone promises that she will bury her brother and die for it unashamed of her pious act, which honors that which the gods honor.[16]

Ismene says she shall neither do dishonor to the gods nor act against the law.[17] Antigone says it is fine that Ismene has made her choice and lets Ismene know that she is going to go bury their brother.[18] Ismene expresses her fear and pity for Antigone, which Antigone abruptly deflects.[19] Ismene asks that Antigone keeps quiet about her plan and promises to do the same, which Antigone rejects even more vehemently.[20] Ismene calls Antigone morbidly angry.[21] Antigone responds by saying, "I know I please those whom I most should please," by which she means the gods and the dead.[22] Ismene points out that she is trying to please them in an impossible way.[23] Antigone says she'll do what she can until she cannot anymore.[24] Ismene says

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[15] Ibid., Ismene: Alas, Remember, sister, how our father/ perished abhorred, ill-famed./ Himself with his own hand, through his own curse/ destroyed both eyes./ Remember next his mother and his wife/ finishing life in the shame of the twisted strings./ And third two brothers on a single day,/ poor creatures, murdering, a common doom/ each with his arm accomplished on the other./ And now look at the two of us alone./ We'll perish terribly if we force law/ and try to cross the royal vote and power./ We must remember that we two are women/ so not to fight with men./ And that since we are subject to strong power/ we must hear these orders, or any that may be worse./ So I shall ask of them beneath the earth/ forgiveness, for in these things I am forced,/ and shall obey the men in power. I know/ that wild and futile action makes no sense. [49-68]

[16] Ibid., Antigone: I wouldn't urge it. And if now you wished/ to act, you wouldn't please me as a partner./ Be what you want to; but that man shall I/ bury. For me, the doer, death is best./ Friend shall I lie with him, yes friend with friend,/ When I have dared the crime of piety./ Longer the time in which to please the dead/ than that for those up here./ There shall I lie forever. You may see fit/ to keep from honor what the gods have honored. [69-77]

[17] Ibid., Ismene: I shall do no dishonor. But to act/ against the citizens. I cannot. [78-79]

[18] Ibid., Antigone: That's your protection. Now I go, to pile/ the burial-mound for him, my dearest brother. [80-81]

[19] Ibid., Ismene: Oh my poor sister. How I fear for you! [82] Antigone: For me, don't borrow trouble. Clear your fate: [83]

[20] Ibid., Ismene: At least give no one warning of this act; you keep it hidden, and I'll do the same. [84-85] Antigone: Dear God! Denounce me. I shall hate you more/ if silent, not proclaiming this to all. [86]

[21] Ibid., Ismene: You have a hot mind over chilly things. [87]

[22] Ibid., [88]

[23] Ibid., Ismene: If you can. You crave what can't be done. [89]

[24] Ibid., Antigone: And so, when strength runs out, I shall give over. [90]

it is a mistake to try at what will inevitably fail.[25] Antigone gravely reproaches her for believing such a thing and declares that she would rather suffer anything than go against the gods.[26] Ismene tells Antigone that she thinks what she is doing is really stupid, but she loves her anyway.[27] The chorus then enters to sing a hymn of triumph because Polyneices and his seven armies failed to take Thebes.[28] By the chorus' report, Zeus made sure Polyneices failed because Polyneices was boastful and Zeus hates that. The chorus says that the war should be forgotten for the time being and that the celebrations should begin. Alas, they've been assembled to hear what Creon, the new ruler of Thebes, has to say to them.

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[25] Ibid., Ismene: Wrong from the start, to chase what cannot be. [91]

[26] Ibid., Antigone: If that's your saying, I shall hate you first,/ and next the dead will hate you in all justice./ But let me and my own ill-counselling/ suffer this terror. I shall suffer nothing/ as great as dying with a lack of grace. [92-96]

[27] Ibid., Ismene: Go, since you want to. But know this: you go/ senseless indeed, but loved by those who love you. (*Ismene returns to the palace; Antigone leaves by one of the side entrances. The Chorus now enters from the other side.*) [97-98]

[28] Ibid., Chorus: Sun's own radiance, fairest light ever shone on the gates of/ Thebes,/ then did you shine, O golden day's/ eye, coming over Dirce's stream,/ on the Man who had come from Argos with all his armor/ running now in headlong fear as you shook his bridle free./ He was stirred by the dubious quarrel of Polyneices./ So, screaming shrill,/ like an eagle over the land he flew,/ covered with white-snowing,/ with many weapons,/ with horse-hair crested helms./ He who had stood above our halls, gaping about our seven gates,/ with that circle of thirsting spears./ Gone, without our blood in his jaws,/ before the torch took hold on our tower-crown,/ Rattle of war at his back; hard the fight for the dragon's foe./ The boasts of a proud tongue are for Zeus to hate./ So seeing them streaming on/ in insolent clangor of gold,/ he struck with hurling fire him who rushed/ for the high wall's top,/ to cry conquest abroad./ Swinging, striking the earth he fell/ fire in hand, who in mad attack,/ had raged against us with blasts of hate./ He failed. He failed of his aim./ For the rest great Ares dealt his blows about,/ first in the war-team./ The captains stationed at seven gates/ fought with seven and left behind/ their brazen arms as an offering/ to Zeus who is turner of battle./ All but those wretches, sons of one man,/ one mother's sons, who sent their spears/ each against each and found and share/ of a common death together./ Great-named Victory comes to us/ answering Thebe's warrior-joy./ Let us forget the wars just done/ and visit the shrines of the gods./ All, with night-long dance which Bacchus will lead,/ who shakes Thebe's acres. (*Creon enters from the palace.*)/ Now here he comes, the king of the land,/ Creon, Menoeceus' son,/ newly named by the gods' new fate./ What plan that beats about his mind/ has made him call this council-session,/ sending his summons to all? [99-160]

Creon says he has brought those who have been known to be faithful to their rulers together and asks them to support his decree that no one should bury the traitor, Polyneices.[29] He believes it is wrong to honor the unjust and thinks that as a ruler, he has a duty to speak his mind about what is right. For Creon, what is right is to honor the friends of the city he rules and dishonor its enemies. He also suggests that a man's mind and soul cannot be judged until you see him govern. He asserts that his mind is as he declares in his rules and his edict regarding Polyneices and Eteocles—that only those who serve Thebes are to be buried and honored whereas traitors of Thebes are to be understood as wicked and unworthy of burial honors. The chorus makes sure that Creon is aware that his decree is coming solely from his own mind—that it is a decree from no other source than himself, "This resolution, Creon, is your own,/ in the matter of the traitor and the true./ For you can make such rulings as you will/ about the living and

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[29] Ibid., Creon: My friends, the very gods who shook the state/ with mighty surge have set it straight again./ So now I sent for you, chosen from all,/ first that I knew you constant in respect/ to Laius' royal power; and again/ when Oedipus had set the state to rights,/ and when he perished, you were faithful still/ in mind to the descendants of the dead./ When they two perished by a double fate,/ on one day struck and striking and defiled/ each by his own hand, now it comes that I/ hold all the power and the royal throne/ through close connections with the perished men./ You cannot learn of an man the soul,/ the mind, and the intent until he shows/ his practice of the government and law./ For I believe that who controls the state/ and does not hold to the best plans of all,/ but locks his tongue up through some kind of fear,/ that he is worst of all who are or were./ And he who counts another greater friend/ than his own fatherland, I put him nowhere./ So I—may Zeus all-seeing always know it—/ could not keep silent as disaster crept/ upon the town, destroying hope of safety./ Nor could I count the enemy of the land/ friend to myself, not I who know so well/ that she it is who saves us, sailing straight,/ and only so can we have friends at all./ With such good rules shall I enlarge our state./ And now I have proclaimed their brother-edict./ In the matter of the sons of Oedipus,/ citizens, know: Eteocles who died,/ defending this our town with champion spear,/ is to be covered in the grave and granted/ all holy rites we give the noble dead./ But his brother Polyneices whom I name/ the exile who came back and sought to burn/ his fatherland, the gods who were his kin,/ who tried to gorge on blood he shared, and lead/ the rest of us as slaves—/ it is announced that no one in this town/ may give him burial or mourn for him./ Leave him unburied, leave his corpse disgraced,/ a dinner for the birds and for the dogs./ Such is my mind. Never shall I, myself,/ honor the wicked and reject the just./ The man who is well-minded to the state/ from me in death and life shall have his honor. [161-210]

the dead."[30] The chorus makes sure Creon realizes that he is making up a new law rather than enforcing a traditionally held one.

Creon tells them to be the enforcers of his new law,[31] but the chorus tells him to find someone younger.[32] Creon says he has younger men guarding the body.[33] The chorus wonders what Creon needs them for, in that case.[34] Creon says he needs them to stay loyal—to not support the perpetrator of the law.[35] The chorus suggests that Creon shouldn't have to worry about someone violating the law because the penalty is death and no one wants to die; "No fool is fool as far as loving death."[36] Creon affirms that death will come to the violator, but suspects that someone might be bribed with enough money to take his chances.[37] At this point, we already know that Antigone presents a case that neither the chorus, nor Creon anticipates. Antigone is willing to die, but not for money—for grace and for family.

A guard interrupts the choral dialogue to speak with Creon, albeit reluctantly.[38] The guard tells Creon that he really did not appreciate the task of bringing him the message he has brought, but determined that he should speak it in hopes that he shouldn't suffer a fate that doesn't belong to him. Creon asks him to say what he has come to say.[39] The guard insists first

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[30] Ibid., [211-214]
[31] Ibid., Creon: Now you be sentinels of the decree. [215]
[32] Ibid., Chorus: Order some younger man to take this on. [216]
[33] Ibid., Creon: Already there are watchers of the corpse. [217]
[34] Ibid., Chorus: What other order would you give us, then? [218]
[35] Ibid., Creon: Not to take sides with any who disobey. [219]
[36] Ibid.,. [220]
[37] Ibid., Creon: Death is the price. But often we have known/ men to be ruined by the hope of profit. (*Enter, from the side, a guard.*) [221-222]
[38] Ibid., Guard: Lord, I can't claim that I am out of breath/ from rushing here with light and hasty step,/ for I had many haltings in my thought/ making me double back upon my road./ My mind kept saying many things to me:/ "Why go where you will surely pay the price?"/ "Fool, are you halting? And if Creon learns/ from someone else, how shall you not be hurt?"/ Turning this over, on I dilly-dallied./ And so a short trip turns itself to long./ Finally, though, my coming here won out./ If what I say is nothing, still I'll say it./ For I come clutching to one single hope/ that I can't suffer what is not my fate. [223-236]
[39] Ibid., Creon: What is it that brings on this gloom of yours? [237]

upon his innocence regarding the matter of which he is to speak.[40] Creon appreciates his avoidance of the matter and decides it must mean he has a shocking piece of information.[41] The guard adds that, "terrible tidings make for long delays,"[42] to which Creon tells him to stop delaying.[43] The guard tells him the corpse of Polyneices was buried with a complete ritual.[44] Creon demands to know who has done it, though the guard has already told him he does not know.[45] The guard explains that there was no sign that anyone had been there except for the fact that the body had been buried and none of the guards admitted to doing it or to seeing it done.[46] Here, we also get an explanation of why this particular guard came to deliver the message—lots were drawn.

The chorus chimes in with a suggestion to Creon that perhaps no man buried the body, but rather it was the work of a god.[47] Creon urges the chorus to say no more and insists that what

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[40] Ibid., Guard: I want to tell you first about myself./ I didn't do it, didn't see who did it./ It isn't right for me to get in trouble. [238-240]
[41] Ibid., Creon: Your aim is good. You fence the fact around/ It's clear you have some shocking news to tell. [241-242]
[42] Ibid., [243]
[43] Ibid., Creon: Speak out the story, and then get away. [244]
[44] Ibid., Guard: I'll tell you. Someone left the corpse just now,/ burial all accomplished, thirsty dust/ strewn on the flesh, the ritual complete. [245]
[45] Ibid., Creon: What are you saying? What man has dared to do it? [246] (See footnote 909)
[46] Ibid., Guard: I wouldn't know. There were no marks of picks,/ no grubbed-out earth. The ground was dry and hard,/ no trace of wheels. The doer left no sign./ When the first fellow on the day-shift showed us,/ we all were sick with wonder./ For he was hidden, not inside a tomb,/ light dust upon him, enough to turn the curse,/ no wild beast's track, nor track of any hound/ having been near, nor was the body torn./ We roared bad words about, guard against guard,/ and came to blows. No one was there to stop us./ Each man had done it, nobody had done it/ so as to prove it on him—we couldn't tell./ We were prepared to hold to red-hot iron,/ to walk through fire, to swear before the gods/ we hadn't done it, hadn't shared the plan,/ when it was plotted or when it was done/ And last, when all our sleuthing came out nowhere,/ one fellow spoke, who made our heads to droop/ low toward the ground. We couldn't disagree./ We couldn't see a chance of getting off./ He said we had to tell you all about it./ We couldn't hide the fact./ So he won out. The lot chose poor old me/ to win the prize. So here I am unwilling,/ quite sure you people hardly want to see me./ Nobody likes the bringer of bad news. [247-276]
[47] Ibid., Chorus: Lord, while he spoke, my mind kept on debating./ Isn't this action possibly a god's? [277-278]

has been said is utterly ridiculous because the gods don't honor the wicked.[48] He insists that the reason the corpse has been buried is because the greed for silver has inspired some man to act against the law. Furthermore, he commands the guard to find the man who committed the crime or else suffer more egregious consequences than death. The guard asks if he can speak his mind before he goes.[49] Creon tells him it should be obvious that what he has to say is not wanted.[50] The guard asks Creon to specify what about his voice is so troubling.[51] Creon wonders why it matters.[52] The guard tries to remind Creon that he is only a messenger and not the man who did the crime.[53] Creon accuses him of being a slave to money,[54] which the guard rejects as a lie.[55] Creon tells him to prove his innocence by finding the guilty or else be condemned as guilty.[56]

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[48] Ibid., Creon: Stop now, before you fill me up with rage,/ or you'll prove yourself insane as well as old./ Unbearable, your saying that the gods/ take any kindly forethought for this corpse./ Would it be they had hidden him away,/ honoring his good service, his who came/ to burn their pillared temples and their wealth,/ even their land, and break apart their laws?/ Or have you seen them honor wicked men?/ It isn't so./ No, from the first there were some men in town/ who took the edict hard, and growled against me,/ who hid the fact that they were rearing back,/ not rightly in the yoke, no way my friends./ These are the people—oh it's clear to me—/ who have bribed these men and brought about the deed./ No current custom among men as bad/ as silver currency. This destroys the state;/ this drives men from their homes; this wicked teacher/ drives solid citizens to acts of shame./ It shows men how to practice infamy/ and know the deeds of all unholiness./ Every least hireling who helped in this/ brought about then the sentence he shall have./ But further, as I still revere great Zeus,/ understand this, I tell you under oath,/ if you don't find the very man whose hands/ buried the corpse, bring him for me to see,/ not death alone shall be enough for you/ till living, hanging, you make clear the crime./ For any future grabbings you'll have learned/ where to get pay, and that it doesn't pay/ to squeeze a profit out of every source./ For you'll have felt that more men come to doom/ through dirty profits than are kept by them. [279-314]

[49] Ibid., Guard: May I say something? Or just turn and go? [315]

[50] Ibid., Creon: Aren't you aware your speech is most unwelcome? [316]

[51] Ibid., Guard: Does it annoy your hearing or your mind? [317]

[52] Ibid., Creon: Why are you out to allocate my pain? [318]

[53] Ibid., Guard: The doer hurts your mind. I hurt your ears. [319] Creon: You are a quibbling rascal through and through. [320] Guard: But anyhow I never did the deed. [321]

[54] Ibid., Creon: And you the man who sold your mind for money! [322]

[55] Ibid., Guard: Oh!/ How terrible to guess, and guess at lies! [323]

[56] Ibid., Creon: Go pretty up your guesswork. If you don't/ show me the doers you will have to say/ that wicked payments work their own revenge. [324]

The guard leaves once he has thanked the gods he is alive, expressed a hope the violator is found, and promised never to return.[57]

After the guard has left and Creon has entered the palace, the chorus fills the time before the guard re-enters with Antigone—representing that some time has elapsed. This choral interlude is a beautiful commentary on the wondrous conqueror of nature that is mankind:

> Chorus: Many the wonders but nothing walks stranger than man./ This thing crosses the sea in the winter's storm,/ making his path through the roaring waves./ And she, the greatest of gods, the earth—/ ageless she is, and unwearied—he wears her away/ as the ploughs go up and down from year to year/ and his mules turn up the soil./ Gay nations of birds he snares and leads,/ wild beast tribes and the salty brood of the sea,/ with the twisted mesh of his nets, this clever man./ He controls with craft the beasts of the open air,/ walkers on hills. The horse with his shaggy mane/ he holds and harnesses, yoked about the neck,/ and the strong bull of the mountain./ Language, and thought like the wind/ and the feelings that make the town,/ he has taught himself, and shelter against the cold,/ refuge from the rain./ He can always help himself./ He faces no future helpless. There's only death/ that he cannot find an escape from. He has contrived/ refuge from illnesses once beyond all cure./ Clever beyond all dreams/ the inventive craft that he has/ which may drive him one time or another to well or ill./ When he honors the laws of the land and the gods' sworn right/ high indeed is his city; but stateless the man/ who dares to dwell with dishonor. Not by my fire,/ never to share my thoughts, who does these things. (*The Guard enters with Antigone.*)/ My mind is split at this awful sight./ I know her. I

[57] Ibid., Guard: Indeed, I pray he's found, but yes or no,/ taken or not as luck may settle it,/ you won't see me returning to this place./ Saved when I neither hoped nor thought to be,/ I owe the gods a mighty debt of thanks. (*Creon enters the palace. The Guard leaves by the way he came.*) [325-331]

> cannot deny/ Antigone is here./ Alas, the unhappy girl,/ her unhappy father's child./ Oh what is the meaning of this?/ It cannot be you that they bring/ for breaking the royal law,/ caught in open shame.[58]

The chorus discusses the wondrous ways in which man prevails over natural obstacles through his exceptional cleverness and ability to learn how to cope. The only real dangers the chorus expresses for man at this point are the dangers of death and dishonor. Notably, there is a declaration that a man who honors the laws of the gods and the land will do well by his city, but a man who dishonors the laws of the gods and nature is not to be trusted. Just as this notion has been expressed, Antigone enters with the guard and the chorus is troubled to think that she is the one who will face death for her violation of Creon's decree.

The guard tells the chorus that they have brought the woman who buried Polyneices.[59] The chorus announces Creon's re-entrance.[60] Creon asks what is going on[61] and the guard says he is most unexpectedly back because he wishes to be recognized as innocent since he has brought the girl who buried the body.[62] Creon asks how they know it was Antigone.[63] The guard says she was caught in the act.[64] When Creon asks how they caught her,[65] the guard explains that

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[58] Ibid., [332-383]
[59] Ibid., Guard: This is the woman who has done the deed./ We caught her at the burying. Where's the king? (*Creon enters*). [384-385]
[60] Ibid., Chorus: Back from the house again just when he's needed. [386]
[61] Ibid., Creon: What must I measure up to? What has happened? [387]
[62] Ibid., Guard: Lord, one should never swear off anything./ Afterthought makes the first resolve a liar./ I could have vowed I wouldn't come back here/ after your threats, after the storm I faced./ But joy that comes beyond the wildest hope/ is bigger than all other pleasure known./ I'm here, though I swore not to be, and bring/ this girl. We caught her burying the dead./ This time we didn't need to shake the lots;/ mine was the luck, all mine./ So now, lord, take her, you, and question her/ and prove her as you will. But I am free./ And I deserve full clearance on this charge. [388-400]
[63] Ibid., Creon: Explain the circumstance of the arrest. [401]
[64] Ibid., Guard: She was burying the man. You have it all. [402] Creon: Is this the truth? And do you grasp its meaning? [403] Guard: I saw her burying the very corpse/ you had forbidden. Is this adequate? [404-405]

they dug up the corpse and kept watch until they saw her come back to bury the body a second time.[66] He also explains that she denied nothing when they approached her, seized her, and questioned her.

Creon addresses Antigone and asks her if she denies having buried the body,[67] to which she gives a clear response, "I say I did it and I don't deny it."[68] Creon tells the guard his name has been cleared and he can take his leave.[69] Then, to Antigone, Creon asks if she knew about the law.[70] Antigone answers earnestly again, "I knew, of course I knew. The word was plain."[71] Creon expresses his surprise that she acted against the law,[72] to which Antigone makes her argument:

> For me it was not Zeus who made that order./ Nor did that Justice who lives with the gods below/ mark out such laws to hold among mankind./ Nor did I think your orders

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[65] Ibid., Creon: How was she caught and taken in the act? [406]

[66] Ibid., Guard: It was like this: when we got back again/ struck with those dreadful threatenings of yours,/ we swept away the dust that hid the corpse./ We stripped it back to slimy nakedness./ And then we sat to windward on the hill/ so as to dodge the smell./ We poked each other up with growling threats/ if anyone was careless of his work./ For some time this went on, till it was noon./ The sun was high and hot. Then from the earth/ up rose a dusty whirlwind to the sky,/ filling the plain, smearing the forest-leaves,/ clogging the upper air. We shut our eyes,/ sat and endured the plague the gods had sent./ So the storm left us after a long time./ We saw the girl. She cried the sharp and shrill/ cry of a bitter bird which sees the nest/ bare where the young birds lay./ So this same girl, seeing the body stripped,/ cried with great groanings, cried a dreadful curse/ upon the people who had done the deed./ Soon in her hands she brought the thirsty dust,/ and holding high a pitcher of wrought bronze/ she poured the three libations for the dead./ We saw this and surged down. We trapped her fast;/ And she was calm. We taxed her with the deeds/ both past and present. Nothing was denied./ And I was glad, and yet I took it hard./ One's own escape from trouble makes one glad;/ but bringing friends to trouble is hard grief./ Still I care less for all these second thoughts than for the fact that I myself am safe. [407-440]

[67] Ibid., Creon: You there, whose head is drooping to the ground,/ do you admit this, or deny you did it? [441-442]

[68] Ibid., [443]

[69] Ibid., Creon (*to the guard*): Take yourself off wherever you wish to go/ free of a heavy charge. [444-445]

[70] Ibid., Creon (*to Antigone*): You—tell me not at length but in a word./ You knew the order not to do this thing? [446-447]

[71] Ibid., [448]

[72] Ibid., Creon: And still you dared to overstep these laws? [449]

> were so strong/ that you, a mortal man, could over-run/ the gods' unwritten and unfailing laws./ Not now, nor yesterday's, they always live,/ and no one knows their origin in time./ So not through fear of any man's proud spirit/ would I be likely to neglect these laws,/ draw on myself the gods' sure punishment./ I knew that I must die; how could I not?/ even without your warning. If I die/ before my time, I say it is a gain./ Who lives in sorrows many as are mine/ how shall he not be glad to gain his death?/ And so, for me to meet this fate, no grief./ But if I left that corpse, my mother's son,/ dead and unburied I'd have cause to grieve/ as I grieve not./ And if you think my acts are foolishness/ the foolishness may be in a fool's eye.[73]

Antigone's argument is that Creon's brand new orders as a mortal man do not supersede the orders of Zeus or the rights of the gods who reign over the dead. Furthermore, she states that her suffering is so great that death is welcome, whereas her brother's unburied body is not and would cause her more grief than death. Lastly, she tells Creon that if her actions look foolish, it might be because a fool is judging them. Antigone's fearless defiance in the face of the king is a legend that has continued throughout centuries. She has been exalted as a figure of feminine grandeur and discussed as a timeless enigma for scholarly discourse across disciplines. Antigone excites the individual mind because she is a female character that stands up for her family, religious values, and human rights despite the legal rule that promises her death for doing what she believes is right. People want to know if she was right to do as she did and what gives someone that kind of courage. The following section introduces the conversation about her.

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[73] Ibid., [450-470]

An Introductory Literature Review

In *Antigones*, George Steiner examines Antigone's eternal presence and the fact that, "Sophocles' *Antigone* had held pride of place in poetic and philosophic judgment for over a century."[74] Steiner proposes a number of historical reasons for "the *Antigone* predominance"[75] and the first of which is "the seminal passage in the Antigone vogue"[76] found in Barhélémy's *Le Voyage du jeune Anacharsis* printed in 1788 which Steiner expounds was, "echoed for a hundred years."[77] Another incendiary movement in the resurgence of interest in Antigone was the, "simultaneous presence in the theological seminary at Tübingen, the *Stift*, of Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling."[78] A "third cause of the *Antigone* predominance"[79] that Steiner explicates is the theatrical history of reproductions of the *Antigone,* which begins with Goethe and continues through Mendelssohn, moving swiftly throughout Europe from Berlin to Paris and then from London to Edinburgh. Within this framework of ongoing popularity of the play in art, seminary, and philosophy there was a movement involving gender and politics that arguably, "made of *Antigone* an emblematic text."[80] Steiner's fourth explanation for Antigone's being in vogue for so long is the way in which she has been called upon to address questions concerning the status of women.[81]

Antigone is brought into contemporary interest from movements such as, "the programme of feminine emancipation and political parity between the sexes professed by the

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[74] Steiner, George. *Antigones.* Oxford: 1984. (6).
[75] Ibid., 8.
[76] Ibid., 7.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 8.
[80] Ibid., 9.
[81] Ibid., 10.

French Revolution and its Utopian or pragmatic sympathizers across Europe."[82] Given the lack of feminine exemplars of revolutionary action in the centuries leading up to the cause, "there is suspicion that the exaltation of Sophocles' heroine after 1790 is, in some degree, a surrogate for reality. Philosophers, poets, political thinkers acclaim an act of feminine grandeur and echo the affirmation of certain feminine principles over civic power and expediency."[83] Antigone's popularity in this case is attributed to the fact that she is a female character who defies the law of an authoritative male political figure. As such, she is exalted in poetry, philosophy and political theory as a political rebel, martyr, and figure of feminine grandeur. Steiner suspects her fictional status was most attractive because in that way, "Antigone belongs, hauntingly but safely, to the idiom of the ideal."[84] Antigone as a fictional form of feminine grandeur was safely distant from the real, threatening kind of female rebel. She could exist in her ideal splendor without raising an actual finger or speaking out against those speaking for her. Steiner's *Antigones* aims to capture the essence of Antigone's resplendence in poetry, philosophy, and political thought, especially throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

The theme of kinship resonates from the major figures responsible for Antigone's predominance, namely G.W.F. Hegel. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit,* Hegel's Antigone comes to stand for a certain kind of ethical consciousness in the name of "Divine Law" by means of her femininity and position in the family. What "Divine Law" means for Hegel is contextually defined in opposition to human law or community, "The community therefore possesses the truth and the confirmation of its power in the essence of the Divine Law and the realm of the nether world. The Divine Law which governs the family has likewise on its side differences within

[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

itself whose interrelationships constitute the living process of its actuality."[85] Hegel quotes from Sophocles' *Antigone* to clarify that divine law is considered in the play to be "the unwritten and infallible law of the gods."[86] Antigone herself defines them as such in her position against Creon.

Hegel's interpretation of Antigone is that she brazenly and knowingly risks her life on account of her innate devotion to divine law. Her action results from her being a woman and sister, "Consequently, the feminine, in the form of the sister, has the highest *intuitive* awareness of what is ethical. She does not attain to *consciousness* of it, or to the objective existence of it, because the law of the Family is an implicit, inner essence which is not exposed to the daylight of consciousness, but remains an inner feeling and the divine element that is exempt from an existence in the real world."[87] Hegel ties Antigone's motivations, convictions, and actions to her essence as a woman and a sister. He conjectures that her ethical motivation, position, and action is innately tied to the fact that she has a certain familial role and inner sense of how to fill that familial role. Her familial role as a sister gives her the highest feminine form of ethical awareness—a divinely inspired unconscious intuition. Her fatal action is inspired by her relationship to her brother in particular because it is that relation which inspires the pinnacle of her ethical intuition.

The reason feminine awareness of the ethical is strongest in the form of the sister is because a brother and sister, "do not desire one another, nor have they given to, or received from, one another this independent being-for-self; on the contrary, they are free individualities in regard to each other."[88] According to Hegel, it is precisely because there is no sexual tension, possession, or submission within the nature of brothers and sisters that the sister can achieve the

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[85] Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Trans. By A.V. Miller. Oxford: 1977. [Section 437].
[86] Ibid. [455-456].
[87] Ibid. [457].
[88] Ibid.

highest level of ethical awareness (for a woman) through her relationship to her brother. Hegel references the passage cited in the epilogue to support his claim that, "The loss of the brother is therefore irreparable to the sister and her duty toward him is the highest. [Cf. *Antigone,* 1.910]"[89] The irreparable loss of a brother is, for a sister, distinct from the loss of parents, the loss of a husband, or the loss of children. A woman is not so torn up about losing her parents because it is the natural order by which she is then able to become a wife and mother herself, "As a daughter, the woman must now see her parents pass away with a natural emotion and ethical resignation, for it is only at the cost of this relationship that she can achieve that existence of her own of which she is capable. Thus in parents, she does not behold her own being-for-self in a positive form."[90] A woman accepts the terms of her parents' demise because she will take their place by becoming a parent and having a family of her own. Her place as a wife and mother does not give her a sense of irreplaceability in terms of her husband and children.

A mother or wife experiences relationships in the form of desire that deals in universals rather than particulars. Concepts like husband and child are universal and evanescent rather than particular because, "In the ethical household, it is not a question of *this* particular husband, *this* particular child, but simply of husband and children generally; the relationships of the woman are based, not on feeling, but on the universal."[91] The idea that a husband can be replaced or a child can be replaced, or both, is precisely what we get from Antigone's statement that she would not have defied the decree for a husband or child because she could replace them. Hegel suggests this is something true about women in terms of familial relationships. A woman thinks of her husband and children as universal concepts rather than particular individuals and, "The

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.

difference between the ethical life of the woman and that of the man consists just in this, that in her vocation as an individual and in her pleasure, her interest is [centred] on the universal and remains alien to the particularity of desire."[92] Hegel applies a woman's interest in the universal to her vocation as an individual. It is in her job description to care for the universal—for husband and children—not to care for one particular husband or a particular child. In other words, being a wife and mother does not require a particular man or particular children; it simply requires being a wife to a husband and being a mother to children.

From what Antigone says directly about why she would not have defied the decree for a husband or child, Hegel infers an indirect statement about women. Directly, Antigone explains that she could be a wife again if she lost a husband. She could be a mother again if she lost a child. She could never again be a sister once she has lost both of her brothers and her parents. Hegel's conclusion about what Antigone's argument means is that a woman's desires are determined by the replaceability of the object of her desire. As such, "The relationships of mother and wife, however, are those of particular individuals, partly in the form of something natural pertaining to desire, partly in the form of something negative which sees in those relationships only something evanescent and also, again, the particular individual is for that very reason a contingent element which can be replaced by another individual."[93] The desire for a replaceable contingent element is not pure and natural; there is a mixture of desire for the universal and for the particular in the form of husband and children. Neither is her ethical life, "Since, then, in this relationship of the wife there is an admixture of particularity, her ethical life is not pure; but in so far as it *is* ethical, the particularity is a matter of indifference, and the wife

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.

is without the moment of knowing herself as *this* particular self in the other partner."[94] A wife and mother does not have a pure ethical life because her relationships have a mixture of desire in the form of the universal.

The sister, on the other hand, in relation to the brother, does not have the same mixture because she has no desire for the brother at all:

> The brother, however, is for the sister a passive, similar being in general; the recognition of herself in him is pure and unmixed with any natural desire. In this relationship, therefore, the indifference of the particularity, and the ethical contingency of the latter, are not present; but the moment of the individual self, recognizing and being recognized, can here assert its right, because it is linked to the equilibrium of the blood and is a relation devoid of desire.[95]

The relationship between a brother and a sister is in equilibrium. The two beings are similar and recognize each other in themselves without a mixture of desire. A form of mutual recognition is achieved precisely because the particular form of blood kinship between brother and sister is completely without any kind of natural desire. Since it is in this kind of relationship that a woman can achieve the highest form of life and in no other kind of relationship of kinship, the loss of the brother is the most irreparable loss for the sister. She cannot have the same kind of relationship with her other family members.

Scholars after Hegel are not so sure Antigone's motivations or relations are pure. In the 20th century, Antigone became of interest to psychoanalytic studies for figures such as Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kristeva. Antigone was also championed in the 20th century by Luce Irigaray who goes up against Hegel and Lacan to provide a more generous interpretation of

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.

woman. Irigaray has continued her work on Antigone into the 21st century (as recently as 2013) to provide a new understanding of Antigone and the justifications for her actions inspired by her feminine form. Judith Butler's response to earlier work from Irigaray, Lacan, and Hegel has inspired a number of 21st century interlocutors of her own. Major collections on essays concerning feminist interpretations of Antigone include *Feminist Readings of Antigone* (published in 2010) and *The Returns of Antigone* (published in 2014), which are comprised of interdisciplinary essays in conversation with each other as well as with Hegel, Lacan, Irigaray, and Butler. Irigaray and Butler even make an appearance in these compilations of essays.

The plethora of responses to Hegel's Antigone follows in the tradition of Hegel and his contemporaries in that they interpret Antigone in a new way in order to posit a new position. They take what she says, interpret it freely, and then deliver a position she might hold given the position she does hold. Or, they posit that she holds the position she holds because of something she does not say directly, but could be interpreted to say indirectly. For instance, Jacques Lacan conceives of Antigone as a figure of desire who pushes the limits of life, knows her race is run, and chooses her last action in the name of crime.[96] Judith Butler reveals the possibility that Antigone's last action indicates her desire for death is a result of her impossible incestuous love impulses.[97] Luce Irigaray defends Antigone's protection of the dead as the protection of life by defending the cosmic order.[98] Tina Chanter moves the conversation toward intersectionality by emphasizing that Antigone's argument involves the qualification that Polyneices was not a slave.[99] Bonnie Honig and Fanny Söderbäck discuss the importance of Antigone's political

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[96] Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII.* Trans. by Dennis Porter. London and New York: 2008.
[97] Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim.* New York: 2000.
[98] Irigaray, Luce. *In the Beginning, She Was.* NY: 2013.
[99] Chanter, Tina. *Whose Antigone?: The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery.* Suny: 2011.

position.[100] Fatima Festic introduces the concept of Antigone in Palestine and compares her to the trend of girl suicide bombings.[101] Each of these renderings of Antigone captures some semblance of her connectedness with death and then moves to explain why she chose to die for her final act. Antigone is a figure of burial, death, defiance, and aberrant desires in all of the recent accounts, but the crucial point of interest, I think, is a three part question: Why does Antigone move toward death? Why does she not show remorse or hesitation regarding her decision to defy Creon? Why is it so important for her to bury Polyneices in particular?

Lacan asserts that Antigone's movement toward death is her splendor and her atë (tragic flaw/blindness); and in choosing to bury Polyneices and defy Creon, she depicts desire in the form of the criminal.[102] Butler argues that Antigone moves toward death because she loves Polyneices in precisely the manner Hegel says is impossible for brothers and sisters to love each other.[103] Irigaray echoes Hegel's assertion that Antigone acts on behalf of her innate feminine affinity with the laws of the divine, of kinship, and of burial but distinguishes Antigone's movement toward death as that which promotes and protects life (rather than disrupting it) by guarding the cosmic order.[104] Chanter invites us to expand our understanding of Antigone in terms of race considering that one of Antigone's major claims is that she should be allowed to bury Polyneices because he's not a slave.[105] Honig reads directly into Antigone's explanation of Polyneices' irreplaceability and then theorizes that Antigone is making a case for her rank in the

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[100] *Feminist Readings of Antigone.* Ed. By Fanny Söderbäck.
[101] Festic, Fatima. "Antigone in (Post-)Modern Palestine." *Hecate* 2003.
[102] Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII.* Trans. by Dennis Porter. London and New York: 2008.
[103] Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim.* New York: 2000.
[104] Irigaray, Luce. *In the Beginning, She Was.* NY: 2013.
[105] Chanter, Tina. *Whose Antigone?: The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery.* Suny: 2011.

economy of individuality on the basis of economic citizenship.[106] Additionally, in *Antigone, Interrupted*, Honig puts forth a more in depth theory that Antigone and Ismene conspired together against Creon, the sovereign authority. Söderbäck depicts Antigone's act as an introduction of the democratic value of the separation between private and public spheres, explaining her nobly defiant action in the name of democracy.[107]

In the conclusion chapter of his anthology of the legend, titled *Antigones,* George Steiner offers his own interpretation of Antigone in regard to the common questions asked about her. Steiner appeals to Antigone as a figure for eternality versus temporality. A question Steiner determines to answer about Antigone's action and motivation is, "*If* those 'laws' invoked by Antigone are of manifest universality and eternity, why should they not be incised in Creon or the chorus as evidently as they are in her?"[108] The idea is that if Antigone is right about what the gods want—about what she calls timeless unwritten laws—everyone should follow her reasoning and comprehend her action without incredulity. Steiner says the answer is that for Antigone, "the category of the historical—of rationally organized and mastered timelessness—have obtruded irrelevantly and then destructively, upon an order of being, call it 'familial', 'telluric', 'cyclical', in which man was, literally, at home in timelessness."[109] The laws to which Antigone devotes herself are beyond the scope of historical and political systems—systems that rely on notions of temporality and so, "Antigone's refusal of temporality—she will not 'temporize'—takes on an ever more explicit and self-destructive point. Creon's death sentence is, to her, immaterial."[110]

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[106] Honig, Bonnie. *Antigone, Interrupted.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
[107] *Feminist Readings of Antigone.* Ed. By Fanny Söderbäck. "Impossible Mourning" By Fanny Söderbäck.
[108] Steiner, George. *Antigones.* Oxford: 1984. (250).
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid., 251.

Antigone's laws oppose Creon's because she stands against mortality and temporality, which her namesake could be literally translated to say.

Referencing *Oedipus at Colonus*, Steiner elucidates that, "The Antigone in Sophocles' play is, as it were, the young woman who had learnt at Colonus that only the full acceptance of death can yield a mortal lastingness (the archaic word 'durance' would be most accurate)."[111] Antigone moves with her father toward his full acceptance of death through which he receives mortal lastingness. Antigone bears witness. Antigone sees that her father is able to make a lasting curse on his sons and upon Thebes. She also sees that her father is able to provide a lasting blessing for King Theseus and Athens. Returning to this point in *Oedipus at Colonus* evokes the dreary choral poem that follows from the death of Oedipus:

> Death is the finish./ Not to be born surpasses thought and speech. The second best is to have seen the light/ And then to go back quickly whence we came./ The feathery follies of his youth once over,/ What trouble is beyond the range of man?/ What heavy burden will he not endure?/ Jealousy, faction, quarreling and battle—The bloodiness of war, the grief of war./ And in the end he comes to strengthless age, / Abhorred by all men, without company,/ Unfriended in that uttermost twilight/ Where he must live with every bitter thing./ This is the truth, not for me only,/ But for this blind and ruined man./ Think of some shore in the north the/ Concussive waves make stream/ This way and that in the gales of winter:/ It is like that with him:/ The wild wrack breaking over him/ From head to foot, and coming on forever;/ Now from the plunging down of the sun,/ Now from the

[111] Ibid.

sunrise quarter,/ Now from where the noonday gleams,/ Now from the night and the north. (*Antigone and Ismene have been looking off-stage, left. Antigone turns.*)[112]

Antigone knows death is the finish. She knows there are fates worse than death. She knows the trouble man endures. She knows the grief of war. She knows she must die. She says she has always known it.[113] The chorus tells her that the second best thing to not having been born is dying young. Based upon what is explicitly said in the opening argument between Antigone and Ismene in *Antigone*, it is clear that Antigone internalizes this tragic insight whereas Ismene does not.

I would like to acknowledge the manner in which my thesis and conclusion resembles Steiner's conclusion chapter of *Antigones* as well as point out that for this project as a whole I owe a great debt to George Steiner and his *Antigones*. Steiner's project anthologizes the endurance of the Antigone legend, just as his title promises. From his thorough and carefully produced anthology, Steiner is able to offer some of his own conclusions about why the Antigone legend has endured and why Antigone seems to be a figure of endurance and timelessness. The way in which my claim resembles Steiner's is that it focuses upon Antigone's statement that the eternal afterlife is more important than the mortal finite one. The major difference between my project and Steiner's, however, is that my project is not an exhaustive anthology of Antigone ordered chronologically. Like Steiner, Lacan, Butler, and others, I appeal to *Oedipus at Colonus* to defend my claims about Sophocles' *Antigone.* Unlike those I discuss in my project from the past couple of centuries as well as from the most prominent scholarship

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[112] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Oedipus at Colonus*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 1211-1248].

[113] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). Antigone: I knew that I must die; how could I not?/ even without your warning. [Lines 60-61].

from the past decades, I insist that we must fully examine Sophocles' *Theban Plays* to understand Antigone's position in Sophocles' *Antigone*.

My title promises that this is a project aimed at un-interrupting Antigone in some capacity. The subtitle explains that the method for un-interrupting her is an examination of Sophocles' three *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth[114], or, biographically as presented by Sophocles, as opposed to an examination of the play *Antigone* in isolation. As mentioned earlier, a contemporary scholar by the name of Bonnie Honig titled one of her books *Antigone, Interrupted*. Though my title is obviously an allusion to Honig's book (which is an allusion to the book *Girl, Interrupted*), I decided to remove the comma because such punctuation is precisely meant to indicate a pause or interruption of the flow of speech. My project aims to understand Antigone without interruption by reading her character development according to her age progression in the *Theban Plays*, but also by listening to her explanations directly and in light of what she learns as a younger person prior to the moment in which she decides to bury her brother despite the decree.

My work is not an anthology, and is certainly nowhere near as expansive as Steiner's. My project is an examination of the way in which Sophocles' *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth provides answers to the contemporary questions asked about Sophocles' *Antigone*, which were very much motivated by accounts and translations of Sophocles' *Antigone* from the era of German Romanticism. My chapters are ordered thematically, not chronologically. This section of the introduction is titled "An Introductory Literature Review" because my review of the literature on Sophocles' *Antigone* has only just begun and will continue throughout every chapter

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[114] I do mean something like biographical here in the sense that I am only discussing Sophocles' version of the myth. What I mean by 'myth' could also be what George Steiner denotes as the Antigone legend. I just mean that the story of Antigone in circulation when Sophocles wrote his tragedies would have suggested she was born to Oedipus and was a child before she became a fully-grown young woman.

that follows. I begin with 20th and 21st century scholarship and reproductions of Sophocles *Antigone*, but as Steiner's *Antigones* reveals, it is important to establish the influence past Antigones have had on more recent Antigones. Hence, each chapter will make pertinent returns to the influential Antigones of the past in order to show the persistence of the thematic question with which the chapter is concerned. To offer a clearer picture of the thematic organization of my chapters and how each chapter serves to defend my thesis, I have composed a separate section, which follows from this one and concludes the introductory chapter.

The Thesis and Outline of the Project

My examination of the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth offers a contextualized explanation of Antigone's argument for why she buried her brother despite the decree against it. Knowing what Antigone has experienced in *Oedipus at Colonus* provides a context for the explicit reasons Antigone gives for why she chooses to do as she does. Sophocles' *Antigone* has been read, produced, and analyzed in isolation from the other two *Theban Plays* for centuries. Consequently, all kinds of questions concerning her motivations have evolved into theories about what Antigone stands for and what her story should make us think about. I am not saying there is anything wrong with that. Nor am I saying there's only one way to read a play. I am saying that when we read *Antigone* in the complete context of the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth, we gain the tale of her experience of twenty years in exile with her father, Oedipus, which gets lost in scholarship that isolates the play *Antigone* from the other *Theban Plays.*

My thesis does not entail an objection to using either the play *Antigone* or the character Antigone to contribute to theories of gender or morality. I see no reason to remove her from the role she has played and will continue to play in the interest of political and social sciences. My interest is simply to show what can be gained from the complete context, which is an account of Antigone's experience leading up to the decisions and arguments she makes. Her experience with Oedipus and exile teaches her to move toward death and grace for eternal redemption and reward after a life of suffering. She can still stand for everything she has come to stand for as a female character of political defiance, but if the scholarship is seeking to know why or how she becomes so, we ought to turn to the other plays, which is precisely what is missing from scholarship. My point is that though scholarship on Antigone is vibrant and productive across disciplines, there remains context to be added from the *Theban Plays*.

My chapters are each meant to defend my thesis in part by showing what the most popular readings of *Antigone* look like and how they were influenced by the most popular readings of *Antigone* before them. From these demonstrations, I reveal a history of reading *Antigone* indirectly and out of the context of the *Theban Plays.* Doing so misses the tragic insight Antigone offers to explain herself in the play named for her because it is an insight we can only observe her to have gained if we read the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth and properly understand her experience leading up to the moment in which she decides to bury her brother. Each chapter examines the way Antigone is being read, how she came to be read in such a way, and how reading her experience throughout the course of the myth contributes to the discourse. My goal is not to bring a new voice of Antigone into the discussion, but rather to show that if we allow her to tell her whole story, her ancient voice has a yet unspoken rebuttal to new interpretations.

In the following chapter, I survey some of the most prominent critiques and productions of *Antigone* from the 20th century up through today's work and further develop my thesis that we should consider Antigone's experience throughout the *Theban Plays* as we continue to discuss the play *Antigone*. To demonstrate that such a complete contextual reading is missing from current scholarship, the following chapter accounts for the way in which readings of *Antigone* have grown increasingly indirect and out of context. From Heidegger, I draw out explicit instructions to do violence to the original text (and of course, he is working from Hölderlin's translation, which will be further discussed in the fifth chapter) by finding what is unsaid. From the array of 20th and 21st century artistic renditions, psychological analyses, political theories, and feminist philosophies appealing to the classic authority of *Antigone*, I explore the scholarly

tradition of reading Antigone indirectly so as to posit new meanings from what is unsaid in the play. Reading her indirectly further removes her from the context of the *Theban Plays*.

My overall objective for the following chapter is to draw out the popular themes of inquiry surrounding *Antigone* from a general literature review of Antigone's most recent scholarly and artistic popularity. I briefly mentioned these themes in the introductory literature review by posing them as popular questions arising from critiques of Hegel's Antigone. These questions concern why Antigone chooses to (1) accept the death penalty, (2) defy the king outright, and (3) explicitly state that she wouldn't have done it for just anyone. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters are organized around discussion of each of these three choices respectively.

An overarching benefit from my way of approaching Antigone is that it provides a source for understanding the distinction between Antigone and Ismene, which is the topic of the third chapter. Antigone is not deterred by Creon's threat of death whereas Ismene is. My approach refers to the twenty years during which Antigone and Ismene lived completely different kinds of lives. The first section, however, focuses on Antigone as a figure commonly discussed in contemporary scholarship as a figure of death and desire (and a pusher of limits toward death and on behalf of desire). This section features Jaques Lacan and Judith Butler as its main interlocutors. Other interlocutors surrounding the discourse on Antigone make more of an appearance in the second section, which is about how and why Antigone's actions resemble those of her father and brother (who also push the same kind of limits for the same kind of reasons). In the third section of each chapter I demonstrate my claim that reading the plays in the order of the myth provides answers to the kinds of questions being asked in contemporary scholarship. Specifically, the third section of the third chapter argues that the answer to why

Antigone thinks differently than Ismene at the beginning of Sophocles' *Antigone* can more likely be found in *Oedipus at Colonus* than in *Antigone* or a new re-envisioning of *Antigone.*

The fourth chapter is titled Antigone and Creon because it concerns the issue of Antigone's outright defiance against the authority of King Creon. Since Hegel's influence is inseparable from this discussion, the literature review in this chapter moves back in time to the thinkers who brought Antigone's legend back to life in the 19th century and whose work contemporary scholars continue to reference and critique. Those who speak about what is unsaid in *Antigone* today bear the influences of those who spoke about what is unsaid in *Antigone* long before today. This chapter explores the conversation between Hegel, Butler, Lacan, and others regarding Antigone's defiance toward Creon's law.

The first section of the fourth chapter denotes Hegel's position as the argument that Sophocles *Antigone* depicts the dialectic of opposing laws. The second section examines various contemporary critiques and their variegated arguments, but ultimately reveals that recent scholarship replaces Hegel's theory of opposition between two laws with theories about Antigone's and Creon's opposing personal desires. The third section turns to the complete context of the *Theban Plays* for a contribution to this particular discussion of *Antigone*, once again suggesting that there are answers to be found in *Oedipus at Colonus.* Further, these answers push the theories in a direction that considers Antigone's experience as a woman rather than the simple fact of her being a woman. Since Ismene is a woman and a sister just like Antigone, it cannot simply be that she does what she does because she is a woman. This is a non-essentialist way of reading her.

I do not discard all other theoretical approaches to understanding Antigone's character through her gender, familial role, argumentation in the play named for her, sexual orientation, or

political and religious viewpoints. I think these theories are important and signify the importance of the play and the remarkable female character I have enjoyed working on. However, it matters that Ismene and Antigone act and think differently. It means that not just any female daughter of Oedipus and sister to Polyneices behaves or believes the same thing. My recommendation is an approach that guards against essentialism by insisting that Antigone's unique experience informs her decisions and actions—that not just any woman or sister would choose the same.

The fifth (and final chapter before the conclusion chapter) is titled Antigone and Polyneices because it concerns the issue of Antigone's stated claim that she defied Creon's decree for Polyneices in particular. She says she would not have done so for a husband or child. One of the most popular interlocutors of contemporary scholarship on Antigone is Judith Butler and though her name does not appear for the first time in the fifth chapter, the fifth chapter takes the closest look at Butler's discussion of incest. In reconstructing John Seery's critique of Butler's bolder claims about the novelty of her own reading into incest and *Antigone*, the chapter moves into an even more thorough survey of the Antigone legend with assistance from Steiner's *Antigones*. John Seery suggests that Butler's own claims are too bold in that she claims to be the first to make them. Seery points to Steiner's *Antigones* to reveal a discussion on Antigone involving incest and forbidden desires appears long before Butler addresses the notion. And so, the fifth chapter further explores the major 19th century works on Sophocles' *Antigone*, which leads to the assessment that Butler's Antigone looks a lot more like the Antigones of the 19th century than like Sophocles' *Antigone.*

Further, since Butler stakes her claim upon identifying Antigone as Freud's melancholic, I return a discussion of Antigone's mourning with regard to Freud's definitions for mourning and melancholia first introduced in the following chapter about contemporary scholarship on

Antigone. This chapter concludes with a return to the classic and direct interpretation of what Antigone says (with the added development from reading the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth). My main contribution takes shape in this section, which is that Antigone holds a philosophical position that she learns from her experience—one that Ismene does not understand at first (though, perhaps, she does when she changes her mind later in the play). It is this philosophical position that makes her the kind of woman, daughter, and sister she is in *Antigone.*

Antigone learns from her father, Oedipus, and their experience together for most of her lifetime that one cannot avoid suffering in life, but one can die well and be redeemed for one's courage and acceptance in the face of suffering and death. This position does not mean she does not want to please the chthonic gods of the earth by burying her brother because it is her duty as a woman and a sister. It means she chooses to accept her duty because she is the kind of person who performs their duty because of the kind of philosophical position she holds. I would like to reiterate that I am not condemning theoretical work on *Antigone* that seeks to use explanations for her motivations to present important social and political concerns. I am critical, however, of work that chooses to see her as a subject and yet refuses to acknowledge the way in which her experience makes her the kind of tragic character she is.

Each chapter of this project aims to demonstrate that if we take her at her word in *Antigone* and understand her explanation in light of her experience in the other *Theban Plays*, Antigone's own line of reasoning becomes clearer than the indirect explanations created for her. Antigone chooses to act in defiance of the king and in knowledge of the death penalty because she has gained an insight through Oedipus' lifelong experience that the best thing a mortal can hope for is a graceful death. For the fourth chapter, this means exemplifying that her knowledge of the tragic insight just mentioned is what she explicitly provides for an explanation as to why

she defies Creon. For the fifth chapter, this means showing that her tragic insight also applies to her direct claim about defying Creon on behalf of Polyneices in particular. The major departure I take from my interlocutors is that I do not add anything unsaid to Antigone's line of reasoning. I simply show that what she says is enough, once we understand the tragic insight she gains in *Oedipus at Colonus*.

When we listen to her directly, we hear that Antigone cares about honoring the dead because the afterlife is longer than mortal life, which has been filled with suffering for her. She sees where she is headed and is more afraid of heading there without grace than of heading there sooner rather than later. If we tap into the things she knows and learns as the daughter of Oedipus—the one who travels with him to Colonus—we do not need to come up with our own explanations to understand her motivation. She is certain about what she must do and other characters do not see the sense in what she is saying because she has gained a tragic insight they've yet to accept. Oedipus has to die to learn that in the end, his acceptance of his subordination to the gods lead him to a divine reward, revenge, and redemption. Antigone is able to witness Oedipus' journey to eternal reward and begin preparing for her own.

If we consider that Antigone's acceptance of mortal fate results from her experience and knowledge, her actions and decisions become more intelligible. She moves toward death because she knows we are all moving toward death anyway and her interest is in securing a better eternal life than her mortal life. She knows her mortal limits. She pushes them because she has accepted them. She is not ignorant of them or blind to them, but she gains a certain way of seeing them because she glimpses eternal possibilities. Antigone knows mortal life is temporary whereas the afterlife is eternal. She also knows that her brothers, mother, and father await her there. The actions she chooses are oriented toward the divine and the dead because she is more concerned

with disgrace and dishonor than with death. Antigone chooses to honor Polyneices because he is irreplaceable. She accepts the laws of the gods and the land that certain kin can never again be replaced. She knows that Creon's law goes against the laws of the gods, so she declares that she abided the laws of Zeus. Again, she spends her life in exile with Oedipus. She knows all too well that a king cannot overrule or outrun the will of the gods.

Antigone insists that it is more important to please the gods and the dead because she will spend an eternity with them whereas mortal life is fleeting and tragic. On account of her stated preference, Antigone explains that her decision is oriented toward her preparation for the eternal life. Once we determine the rationale of Antigone's decision and discover that the why behind what she does is not so puzzling after all, we can focus on what it means for a Greek tragic character to act in acceptance of the tragic insight presented in Attic tragedy. We can explore the possibility that this fascinating female tragic character shows us a path toward the acceptance of death in view of a tragic insight. To get there, I examine the continuous journey of Antigone in the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth (by which I simply mean her age progression as Sophocles' three plays present it) until her explicit reasoning is resounding.

My project is not meant to discount other important work, but rather to recommend the benefits of my reading. I could not possibly prove that Judith butler is wrong about Antigone's desire for her dead brother and father, for instance. My work has not given me any insights into the sexual desires or preferences of the fictional female character at hand. I have no qualms about the rich discussion Tina Chanter has begun about issues of slavery and the rights of the body in both Sophocles *Antigone* and Fugard's *The Island.* I find these approaches fruitful, and I would be pleased if I could make a likewise fruitful contribution.

My contribution is that when Antigone makes the decisions and arguments she makes in *Antigone*, she already holds a philosophical position commonly held in Attic tragedy that though mortals cannot escape their fate, their actions result in their happiness or unhappiness—their fortune or misfortune. By examining the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth, we see the development of Antigone's character and mindset. We see what she learns about life that Ismene has yet to learn at the beginning of the play. Exploring her insight is the benefit of my reading.

Evaluations and analyses in current discourse on Antigone concern her motivations for her decision to defy the decree and bring upon her own death. Antigone makes a deliberate and final choice for which she never shows remorse. Scholars tend to argue that her action is more than a wild and futile action that makes no sense (in the words of Ismene). Their arguments also tend to insist that we must look for more than the arguments Antigone provides directly in order to get a fuller understanding of her action. I argue that the reason behind her choice of action becomes quite clear if we read the three *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth. Read in the order of myth and Antigone's age progression, Antigone's explanation to Ismene makes more sense than Ismene is willing to acknowledge. Further, it accepts that the traditional and direct reading of tragedy as the drama of mortal life is a fine place to start when trying to understand why Antigone does what she does. We do not need to read into her speech and actions indirectly or non-traditionally.

What I mean by reading *Antigone* indirectly is to seek meaning that goes beyond what she says, which is that she chooses the course of action she believes to be her best option given her mortal imposition because the gods rank higher than mankind. What I mean by non-traditionally is pushing for more meaning in tragedy than the drama of death and loss. I depart

from the more indirect readings by returning to the idea that Attic tragedy is essentially about the mortal drama surrounding death and dying. This idea is not new; it's old.

The newer idea is to push readings of tragic drama beyond notions of death and dying as the central theme and move into the realm of politics. In her book *Mocked with Death: Tragic Overliving from Sophocles to Milton*, Emily Wilson from the University of Pennsylvania argues, "that it is a mistake, of a specifically modern kind, to view mortality as the central theme of tragic texts."[115] In a published book discussion of Bonnie Honig's *Antigone, Interrupted* (to which the title of my project alludes), Wilson also explains that Honig makes a similar argument and that, "Honig's work complements mine [Wilson's] in that it, too, draws attention to the limitations of reading tragedy as a genre concerned only with death and loss, and Honig beautifully teases out the ways that the question of how we read classical tragedy still matters for our current political and ethical discourse."[116] Both Honig and Wilson argue that reading tragedy as a genre centered upon the drama of death and loss is limiting. The kind of reading they conduct and recommend for classical tragedy is one that seeks out matters applicable to contemporary discourse.

Honig, Wilson, Butler, Lacan, and other interlocutors (whose discussions of Antigone I reconstruct in this project) push for theories inspired by Sophocles' *Antigone* and the drama of the decision to welcome death. These same theories opt to present a new aspect of Antigone's motivations that contributes to current political and ethical discourse. I take no issue with their contributions to political and ethical discourse. My concern is about the insistence upon reading Attic tragedy indirectly in order to move past the idea that tragedy is ultimately the drama of

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[115]From a "Book Discussion: Bonnie Honig's Antigone, Interrupted." Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, Ed. by Keri Walsh. (560).
[116] Ibid.

death and dying. My project aims to show that there is nothing limiting about reading tragic drama directly or in keeping with the traditional understanding of mortality as its central theme.

We can accept Aristotle's supplication that "tragedy is a representation not of human beings but of action and life,"[117] without limiting ourselves from utilizing tragedy in current discourse. The philosophical components of ancient thought performed in Attic tragedy are the ideas about human happiness and unhappiness with regard to actions taken during the finite course of a lifetime. As Aristotle explains, "Happiness and unhappiness lie in action, and the end [of life] is a sort of action, not a quality; people are of a certain sort according to their characters, but happy or the opposite according to their actions."[118] The happiness or unhappiness of a character is directly correlated to the actions of a character.

The classical interpretation of tragedy introduced by Aristotle is that tragedy depicts an action that evokes terror and pity from its audience.[119] The kinds of actions that succeed in doing this are reversals, recognitions, and suffering.[120] This means the audience feels terror and pity when things go from good to bad, when characters discover they've been mistaken, and when reversals, recognitions, and deaths cause suffering for the characters. The classical reading of tragedy is that it is essentially about action in life and the end of life, but insofar as it represents what those actions mean with regard to happiness and suffering. Antigone posits that her action is related to her understanding of how one ought to live and act so as to ameliorate suffering. My conclusion is that there is no need to dismiss traditional thought behind Attic tragedy or render it limiting. My thesis is that current political and ethical discourse still stands to gain plenty from

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[117] Aristotle. *Poetics* I, vi: 3.1.2 Plot is the most important part of tragedy. Translated by Richard Janko. Cambridge: 1987. (8).
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid., 3.1 The definition of tragedy.
[120] Ibid., 3.4 The parts of plot.

the tragic insights about life, death, and loss that its characters directly explain as they develop an understanding about the relation between human action and human wellbeing.

CHAPTER II

ANTIGONE AND CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

Ismene: You have a hot mind over chilly things.

Antigone: I know I please those whom I most should please.

Ismene: If but you can. You crave what can't be done.

Antigone: And so, when strength runs out, I shall give over.

Ismene: Wrong from the start, to chase what cannot be.

Antigone: If that's your saying, I shall hate you first, and next the dead will hate you in all justice. But let me and my own ill-counseling suffer this terror. I shall suffer nothing as great as dying with a lack of grace.

Ismene: Go, since you want to. But know this: you go senseless indeed, but loved by those who love you.[121]

In the quote above, Ismene makes a judgment about Antigone's psychology. She says Antigone's mind is hot about chilly things—morbid. Antigone's response is that she pleases those she should please. One question that is frequently asked about Antigone is how she knows what the gods want when other characters like Creon and Ismene disagree. In other words, if the unwritten rules of the gods are as clear as Antigone says, why does she seem to be the only one that really abides them (with the exception of Teiresias much later in the play)? Whose counsel is she following? However, Ismene's response is neither something like, "but how do you know this is what the gods want?" Nor does Ismene say to her sister, "You're wrong to think this is

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[121] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 87-98].

the way to please those you want to please." Ismene's conversation with Antigone is different from Creon in that Ismene's argument is not necessarily that Antigone is wrong. Rather, Ismene's counter is that Antigone desires the impossible, to which Antigone simply responds that she will strive until her strength gives out. Antigone makes it clear that she is more wary of not trying than of failing.

Antigone is willing to do whatever will please those whom she should please the most even if it results in her death because she would rather suffer anything than a lack of grace. Antigone values death and the afterlife more than mortal life because she knows mortal life is finite whereas the afterlife is eternal. For Antigone, pushing toward limits is worthwhile. Her concern is for the dead. She will do all that she can for her deceased brother as long as she is alive. She knows her strength will give out eventually, but she is willing to try her strength until it runs out. Ismene might think Antigone has a hot mind about chilly things like death and burial, but what Antigone tells us is that her mind is fixed upon her task of honoring what the gods have honored—the ritual of the burial of the dead.

The opening line of Sophocles' *Antigone* roughly translates to something like, "O common one of the same womb, head of Ismene."[122] The embellished hyperbole of a pair expresses Antigone's wish that Ismene is already plotting the same undertaking, but she discovers that she and her sister are not of the same mind (or, head) after all. Rather, Ismene thinks Antigone is wrong to chase the impossible. Antigone thinks Ismene is loathsome for having such a saying. The sisters go their separate ways and agree to disagree. Antigone says she goes with her own 'ill-counseling' that nothing is worse to suffer than a lack of grace. This chapter concerns the contemporary movement away from the explicit counsel in Sophocles'

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[122] Greek version with word-by-word translation (Perseus Project): http://www.perseus.tufts.edu

Antigone. I refer to this kind of reading as 'indirect' reading as opposed to 'direct' reading. I do not mean that my reading is more direct because of an understanding of the original Greek texts or enhanced understanding as a classicist. I do not have knowledge of or access to the original text. Nor am I a classist. I am not advocating a fundamentalist reading. My use of the terms 'direct/indirect', 'return', and 'order of the myth' are not intended to mean that I know the myth from any source other than the contemporary translations in English of the *Theban Plays* that are cited in this document. I am participating in the vein of philosophical discourse on Sophocles' *Antigone* without claiming to have a better source for understanding of the Greek text than anyone else. When I use the terms 'direct/indirect', 'return', and 'order of the myth,' I only mean to stress that my reading takes Antigone at her word in a way contemporary scholarship has not done for decades and that I am reading into her experience by reading the three *Theban Plays* as a depiction of her character development and age progression.

The benefit I claim comes from doing so is the presentation of the importance of the tragic counsel Antigone receives and ultimately follows. The aspect of her heroism is depicted by her integrity and devotion to her gods and loved ones, regardless of whether or not her reasons for protecting her integrity and the integrity of her dead family members is selfish, political, desirous, or anything else of the sort. In the following section, I will discuss contemporary scholarship concerning Antigone's heroism and motivations. I will explain more about those readings I have denoted as 'indirect' (simply meaning they have stopped taking her at her word). I take no issue with moving beyond the straightforward reasons she gives (what I denote as what she says 'directly'). My aim is to defend why we should still listen to the reasons she gives, which is because I believe they are incredibly insightful and heroic in the sense of taking action in light of one's knowledge, wisdom, and strong sense of self.

Post-Modern Antigones and Reading Between the Lines

I would like to first give a swift overview of the major Antigones of Romanticism in the 18th and 19th century before exploring the plethora of ways Antigone resurfaces in the 20th century (especially during the years Steiner denotes as *Antigone Fever:* 1943-4, 1978, 1979).[123] Steiner concludes his first chapter of *Antigones* with the assertion that, "the singular and hyperbolic status which Hegel, Kierkegaard, Goethe perhaps, assigned to Sophocles' *Antigone,*"[124] can be elucidated, in part, by the following acknowledgment: "to know the Greek play as having been, as being, the efficient cause of Hölderlin's *Antigonä,*"[125] and furthermore that, "In the act of philosophical interpretation, in the poet's recasting, we confront the fundamental constancy of homecoming, the backbone of theme and variation in western sensibility."[126] To be clear about the chronology, Hölderlin conducted his translations of the Greek *Theban Plays* during the years of 1797-1803. *Antigonä* was published in 1804. These translations came after Goethe's *Iphigenie*, which was first produced and performed during the years of 1779-1787. Steiner is hesitant to completely determine the extent of the influence the two contemporaries had upon one another throughout their careers, but some influence is apparent and plenty is plausible. After all, the two writers met at the University of Jena in 1794, before *Antigonä* and *Iphigenie*.

The German aesthetic tradition of making a return to the ancient Greeks was shared among friendships formed between Hölderlin, Hegel, and Schelling formed at the University of Tübingen, which later included acquaintances with Schiller and Goethe. Hölderlin's *Antigonä* precedes the copyright date of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), as does Schelling's letter

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[123] Steiner, George. *Antigones.* Oxford: 1984. (108).
[124] Ibid., 106.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.

to Hegel in 1804, which is a scathing review of Hölderlin's *Antigonä*. Having been born a bit later and in Copenhagen, Kierkegaard (whose Antigone really comes forth in his *Either/Or* in 1843) stands somewhat apart from the rest, but his German Romantic influences, especially in respect to his regard for the Greeks, should not be overlooked. And so, from our poetic and philosophical interpretations of Sophocles' *Antigone* in the 18th and 19th century, let us progress into what Steiner calls the 'backbone of theme and variation' in the 20th century—the 'constancy of homecoming' made explicit in referential correlation to *Antigone* by Martin Heidegger, whose Antigone comes from none other than Hölderlin's *Antigonä*.

As we move into the 20th century, we should keep in mind that scholars, playwrights, poets, and film directors often work with Sophocles' *Antigone* through the lens of 18th and 19th century Romanticism. We should also be aware of Antigone's interdisciplinary appeal with regard to scholarship. *Antigone* and the other *Theban Plays* bear a significant role in modern psychology for major figures such as Freud, Frazer, and Cassiner. She is also an enduring figure for political theory as the spirit of revolution. Steiner considers Marx' love of Sophocles to be a contributing factor to this particular phenomenon. Most of this chapter will focus on contemporary scholarship concerning Antigone, but I would like to at least attempt to capture a silhouette of the artistic boom of Antigones in the 20th century. To frame the image, let's recall that the poet, Romain Rolland, called the hecatombs of 1914-8 the Antigones of the earth.

Before Hölderlin's *Antigonä* hit the German stage in the 20th century, Arthur Honegger wrote Sophocles' *Antigone* into a French opera, first performed at La Monnaie in Brussels, Belgium in 1927. Less than two decades later (1944) Maurice Duron produced the play Mégarée, inspired by Sophocles' *Antigone*. In the same year Jean Anouilh, keeping the name 'Antigone', wrote a modernized version of Sophocles' *Antigone* that depicts Antigone as a marginalized

rebel and Creon as a tired, worn-down bureaucrat. The circulation of these plays is part of the reason Steiner marks the year as one of the years of 'Antigone Fever'. Just before this particular year of fever, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote his play *Morts sans sepulture* (1941), though its first performance was not until 1946. Steiner points out the obvious thematic links in Sartre's play to death and burial in Sophocles' *Antigone.* In 1948, Brecht adapted Hölderlin's translation of Sophocles' *Antigone*—*Antigonä*—to the stage. In 1959, Greek composer and writer Mikis Theodorakis produced *Antigone* the ballet (the first of numerous Antigone-related projects by Theodorakis including a modern stage drama, music for the stage composition, and an opera). In 1973, a Turkish playwright, Kemal Demirel brought forth an Antigone influenced by Brecht's adaptation of Hölderlin's *Antigonä*.

Shortly after Theodorakis' ballet, but well before Demiral's play, Antigone entered the realm of cinema. The first was George Tsavella's 1961 film adaptation in Greek. Its title is unchanged, its story is attributed to Sophocles, and the script is adapted more or less in good faith to Sophocles. For a relative comparison, one could think of it like one of Kenneth Branagh's various Shakespeare film adaptations. In 1971, Liliana Cavani directed a film called *I Canibali*, or *The Cannibals*, with the story attributed to Sophocles (though the setting is in Milan, Italy and the main character is named Britt Ekland). Ekland's mission is to remove her brother's corpse from the streets of Milan, for which she is met with fierce resistance. Via YouTube, it is easy to view recordings of play performances of *Antigone* (such as productions of Anouilh's *Antigone* in Athens, Greece). The truth is that if you ever want to find her, Antigone is probably in some production or classroom somewhere in the world at any time. Getting into the more recent productions, Athol Fugard's *The Island* was first performed 1996. *The Island* is based on a true story that took place at a prison in South Africa during the apartheid era. Sophocles'

Antigone serves as the play within the play as the two prisoners practice for their interpretive performance of it.

But why, precisely, does this abundance of artistic renderings of Sophocles' *Antigone* concern the topic of discussion for this chapter? Well, the goal is to understand how the reading of explicit counsel in Antigone has morphed over time. And, since one of the most significant spikes in the history of the iconoclasm of the Antigone legend is owed to the German Romantics of the late 18th and 19th century, it is also owed to Romanticism itself—the idea behind the return to the Greeks for poetic and philosophical works. Artists and philosophers made this return contemporaneously and the philosophers were working in what we now call the philosophical tradition of Aesthetics (engaging theory with contemporary art as well as art from antiquity). We can hardly doubt that Hölderlin and Goethe's influence upon Hegel's understanding of Sophocles plays a significant role in Hegel's interpretation of *Antigone.* In his *Tragedies of Spirit*, Theodore George explains that, "Not only Hegel, but others on the German intellectual scene of his day connected artistic genre such as that of tragic drama, especially in its Greek form, with the presentation of vehement forms of irresolvable conflicts and the experiences of limit they expose." Such an explanation expresses that Hegel and his intellectual contemporaries understood tragedy, including Greek tragedy, through a particular aesthetic understanding that is thematic in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[127] And to this day, art influences scholarship on Antigone at the same time scholarship influences the arts.

Looking into the endurance of the Antigone legend and the influence contemporaries have upon one another, we find an inseparable relation between *Antigone* in the poetic form and the philosophical interpretations of *Antigone* from past centuries. As Steiner remarks in his

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[127] George, Theodore. *Tragedies of Spirit*. NY: 2006. (3).

penultimate section of *Antigones*, "The classic is a text whose initial, existential coming into being and realization may well be unrecapturable to us (this will always be true of the literatures of antiquity)."[128] Antigone has come so far and taken on so many forms since Sophocles that she is practically impossible to recapture, "But the integral authority of the classic is such that it can absorb without loss of identity the millennial incursions upon it, the accretions to it, of commentary, of translations, of enacted variations."[129] We can neither deny that the multitude of Antigones meddle with our understanding of the classic Antigone, nor can we deny the unyielding authority of the classic, even now. In acknowledgment of the legend's multitude of shapes, one can appreciate her transformations across cultures, eras, languages, and mediums.

My title for this section has promised an investigation of the post-modern approach to Antigone, or, the distrust of original ideologies and the push to re-examine the basic assumptions of Western philosophy about art prior to the 20th century. Part of the post-modern approach is simply new renderings of a classic story, which the artistic thrust of Antigones in the 20th century exemplifies. For a more explicit call to scholarship to re-examine the original and to look for what is unsaid and yet said, I turn to Heidegger and what Steiner denoted as the theme of *homecoming* in the 20th century. The first thing I want to mention about Heidegger is that the influence of Hölderlin's translation is obvious. Or, as Steiner explains, "One cannot separate the 1804 *Antigonä* from important tenets in Heidegger's doctrine of man's exile from and attempted homecoming to a natural order of 'earthbound' and of civic being."[130] The doctrine to which Steiner refers can be found in a chapter entitled "The Ode on Man in Sophocles' *Antigone*" in Heidegger's *An Introduction to Metaphysics.* Heidegger's primary source of inspiration for the

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[128] Steiner, George. *Antigones*. New York: 1984. (296-7).
[129] Ibid.,
[130] Ibid., 68.

chapter is Hölderlin's translation of the first choral poem in Sophocles' *Antigone.* It is not the figure of Antigone who represents the doctrine of homecoming in Heidegger's interpretation, but rather the three phases that the opening choral poem of the play *Antigone* puts forth (in Heidegger's reading of it). The quote above from Steiner entails these three phases: the first phase of the poem depicts man's exile from a natural order, the second phase depicts man's attempted homecoming to a natural order, and the third phase discloses the doctrine that man's being is always that of an exile and of belonging to a natural civic order at the same time.

We are first exiles because, "The unhomely [Unheimische] prevents us from making ourselves at home because it is overpowering. But man is the strangest of all, not only because he passes his life amid the strange understood in this sense but because he departs from his customary, familiar limits, because he is the violent one, who, tending toward the strange in the sense of the overpowering, surpasses the limit of the familiar [das Heimische]."[131] Man is strange because he strives to move beyond natural limits. The poem specifically refers to the manner in which man builds and creates tools with which he can conquer the obstacles nature puts in his way. Heidegger finds the Greek definition of man within the choral poem's expression of man as the oddest creature on this earth because he obstructs the laws of nature. He claims, "In calling man 'the strangest of all' it gives the authentic Greek definition of man."[132] Man is defined by his distinction from the rest and the Greek distinction is man's irrevocable quest to overcome natural limitations.

Heidegger provides a vivid and poetic picture of man in which, "Into this life as it rolls along self-contained, extraordinary in its own sphere and structure and ground, man casts his snares and nets; he snatches the living creatures out of their order, shuts them up in his pens and

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[131] Heidegger, Martin. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Yale Press: 1959. (89-90).
[132] Ibid., 90.

enclosures, and forces them under his yokes. On the one hand eruption and upheaval. On the other capture and constraint."[133] Man's attempt to conquer the natural is an attempt to make himself at home in response to his *unheimische*, his exile. The extent of his exile is something that man names for himself because, "How far man is from being at home in his own essence is revealed by his opinion of himself as he who invented and could have invented language and understanding, building and poetry."[134] As the arbiter of language and all that he does with it, man understands himself through his own linguistic examination of who he is in relation to his world—to nature and to others.

Man is strange because of his power to go against the natural course of things. He is stranger still for being able to understand himself to be doing so. But, there is one natural course that man cannot overcome, and so, "All violence shatters against one thing. That is death. It is an end beyond all consummation [Vollendung], a limit beyond all limits. Here there is no breaking-out or breaking-up, no capture or subjugation. But this strange and alien [unheimlich] thing that banishes us once and for all from everything in which we are at home is no particular event that must be named among others because it, too ultimately happens."[135] To break this down, we should first consider where violence enters into the discussion. Violence is man's attempt at homecoming. Man uses violence against nature to master its limiting enforcements. But no amount of violence undoes man's ultimate limitation—death. Nor can man flee from death the way he can from sickness or bad weather. There is no fight or flight when it comes to death. There is only an end beyond all ends and, unlike the natural creatures of the earth, man gives this end a name, attributes it to his being, and calls himself mortal.

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[133] Ibid., 92.
[134] Ibid., 94.
[135] Ibid., 95.

By understanding and naming death as the ultimate end to being, man begins to define himself as being. As Heidegger expounds, "It is not only when he comes to die, but always and essentially that man is without issue in the face of death. Insofar as man *is*, he stands in the issuelessness of death. Thus his being-there is the happening of strangeness. With the naming of *this* strange and powerful thing, the poetic project of being and human essence sets its own limit upon itself."[136] The start of the project to understand 'being' is launched by the definition of mortality—of man's limits. Man knows he *is* because he knows he will someday *not be*. Man sees other limits and sets out to overcome them, but knows that there is a limit that cannot be overcome. The *strange* part is not that man is limited, but that man knows this end and names it.

But for Heidegger, the Greeks only get us started on the poetic project of being and human essence, which we ought to move forward with and push beyond natural law as man is known to do. His view of the Greeks is as follows, "The Greeks had a profound sense of this suddenness and uniqueness of being-there, forced on them by being itself, which disclosed itself to them as *physis* and *logos* and *dikē*."[137] The Greeks understood their *being there* with a primordial immediacy we no longer know because it was disclosed to them. For us, being is not immediately disclosed. It is the ancient Greeks who disclose it to us. They knew immediately. We learn it from them. But, Heidegger insists, "We shall fail to understand the mysteriousness of the essence of being-human, thus experienced and poetically carried back to its ground, if we snatch at value judgments of any kind."[138] A snap judgment about the goodness or badness of man fails to gain an appropriate insight from the poetics of the Greeks. In other words, we ought not seek counsel from the plays directly.

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[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid., 100.
[138] Ibid.

If the Greeks disclose the aspect of being human that needs to be there—to come home—it would be a failure to rest upon, "The evaluation of being-human as arrogance and presumption in the pejorative sense."[139] The reason for its failure would be that it, "takes man out of his essential need as the in-cident. To judge in this way is to take man as something already-there, to put this something into an empty space, and appraise it according to some external table of values."[140] Heidegger's insistence upon reading the choral ode in phases captures the idea of what he argues would be a failure. In one phase, we get a sense of man's need. In another, we get a sense of man's failure to accomplish his need. To read the poem simply as an evaluation of man's failure misses the third phase—the disclosure of man's condition as well as the fact that its being disclosed means man *does* create and name his own limits.

Heidegger objects to interpreting an evaluative judgment of man's proud overstepping from the poem. Heidegger acknowledges that, "This interpretation might even find some basis in the concluding lines of the poem."[141] The final lines of the poem as Heidegger cites them are, "May such a man never frequent my hearth;/ May my mind never share the presumption/ of him who does this."[142] Yet, Heidegger maintains that, "the final words of the chorus do not contradict what has previously been said about being-human,"[143] and that, "their attitude of rejection is a direct and complete confirmation of the strangeness and uncanniness of human being."[144] So, regardless of the final evaluation the chorus makes, Heidegger tells us that the third phase demonstrates a paradigmatic example of how strange man is because part of his need is to keep attempting to overcome his failure. Man needs to push his limits. Man eventually meets his

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[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid., 87.
[143] Ibid., 100.
[144] Ibid.

limits. Man rejects himself for pushing limits in full acknowledgment that it is a human necessity to strive against natural boundaries. The third phase, as Heidegger reads it, is actually an exhibition rather than a condemnation.

But whom is the chorus talking about in this exhibition disguised as a condemnation? Heidegger says the chorus is declaring that, "One who is *thus* (namely the strangest of all) should be excluded from hearth and council."[145] The poem from Heidegger's citation refers to the unfortunate man who, "Rising high above his place, he who for the sake of adventure takes the nonessent for essent loses his place in the end."[146] The strangest of all is the one who pushes the ultimate limit—death. The one who loses his place is the one who defies the laws of mortality. Heidegger, however, avers that we must not read the rejection of this man as the ultimate meaning of the poem.

Heidegger insists we gather from the second phase is that, "In venturing to master being, he must risk the assault of the nonessent, *mē kalon*, he must risk dispersion, instability, disorder, mischief. The higher the summit of historical being-there, the deeper will be the abyss, the more abrupt the fall into the unhistorical, which merely thrashes around in issueless and placeless confusion."[147] Assaulting the nonessent is part of man's failed attempt at homecoming. And in order to really understand the third phase, "the exegete must use violence. He must seek the essential where nothing more is to be found by the scientific interpretation that brands as unscientific everything that transcends its limits."[148] In keeping with our strange human nature to push beyond natural limits, Heidegger affirms that we must not "content ourselves with what the

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[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid., 87.
[147] Ibid., 98.
[148] Ibid.

poem directly says,"[149] because, "the actual interpretation must show what does not stand in the words and is nevertheless said."[150] Heidegger's argument is that the best interpretation of the poem reveals what is not explicit, or, discloses what is not directly disclosed. The direct reading is that any man who tries to transcend the limits of his mortality will fail to do so and will fall from his place, so we should avoid that man and avoid being like that man. Heidegger says this direct reading of the third phase does not encapsulate the meaning that can be inferred from the three phases together. Heidegger claims that a true exegesis of the play needs to do violence to the original by inferring meaning beyond a direct reading.

From Heidegger, we have explicit instructions to look beneath the surface of the plays and to find meaning beyond what the chorus and the characters directly tell us. In the work of psychoanalysts like Lacan as well as each of the 20th century artists and thinkers mentioned in this section, there are exhaustive examples of exactly what Heidegger says to do with the Greek plays. Of course, Hegel, Goethe, Hölderlin, Kierkegaard, and others from previous centuries also did precisely what Heidegger says ought to be done with the Antigone legend. The task taken up before, through, and beyond the years of 'Antigone Fever' is to read the play indirectly and through the lens of other indirect interpretations. The approach is what Heidegger explicitly says—to find meaning in what is unsaid and yet said. His instructions are also to *not* accept the direct counsel of the choral poem. And so, the post-modern Antigones do not render her classically in terms of direct counsel. A classical rendering would reflect Aristotle's account of Antigone's counsel. The classic interpretation (that we still see up through Hegel and his contemporaries) is that she argues against a particular law by appealing to natural universal law.

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[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

The post-modern interpretation popularized in the 20th century is that she operates off of desires and exemplifies an excessively strange psychological condition, just like her father.

Lacan calls Antigone enigmatic and inhuman, but not monstrous.[151] Furthermore, he insists that Antigone is a figure of pure desire. Her desire takes shape in the form of criminality.[152] Antigone appears cold, inflexible, and completely misguided because of her particular affinity with death. Her tragic flaw or failure is, for Lacan, that the only way Antigone is able to see life is through the lens of death.[153] Lacan explains that Antigone's atë (tragic fault or blindness) is that Antigone sees life through death rather than seeing death through life. He proposes that what Freud calls the 'death instinct' shines from Antigone as she, "pushes the pure and simple desire of death as such. She incarnates that desire," in a sense that Lacan wants to call Dionysian.[154] The desire of Antigone is, according to Lacan, the criminal desire. Her desire moves against the communal wishes and toward unapologetic crime.[155] The movement of her desire is one we can understand through her choice to bury Polyneices as her last act. When she chooses to defy the law on behalf of her criminal brother, she chooses crime for her last act. She defers death in order to join the ranks of her criminal brother and father. Lacan interprets Antigone's final action as evidence of her pure desire to push the limits the law.

The new meanings post-modern Antigones develop from an indirect approach follow from a longstanding tradition of indirectly approaching *Antigone*. For instance, Heidegger's interpretation comes through from the interpretive framework of Hölderlin's translation. Recall that Lacan, Derrida, and the students of Lacan and Derrida consider Hölderlin's translation

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[151] Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII.* Trans. by Dennis Porter. London and New York: 2008. (324).
[152] Ibid. 348.
[153] Ibid. 345.
[154] Ibid. 348.
[155] Ibid.

exemplary. Deriving new interpretations of *Antigone* by looking indirectly at what is said in Sophocles' plays is not a new approach taken up in the 20th century. However, there is a notable spike in reproductions of Antigone in the 20th century and they tend to follow in the tradition that Heidegger expounds—the tradition of doing violence to the original by pushing beyond its natural limitations. The next section observes some of the most prominent readings of the Antigone legend in our current century. In the year 2000, Butler's *Antigone's Claim* was published and a new century picked up the task of maintaining that what is unsaid in *Antigone* means more than what is said (and there is so much that is unsaid).

Millennial Antigones and Political Disobedience

Butler's Antigone is molded for comparison to those fighting for gay marriage. Butler pontificates, "No matter what one ultimately thinks of the political value of gay marriage, and I myself am a skeptic here for political reasons I outline elsewhere, the public debate on its legitimacy becomes the occasion for a set of homophobic discourses that must be resisted on independent grounds."[156] According to Butler, Antigone is driven to death by the fact that her desires are taboo and as such she is cut off from the possibility of love. Butler asks that we, "Consider that the horror of incest, the moral revulsion it compels in some, is not that far afield from the same horror and revulsion felt toward lesbian and gay sex, and is not unrelated to the intense moral condemnation of voluntary single parenting, or gay parenting, or parenting arrangements with more than two adults involved."[157] Butler likens the tragedy of *Antigone* to the despair felt by those whose love and kinship relations are met with homophobia and legal restrictions. Butler's argument is that the taboo and revulsion around incest is similar to that which is directed at non-heteronormative kinships.

Some scholars call Antigone a queer heroine;[158] however, Butler concludes that, "Although not quite a queer heroine, Antigone does emblematize a certain heterosexual fatality that remains to be read."[159] Butler's Antigone does not, "achieve another sexuality, one that is *not* heterosexuality, but she does seem to deinstitute heterosexuality by refusing to do what is necessary to stay alive for Haemon, by refusing to become a mother and a wife, by scandalizing the public with her wavering gender, by embracing death as her bridal chamber and identifying

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[156] Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim.* New York: 2000. (70).
[157] Ibid. 71.
[158] See "The Queer Heroics of Butler's Antigone" by Marie Draz.
[159] Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim.* New York: 2000. (72).

her tomb as a ‘deep dug home’ (kataskaphes oikesis).”[160] In choosing death on behalf of honoring her brother Polyneices rather than becoming a wife to Haemon and a mother to their potential children, Antigone represents the desire for an alternative kind of kinship relationship. Unable to have the kind of relationship Antigone truly desires, she forfeits life altogether. The justification Butler gives for this conclusion is based upon her decision to choose death on behalf of her brother and at the same time sacrifice her life with her fiancé and potential children.

Butler turns to the events of the other two *Theban Plays* to explain the process by which Antigone makes this kind of decision. She first recaps the events of *Oedipus the King*, wherein, “Oedipus, of course, unknowingly sleeps with his mother and slays his father, and is driven into the wilderness accompanied by Antigone.”[161] The story of Oedipus and Antigone in the wilderness is the next of the *Theban Plays* and in, “*Oedipus at Colonus* the two of them, along with a small party of followers, are given shelter by Theseus in a land governed by Athens.”[162] The events in this play are important for Butler’s interpretation of Antigone’s decisions because, “Antigone not only loses her brother to her father’s curse, words that quite literally yield the force of annihilation, but she then loses her father to death by the curse that is upon him. Words and deeds become fatally entangled in the familial scene.”[163] Butler evokes a moment in the *Theban Plays* prior to the play *Antigone* to reveal that, “Antigone worries over their [her brothers’] fate even as she embarks upon her own course of action for which death is a necessary conclusion. Her desire to save her brothers from their fate is overwhelmed, it seems, by her desire to join them in their fate.”[164] For Butler, Antigone’s desires are wrapped up in her desires

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[160] Ibid. 76.
[161] Ibid., 59.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid., 60.

for her father, brother, and death. Still, her choice to bury Polyneices before joining the others in their fate is what makes Antigone the kind of heroine that evokes the issue of social taboo restricting certain kinds of kinships. Her choice to bury Polyneices, then, is Butler's claim to the unspoken desire of Antigone. As Heidegger instructs, Butler takes what is said and interprets indirectly what ought to be inferred.

Butler's Antigone defers death to bury a man she loves more than her fiancé, because, "Indeed, she takes her brother to be her only one—she would risk defying the official edict for no kin but Polyneices."[165] Butler, like Lacan, considers the conflation of brother and father for Antigone and furthers her argument that, "Antigone's assertive burial, which she performs twice, might be understood to be for both, a burial that at once reflects and institutes the equivocation of brother and father." [166] Antigone's action of burying Polyneices becomes a double action by Butler's interpretation. It does not matter if it is for Polyneices or Oedipus in the end because, "They are, after all, already interchangeable for her [Antigone], and yet her act reinstitutes and reelaborates that interchangeability."[167] Butler's Antigone loves two dead men: Oedipus and Polyneices. Antigone's love for these two men is expressed in her deferral of death and in her action of burial. Butler's Antigone wishes for a kind of life and love with kin that cannot be, and so she turns to death.

Responding in large part to Butler, Tina Chanter argues that, "Antigone's excessive character—her excess of love for her brother and her refusal to be circumscribed by Creon's law—subsists less in the appeal her character makes to unchanging, timeless, eternal laws, and still less in an Hegelian invocation of her sublimity…than in her strategic political reemergence

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[165] Ibid., 61.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.

at times of political crises, which tells a different story."[168] Chanter proposes that scholarship on Antigone must reach beyond gender and/or incestuous desire and into the politics of race and exclusion because, "While Irigaray and Butler have argued in different ways that questions of sexuality are central to Antigone's legacy, the logic of Antigone extends beyond these questions. Not only does it lend itself to commentary on racial issues of postcolonial identity, but it also points out how exclusionary logics reiterate themselves." Chanter determines that Antigone's claim that she did nothing wrong by burying her brother since he was not a slave points beyond questions of sexuality and lends itself to an expansive array of questions concerning issues of politically reinforced racial exclusion.

Chanter's proposition is that as scholars we continue to, "Explore the complex interrelation between race and sexuality, whereby sexuality comes to be abjected in a racially fraught context in a play that nonetheless acknowledges at another level how gender and race operate as metaphors for one another."[169] Chanter's project is to move beyond gendered readings of Antigone and toward racially concerned readings so as to render new readings that acknowledge both race and gender at work in the play. Given Antigone's emphasis on the burial of the body, her performative act serves to present a discussion of the rights of the body in terms of gender as well as race. Chanter's project aims to broaden interpretations of Antigone by pointing us beyond the stakes of gender. Chanter's Antigone acts on behalf of protecting her brother from the dehumanizing status of slavery. Chanter determines that we should still consider what Butler and Irigaray tell us about exclusionary issues concerning gender and sexuality, but also include a more open discussion of exclusionary politics and logic.

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[168] *Feminist Readings of Antigone.* Ed. By Fanny Söderbäck. "The Performative Politics and Rebirth of Antigone" by Tina Chanter. (83).
[169] Ibid., 85.

Chanter proposes that, "Antigone's burial of her brother should be read not only as her effort to disambiguate her brother [Polynices] from her father; it should also be read as Antigone's insistence on violating the law in order to usher her brother into a community whose humanity is underwritten by the implicit denial of humanity to those slaves for whom Antigone would not have transgressed the law in order to bury."[170] Chanter interprets Antigone's actions as the performance of her desire to uphold her family's status as being at least above that of slaves, whose bodies were not buried. Chanter's claim upon what is unspoken that underlies what Antigone does speak regards the status of humanity that is stripped away from those reduced to the status of slavery.[171] Her argument adds the interpretation of what Antigone indirectly tells us about slavery to the interpretations from Butler and Irigaray about what Antigone indirectly tells us about gender and sexuality, but I've yet to directly discuss Irigaray in this chapter. Chanter's response to Irigaray concerns Irigaray's work on *Antigone* in *Speculum*, but Irigaray has come out with a new book featuring a chapter on *Antigone* since Chanter's *Whose Antigone?*: *The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery* published in 2011.

In her work, *In the Beginning She Was*, Luce Irigaray maintains that Antigone's devotion to death and burial is actually a devotion to life and the cosmic order because, "The lack of a burial for [Polynices] harms life itself for all living beings, breaking the economy of relations between earth and sky, air and sun."[172] For Irigaray, Antigone's devotion to death is a devotion to life and the cosmic order. Irigaray's Antigone makes a sacrificial and spiritual feminine act because, "Woman is the guardian of blood."[173] A woman who serves her dead kin does so as the

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[170] Chanter, Tina. *Whose Antigone?: The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery.* Suny: 2011. (141).
[171] Chanter, Tina. *Whose Antigone?: The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery.* Suny: 2011.
[172] Irigaray, Luce. *In the Beginning, She Was.* NY: 2013. (120).
[173] *Feminist Readings of Antigone.* Ed. By Fanny Söderbäck. "The Eternal Irony of the Community" By Luce Irigaray. (108).

spiritual guardian of the cosmic order and, "when woman renounces her claim to desire, external things are positively molded, their forms are determined by a self that is not remarked by any individual pathos or by any contingent arbitrariness, things in which the mind might intuit itself as objectal reality."[174] Antigone's renunciation of her life for the sake of her brother's burial moves her spirit away from the individual and toward the universal. Her obedience to her male kin through her act of burial becomes "the final meaning of the obedience demanded of woman. She is merely the passage that serves to transform the inessential whims of a still sensible and material nature into universal will. Woman is the guardian of blood."[175] Antigone's service to the dead and sacrifice of her life on behalf of her male counterparts is part of the transference of the organic body to the eternal cosmos. In a sense, Irigaray points back to Aristotle's account of Antigone's argument on behalf of universal law as opposed to particular law, but that is also simply to point back to Hegel, whose interpretation points back to Aristotle. The difference is that Aristotle says *all men* understand universal laws and are subject to them (which is precisely what makes them universal, whereas Hegel and Irigaray say Antigone moves toward universal law rather than particular law because she is a woman.

Irigaray's Antigone is moved to act as she does because, "The purpose that moves blood relatives to action is the care of the *bloodless*, their inherent duty is to ensure *burial for the dead*, thus changing a natural phenomenon into a spiritual act."[176] Antigone must bury the dead and release the spirit from the body, fulfilling the cosmic order through her act of submission and sacrifice. This part of Irigaray's interpretation is a classical read akin to Aristotle, but Irigaray continues to make the move of attributing guardianship over blood to *woman.* Antigone is bound

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[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid., 99-100.

by her gender to act in service to her dead brother for cosmic order. She moves toward death out of a divinely inspired duty for order. Irigaray's phenomenological read of Antigone opposes and at the same time embraces Hegel's Antigone through a feminist interpretation of her obedience to divine law. Simply put, both Hegel and Irigaray explain Antigone's move to action by means of her gender. The indirect reading of Sophocles' work in this manner is that Antigone does what she does because she is a woman, which tells us something about women. Again, this account is not what Sophocles' *Antigone* says directly. Irigaray's interpretation is a 21st century feminist take on a 19th century interpretation of Antigone's quest to bury the dead.

As you can already see, scholarship on Antigone often finds a selection of something that the play says directly and then provides a novel and indirect interpretation loosely based upon the direct saying. Bonnie Honig's *Antigone, Interrupted* investigates various indirect readings that she calls interruptions, which comprise contemporary scholarship on Antigone. Honig joins the conversation by offering her own rereading of the play *Antigone*. Honig first introduces Antigone as a figure that is repeatedly interrupted by varied interpretations that serve the purposes of the current political state of things. Honig explains that, the various contending readings of Antigone that have filled the pages of political theory and philosophy books tend to identify Antigone with one of three roles,"[177] or at least, "Since G.W.F. Hegel first canonized the play for modern philosophy in the early nineteenth century, admiring the heroine who would go on to haunt his modern state as its eternal irony."[178] In *Antigone, Interrupted,* Honig promises to bring forth a new role to posit against the prior three, which she lists as:

> (i) heroic conscientious objector who on political grounds violates an unjust law, challenges a powerful sovereign, and all by herself dares speak truth to power. This is the

[177] Honig, Bonnie. *Antigone, Interrupted.* Cambridge: 2013. (7).
[178] Ibid.

> legalists' Antigone, invariably paired, whether or not to her advantage, with Socrates, that other famous civil disobedient.
>
> (ii) humanist lamenter of the dead, grieving sister/mother/daughter, whose cries for her brother accentuate a sense of loss said to be familiar to all humans, instancing a universal that is pointedly poised against time-bound, divisive, and merely political distinctions between friend and enemy.
>
> (iii) monstrous creature of desire unbound by the ordinary satisfactions of everyday life and therefore willing, even passionately eager, to die for her cause.[179]

Honig promises her readers, "To these I add another; or better, against these I posit another."[180] The approach she takes to posit a new role for Antigone is twofold. The first part she titles 'Interruption' and the second part she titles 'Conspiracy.' In the former, she surveys Antigone's impact on political theory and looks toward the reworking of it. In the latter, she offers new readings with the hope of inspiring, "democratic theorists today seeking to theorize politics as a meaning-making practice, as action in concert on behalf of collective life, rather than as the sorts of solitary, heroic performances that may sometimes shift the plates of tectonic politics but also seem fated to rock undecidably on the border of self-indulgence and madness."[181] The main focus of the new reading is Honig's proposition that Ismene and Antigone conspired against Creon. Honig's indirect reading is a conspiracy theory about the sisters. Her Antigone is a conspirator against the sovereign authority.

Part of Honig's project is to assemble new readings of the play that, "show how selective were the canonical interpretations that generated the iconic tragic heroine and how symptomatic

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[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid., xiii.

these insistent receptions were of her readers' needs, over time, for a certain kind of heroine."[182] Honig lists the kinds of heroines past canonical interpretations have generated based upon certain needs: "Christian martyr, Romantic suicide, idealized sister, heroic individual, maternal lamenter."[183] Though a substantial amount of Honig's book is devoted to positing new readings that go against the old ones that were developed for the needs of readers at the time, she grants that, "the new Antigone developed here may be a product of *its* moment as well."[184] Her acknowledgment here is much like Steiner's conclusive remarks about the endurance of the Antigone legend. Steiner's *Antigones* is a 20th century guide to observing the way canonical readings and renderings of Antigone have reflected the period within which they appear. Steiner projects that new Antigones will continue to take on new forms as she meets the needs of new readers for new times. Antigones after Steiner, such as Honig's, endure with a post-modern ownership of the fact that they are using Antigone to suit their needs.

The new role Honig assigns to Antigone is a figure for the politics of conspiracy and counter-sovereignty that emphasizes equality of life.[185] To the contrary, Fanny Söderbäck offers a feminist political read of Antigone in which Antigone's action stands for democratic values rather than against sovereignty. Söderbäck explains that since, "Antigone refuses to let the ruler interfere with private matters such as grief and mourning. And she simultaneously refuses to let the city be run as a (patriarchal) household. By transgressing the law she sets a new standard for lawmaking. She introduces a new model of the political, a model based on speech and action

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[182] Ibid., 7.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid., 10.

rather than tyrannical rule."[186] Söderbäck's Antigone represents a democratic ideal in her defiant act to protect the separation of public and private spheres and rights. Antigone is a masculinized political hero for Söderbäck in that, "*Her* heroic death simultaneously makes her a man, and she becomes the founding principle of a political order where action is carried out by the many and no longer appropriated by the king alone."[187] Antigone's final and fatal action is done in service to the gods, but not in order to undermine human law. Rather, she introduces a new kind of democratic human law, which defines the separation of public and privates spheres.

Söderbäck revisits the idea that Antigone transgresses the law because, "In protecting divine law, however, Antigone simply draws a clear distinction between the private and public realms—a distinction that would come to lie at the very foundation of the democratic polis as Arendt characterizes it."[188] Antigone's transgression is, in that case, a movement toward a progression in human law and democratic values rather than the destruction of the sovereign authority. Söderbäck argues that Antigone's unspoken underlying mission is to maintain a separation between the private realm and the public realm in such a way that it promotes democracy and undermines tyranny.

So, as you can see, the unspoken underlying mission of Antigone is as prominent in the 21st century as it has been for centuries past. Today, Antigone continues to be a compound of art and politics. Anne Carson's *Antigonick* (2013) is currently a popular book for curriculum on ethics. While technically a book and not a play, much of *Antigonick's* contemporary appeal is due to its comic book style. It is a book that is like a cross between a graphic novel and a screenplay. Its virtual imagery has given it a certain appeal to young audiences, which appeals to

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[186] *Feminist Readings of Antigone.* Ed. By Fanny Söderbäck. "Impossible Mourning" By Fanny Söderbäck. (70).
[187] Ibid., 71.
[188] Ibid., 69-70.

the pedagogical sensibilities of those adapting their classical coursework to the interests of their students. Even more recently, Slovaj Źiźek published his *Antigone* (2016), which adds a scene from Antigone's afterlife that reflects his politically inclined notions of irreconcilability.

The Antigone legend also bears a strong presence in the discipline of psychology and psychoanalytic theory. Julia Kristeva speaks directly to Antigone and says, "An unfathomable, indefinable figure; lacking a fixed identity in your very authenticity; you escape yourself, Antigone. I understand that you prefer the obscurity of the underworld, for you are not of this world. Yet, there is nothing of indecision in your evasion: you make the law (*nomos*) for yourself, all alone!"[189] Kristeva calls Antigone unfathomable and indefinable because of her insistent movement beyond the limits of life and away from the social political sphere of being. A bit more harshly, Kristeva continues to tell Antigone, "In your insolent autonomy as a daughter of Oedipus the transgressor, you know in advance that you are excluded from political justice, which is to say from human norms. But your knowledge (which testifies all the same to you 'exists within' this social world, at least in part) does not bother you at all."[190] Kristeva's Antigone is an uncanny hero because she is not held back by the fear of death or her knowledge of her heritage of political exclusion.

Why should Antigone be unfathomable, though? Why are we still puzzled in the 21st century by Antigone when we have a plethora of interpretations spanning across a multitude of centuries? Furthermore, whose Antigone puzzles us? Scholars who have done extensive work on anthologizing accounts of Antigone such as Steiner and Honig report that it is not the Antigone of Sophocles who puzzles us. It is not the classical read that makes her out to be

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[189] *Feminist Readings of Antigone.* Ed. By Fanny Söderbäck. "Antigone: Limit and Horizon" By Julia Kristeva. (215).
[190] Ibid.

bewildering. It is the more recent surplus of Antigones that reveal a strange and impossible character.

It is because this overabundance of indirectly interpreted Antigones that she appears to have become strange and impossible in a way that Sophocles' *Antigone* is not. Through these indirect readings we are granted new Creons, new Ismenes, new Antigones, and even new meanings of the choral poems. In the following section of this chapter, I begin my demonstration that the Antigone of Sophocles can be easily understood if we read her character's trajectory in the order of the myth, examine the difference between her and Ismene, and take her at her word when she explains herself. It is because the legend of Antigone has endured over centuries and taken on new forms that Antigone is now elusive. It is because the tradition has been to read *Antigone* indirectly and seek out meaning that is not explicitly stated that she has become unfathomable. If we read her character directly throughout the three plays in the order of her age progression, her argument should be as clear to us as it was to the Greeks. One might even consider her counsel wise.

Antigone and Interruption

The title of Honig's book (*Antigone, Interrupted*) is an allusion to the book (later made into a film), *Girl, Interrupted*. Anyone familiar with either the book or film *Girl, Interrupted* could infer that Honig is connecting Antigone to a story about young women in a mental institution. Prominent renderings of Antigone in the 20th and 21st century tend to portray her as enigmatic at best (hence the need to bring forth her unsaid intentions to complete the story). At worst, they portray her as completely disturbed and destructive (Źiźek). Butler specifically refers to Antigone as an example of Freud's melancholic. According to Freud "The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment."[191] It is quite clear that Butler's Antigone is not incapable of love and in fact stands accused of taking her love for her brother too far. Butler insists that Oedipus condemns Antigone to a life in which she will never have greater love than the love of her father. Butler's Antigone is melancholic in the sense that she cannot act upon her love as opposed to being psychologically incapable of it. Freud's account of melancholia is that it hinders the capacity to love. Butler's account of melancholia is that it is caused by the inability to speak one's love publically. Butler's Antigone carries her love too far, but she also exhibits the incapacity to speak and act upon her love due to social taboo. Butler's claim, as we will continue to see in later chapters, is that the psychological pathology of melancholia can be rooted in social restriction of desired kinship love relations.

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[191] Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works,* (237-258). Section 243.

I certainly do not reject the possibility that social restrictions upon love relations could cause a melancholic disposition. Freud remarks that one never really knows the direct cause of a melancholic disposition. The reason for this is that the loss resulting in melancholia is an ambiguous loss. A melancholic person cannot say what is the source of their melancholy, which is precisely part of what makes it melancholia versus mourning and what makes the former pathological and the latter normal. We must understand that there is substantial overlap between the symptoms of mourning and the symptoms of melancholia. Even if Antigone exhibits most of the symptoms of melancholia, it does not mean she is melancholic unless she exhibits the symptoms that are distinctly melancholic and not part of the normal process of mourning.

Freud tells us that melancholia and mourning have very similar characteristics, but there is a difference: "The disturbance of self-regard is absent in mourning; but otherwise the features are the same."[192] One key distinction between mourning and melancholia is that mourning does not involve a disturbed self-regard whereas melancholia does. To be as generous as possible to Butler's claims about Antigone's melancholia we would need to take Butler and Kierkegaard together and say that because Antigone knows she takes her love for her brother too far, she secretly possesses guilt for her family's incestuous heritage. It cannot simply be that Antigone's public mourning or defiance in the name of mourning makes her melancholic.

As Freud explains, excessive mourning is not melancholia, but rather, "Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world—in so far as it does not recall him—the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and the same

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[192] Ibid.

turning away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of him."[193] It is hardly contestable that Antigone defends her right to mourn her loss. Mourning her loss means a painful frame of mind, a loss of interest in the outside world, and the struggle to form a new attachment to a new object of love. Freud further observes, "It is easy to see that this inhibition and circumscription of the ego is the expression of an exclusive devotion to mourning which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests. It is really only because we know so well how to explain it that this attitude does not seem to us pathological."[194] Especially, if the conversation is inviting Freud's conception of mourning and melancholia, the concern that Antigone shows loyal devotion to her lost loved one should be no concern at all. We should understand that she does precisely what the process of mourning entails. This process is not pathological because we understand it and in most cases, attachments are overcome by accepting the reality of the loss.

In mourning, "Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object."[195] When a loved object is lost, one realizes one must move on from attachments to the object but, "This demand arouses understandable opposition—it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them."[196] So, there is a natural struggle produced when the reality that the object is gone means that one can no longer maintain the same attachment to the object because the abandoning of a libidinal position is not taking place willfully, but rather out of necessity. In some instances, "This opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place

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[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.

and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis. Normally, respect for reality gains the day."[197] Abandoning former attachments is known to be difficult. It is not abnormal to need to undergo a lengthy or difficult process in order for someone in mourning to replace one libidinal position with another.

The process of mourning is difficult because, "Nevertheless its [reality's] orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it."[198] The process of mourning requires time, energy, and devotion to each memory of the lost individual. Furthermore, it is painful. Freud acknowledges the fact that it must be painful and admits that, "Why this compromise by which the command of reality is carried out piecemeal should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics."[199] The pain is, of course, a major component of the difficulty in mourning and Freud comments, "It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a matter of course by us."[200] Mourning, unlike melancholia, is a process with an end in sight because, "The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed, the ego becomes free and uninhibited again."[201] The key point here is that regardless of the painful and exclusionary aspects of mourning, an ego must undergo the process to free itself.

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[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid., Section 244.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid.

The work of mourning is not problematic. It is a necessity for the liberation of the ego. When the work of mourning is subverted, melancholia becomes a danger. A salient difference between mourning and melancholia is that, "melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious."[202] The pain of mourning has to do with the conscious acceptance of the reality that a loved object no longer exists. In melancholia, the loss has been subverted to the realm of the unconscious. It is hard to understand what loss someone melancholic is suffering from because he or she does is not conscious of it. Mourning means the ego is consciously consumed with thoughts, memories, and activities related to their loss until the process is complete. Melancholia is different because the loss that consumes the ego is unconscious and, as such, much more difficult to understand.

Whereas, "In mourning we found that the inhibition and loss of interest are fully accounted for by the work of mourning in which the ego is absorbed,"[203] we find that, "In melancholia, the unknown loss will result in a similar internal work and will therefore be responsible for the melancholic inhibition."[204] When someone is in mourning, we know what consumes his or her thoughts and activities. In cases of melancholia, "The difference is that the inhibition of the melancholic seems puzzling to us because we cannot see what it is that is absorbing him so entirely."[205] If one is melancholic, it is not clear what is consuming their thoughts and activities. All we know is that something is consuming them to the extent that they exhibit all of the behaviors of mourning because their ego is doing the same work, albeit unconsciously. There is even an additional behavior present in the melancholic alone.

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[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid., Section 245.

Notably, "The melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning—an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale."[206] There is something about the melancholic's self-regard that does not align with someone in mourning. Perhaps the clearest way of understanding the distinction is as follows: "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished."[207] In either mourning or melancholia, one is utterly absorbed in some process that alters and inhibits normal patterns of behavior, activity, and mood. In mourning, one is clearly experiencing an actual loss and is conscious of that loss. In melancholia, the loss is ambiguous and unconscious. The activity consuming the mourner is the activity of mourning (honoring the memory of the lost loved one, a proper burial, a service of some kind, the shedding of tears, abstaining from social activity and other pleasures, etc.). The activity consuming the melancholic is the denigration of the ego.

With Freud's definition of melancholia in mind, is Antigone really a good fit for melancholia? Antigone makes it clear that she believes she did the right thing. There is nothing about her act or herself that she denounces as morally deplorable. Even if we go further back from Butler to Hölderlin's Antigonä or Kierkegaard's Antigone, we are not going to find an Antigone that thinks she's wrong. She might have alternative justifications as to why she's right (as opposed to the classical justification Aristotle offers). She might even appear deranged to the audience. In Kierkegaard's interpretation she could be suffering from tremendous inherited guilt. In any of these cases however, she still has reasons for doing what she does that she

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[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid.

believes to be sound reasons. She stands by her decisions no matter what is motivating them (according to whomever is interpreting her motivations and justifications). She honored her brother. Creon thought it was wrong and though he punishes her for it, Antigone does not blame herself. She blames Creon. She also believes that the wise will know she was right to do what she did because her brother was irreplaceable. A husband or child, she says, is replaceable.[208] Freud's characterization of melancholia is self-demoralization. Antigone is simply not that.

I must acknowledge, however, the rationality behind claims to Antigone's melancholic disposition. For one thing, her decision to act in knowledge that the consequence is death can reasonably be interpreted as self-destructive. Seeking or expecting punishment is the mode of the melancholic. If it is not obvious why death is preferable for Antigone given her circumstances, Antigone appears to be self-destructive. But Antigone says that the wise will know she was right. This, of course, does not mean it is unreasonable to suppose she is wrong about that. As we will see as we continue to explore Steiner's *Antigones*, there are substantial differences between Sophocles' Antigone and the Antigones thereafter; and each new Antigone bears the influence of the Antigones before her. The classical reason for her decision as Aristotle makes plain is distorted into a plethora of motivations throughout the history of her legend. Antigone becomes a figure referred to as 'melancholic,' though she was not always so. We can see how such a depiction of her evolves, but she was not always a spirit of gloom *and* mental derangement—not even in the hands of Hegel.

To say that Sophocles' Antigone is simply self-destructive requires undermining her rationale or suspecting her of ulterior motivations. If we accept her rationale and the reasons for acting that she provides, the clear conclusion is that she believes she is doing the right thing even

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[208] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 891-928].

though the punishment is death. Antigone also explains that her family should welcome her as a friend in the afterlife because of her honor and devotion to them after their deaths:

> Antigone: O tomb, O marriage-chamber, hollowed out/ house that will watch forever, where I go./ To my own people, who are mostly there;/ Persephone has taken them to her./ Last of them all, ill-fated past the rest,/ shall I descend, before my course is run./ Still when I get there I may hope to find/ I come as a dear friend to my dear father,/ to you, my mother, and my brother too./ All three of you have known my hand in death./ I washed your bodies, dressed them for the grave,/ poured out the last libation at the tomb.[209]

Antigone calls upon her mother, father, and Polyneices to let them know she expects a warm welcome in return for her service to them at the time of their deaths. Antigone expects punishment for defying the decree, but she expects reward in the afterlife for the same act of defiance. Antigone points out that especially Polyneices should know the price she paid to perform his rites. He, of all her family, owes her the most for the price she paid to honor his corpse.

The point of combatting the notion that Antigone is melancholic is ultimately to support something my project has been developing throughout my readings of the three *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth, which is the idea that Antigone *grows into* the woman who defies the king. She grows in a way her sister does not because they grow up in different places with different people and learn different lessons. Antigone's strong sense of self is why she (and *not* her sister) understands that it is not for Creon to keep her from her own. It is also why Antigone expects something in return from her family members for her dutiful service that she regards herself

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[209] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [891-903].

highly for. Freud's melancholic considers himself morally deplorable. Antigone knows she is right and expects a reward in the afterlife.

To demonstrate I will turn to the conversation in *Oedipus at Colonus* wherein Antigone receives a specific request from Polyneices to bury him. It is the last thing she is asked to do in service to her family before her final services to Oedipus (bathing rituals and preparations) right before his death. Like Antigone, Polyneices becomes aware that his death is immanent. His last request before he leaves Colonus is to Ismene and Antigone. He asks that they make sure he is buried if he dies attacking the city. I suppose we know from the composite of the plays that he is wise to observe that his sisters might be his only hope for a proper burial. Polyneices tells Antigone and Ismene that they will be doing the office of his ghost a favor if they bury his body and that Oedipus will regard them even more highly than he already does for pacifying his unruly ghost.

I want to stress that Polyneices makes this request to both Antigone and Ismene. I will critique Butler for not acknowledging that the condemnation Oedipus poses to Antigone is directed at both of his daughters. I do not intend to make the same oversight. However, in the scene I am referencing there is a substantial exchange between Polyneices and Antigone during which Ismene does not speak. In this exchange, Polyneices explains to Antigone why he will not withdraw his troops. At this point, Antigone says she does not understand why he would march toward his own death. This conversation bears a notable resemblance to the conversation between Antigone and Ismene at the beginning of *Antigone.* The last time Antigone asks if she can possibly convince Polyneices not to attack Thebes,[210] Polyneices says he cannot be swayed

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[210] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Oedipus at Colonus*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). Antigone: Then you have made up your mind to this, my brother? [Line 1431].

or held back—that the only way she will ever be able to help him is after his death.[211] If we really want to understand why Antigone chooses death, we need to also understand what she learns from her father and her brother who make similar choices and share their reasoning with Antigone. Therein lies the difference between Antigone and Ismene. Just as Lacan says, Antigone follows in her father and brother's footsteps whereas Ismene does not. But we should ask ourselves why. The other *Theban Plays* tell us why.

Antigone begs Polyneices not to attack Thebes. In the only conversation the two characters have in the three plays, Antigone commands him to listen to her[212] and to, "Withdraw your troops to Argos as soon as you can."[213] In this conversation in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Antigone completely discourages Polyneices' choice to act in such a way that will result in his death. Polyneices tells her she can help him only in death. Antigone tells her brother, "You break my heart!"[214] and that she does not understand how she could obey his command not to grieve for him because he is walking toward his own death.[215] To her concern about him facing death, Polyneices replies, "Death. If it must be so."[216] Antigone approaches Polyneices in the same way many approach Antigone—baffled by the decision to walk toward death. Antigone cries out, "No! Do as I ask,"[217] but Polyneices tells her that whatever will be is in the hands of the gods.[218]

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[211] Ibid., Polyneices: Yes. And do not try to hold me back./ The dark road is before me; I must take it,/ Doomed by my father and his avenging Furies./ God bless you if you do what I have asked:/ It is only in death that you can help me now./ Now let me go. Good-bye! You will not ever/ Look in my eyes again. [1432-1436].
[212] Ibid., Antigone: Polyneices, I beseech you, listen to me! [1413].
[213] Ibid., Antigone: Withdraw your troops to Argos as soon as you can. [1416-1417].
[214] Ibid., [1437].
[215] Ibid., Antigone: Who would not grieve for you,/ Sweet brother! You go with open eyes to death! [1349-1440].
[216] Ibid., [1441].
[217] Ibid., Antigone: No! Do as I ask! [1442].
[218] Ibid., Polyneices: All that/ Rests with the powers that are over us,—/ Whether it must be so or otherwise./ You two—I pray no evil comes to you,/ For all men know you merit no more pain. (*Polyneices goes out, left. There is a dead silence; then the Chorus meditates.*) [1445-1449]

This conversation resembles the one between Antigone and Ismene at the start of the play *Antigone.* Ismene thinks Antigone is senseless to walk toward death, but Antigone will not be dissuaded. Of course, Antigone takes on the part of Polyneices and Ismene takes on the part of Antigone in the latter conversation.

Returning to the matter of Polyneices' request to both of his sisters, Polyneices asks, "For God's sweet sake, if father's curse comes true,/ And if you find some way to return home,/ Do not, at least, dishonor me in death!/ But give me a grace and what will quiet me./ Then you shall have, besides the praise he now/ Gives you for serving him, an equal praise/ For offices you shall have paid my ghost."[219] Ismene and Antigone know the curse Polyneices bears—Oedipus' wish that he and Etoecles kill each other in battle. Polyneices asks both of his sisters to honor his corpse if the curse comes true, but it is Antigone and *not Ismene* who inquires into Polyneices' logic for going through with the attack despite the risk of death. He explains to Antigone (perhaps to Ismene as well but in response to Antigone's concerns in particular) that he is willing to accept death if it must be so. He says that whatever will be is not up to them, but to the gods. The choice he can make, however, is to suffer death and defeat rather than withdraw his troops (and be made a disgraceful coward by a younger brother). By the time it is up to Antigone to honor his request, she has reason to recall why he determined that death was best—a determination she expresses about herself to her sister in *Antigone*.

Knowing Oedipus has cursed him, Polyneices marches toward a dubious battle having made the request that he is at least not denied dishonor in death (by means of proper burial—his higher priority than avoiding death). He tells Antigone that he would rather die than do something as dishonorable as withdraw his troops. His only remaining wish is that he will not be

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[219] Ibid., [1399-1413]

dishonored in death. Polyneices offers his sisters an incentive for burying his body. He, like Antigone in *Antigone*, is less afraid of death than acting counter to what he believes is right and honorable. He would rather die than be made a coward to his younger brother. He would rather die in battle than face the shame of withdrawing his troops. When we meet Polyneices in *Oedipus at Colonus*, he is faced with the choice to take action despite the risk of death or withdraw out of fear of death. As Polyneices sees it, there is really no choice in the matter at all. It is obvious to Polyneices, though not to Antigone, that he *must* go forth in battle despite the threat of Oedipus' curse. We see this again when Antigone explains to Ismene that she *must* bury his corpse. The questions we should be asking here is why *must* Polyneices make the choice he makes? Why *must* Antigone? What do their choices have in common and why isn't it obvious to anyone but them that they *must* make the choice they make? We can only answer these questions if we read the *Theban* in the order of the myth. But of course we must not forget that there is a third *Theban Play* that precedes the two that have been discussed in this chapter thus far. When we look at the first of the three plays is that Oedipus' march toward death paves the way for that of his children. I am not claiming novelty in this particular observation. Interlocutors such as Lacan and Butler, whom I have already discussed at length, take Antigone to be following in the footsteps of Oedipus and Polyneices. My contribution is to use this prognosis of the story to better understand the philosophical proclamations Oedipus, Polyneices, and Antigone make as they approach death, beginning with Oedipus.

In *Oedipus the King*, the chorus asks Oedipus, "Doer of dreadful deeds, how did you dare/so far to despite your own eyes?/What spirit urged you to do it?"[220] Oedipus says Apollo was responsible for the rest of his misfortune, but that he destroyed his eyes by his own volition

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[220] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Oedipus the King*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 1327-1328].

because he didn't believe there was anything good for him to see anymore.[221] Upon hearing Oedipus' explanation, the chorus agrees that he should be blind to the world, since he has no pleasant sights ahead of him.[222] Oedipus laments that there is nothing for him to see, to love, or touch that will bring him joy and asks the chorus to take him away and calls himself the most hated, miserable, and accursed man on earth.[223] The chorus agrees with this too, but still does not quite understand his choice to mutilate his eyes. The chorus says, "I cannot say your remedy was good;/you would be better dead than blind and living."[224] Oedipus' response is a telling one if we want to understand the logic of his and his family members in the other *Theban Plays*. Oedipus, Polyneices, and Antigone each express explicit concerns regarding the afterlife before moving toward their deaths.

Oedipus disagrees that he would be better off dead than blind and living by saying, "What I have done here was best done—don't tell me/ otherwise, do not give me further counsel./ I do not know with what eyes I could look/ upon my father when I die and go/ under the earth, nor yet my wretched mother—/ those two to whom I have done things deserving/ worse punishment than hanging."[225] Oedipus explains that he did not simply kill himself because he did not want to look upon his mother and father in Hades. He blinded himself to avoid the sights of the living and the dead. He is not opposed to the option of death, but he did not want to make his move to the afterlife with eyes that would have to look upon his mother that he married

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[221] Ibid., Oedipus: It was Apollo, friends, Apollo,/ that brought this bitter bitterness, my sorrows to completion./ But the hand that struck me/ was none but my own./ Why should I see/ whose vision showed me nothing sweet to see? [1329-1335].
[222] Ibid., Chorus: These things are as you say. [1336].
[223] Ibid., Oedipus: What can I see to love?/ What greeting can touch my ears with joy?/ Take me away, and haste—to a place out of the way!/ Take me away, my friends, the greatly miserable,/ the most accursed, whom God too hates/ above all men on earth! [1337-1346].
[224] Ibid., [1368-1369].
[225]Ibid., [1370-1415].

and bore children with or his father that he murdered. Yet, once he is blind, death reappears as an option and he says to the chorus, “I beg of you in God’s name hide me/ somewhere outside your country, yes, or kill me,/ or throw me into the sea, to be forever/ out of your sight. Approach and deign to touch me/ for all my wretchedness, and do not fear./ No man but I can bear my evil doom.”[226] Oedipus wants death after what he suffered, but he blinds himself before death because he does not want to go to the afterlife and look upon his mother and father.

The conversation Antigone has with Polyneices wherein he requests her service to his ghost is quickly followed by the event of Oedipus’ death. As discussed in previous sections and chapters, Antigone first wants to join Oedipus in death by returning to where he died and dying there too. Next, she decides she wants to go home. She says she wants to try to stop the war, but we also know that she does not have a lot of hope it can be stopped given that Polyneices would rather die than withdraw his troops. We also know that the one request she receives before the thunder signals the process of Oedipus’ death is from Polyneices. Indeed she acts upon that request, but only after she realizes she cannot simply pass through into Hades just as her father did. She is told it is against Oedipus’ wish. She accepts this explanation because she does not want a death that goes against the rules of those she wishes to please. She does not want to do anything disgraceful. She is offered a place of refuge, but that is not what she wants either. She realizes Thebes is where she can serve one more ghost and ensure a welcome reunion with her family in Hades. Antigone chooses to bury Polyneices because her decision-making becomes forward-looking just like Oedipus and Polyneices. She looks toward the future of this life and the next and decides whether or not death is best, given her predicament.

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[226]Ibid.

In her own way, Antigone learns to see life and death the way her father and brother see it before they move toward their deaths. Each of them decides that it is better to risk death than to accept a worse consequence for not acting. For Oedipus, seeing his family after learning the truth about his familial relations is a worse fate than death, so he is only willing to die after blinding himself to sights more horrifying than death. Polyneices decides he would rather die than be called a coward for yielding to a younger brother. Antigone would rather die than let her brother go unburied. The reason each of them believes that they must make one choice over another because it is obvious to each of them that the alternative is worse. Though it consistently appears self-destructive to others, Oedipus, Polyneices, and Antigone assure whomever they are speaking to that given the options, they have made the best choice. The choices discussed each come down to this: what are the best options given that natural law always wins out in the end? As Aristotle explains, Antigone decides to go the course of natural law. It should make sense to us that she does, given her vast experience with death and the lessons taught to her family by the gods.

CHAPTER III

ANTIGONE AND ISMENE

Be what you want to; but that man shall I/ bury. For me, the doer, death is best./ Friend shall I lie with him, yes friend with friend,/ When I have dared the crime of piety./ Longer the time in which to please the dead/ than that for those up here./ There shall I lie forever. You may see fit/ to keep from honor what the gods have honored.[227]

Antigone distinguishes herself from her sister, Ismene, as 'the doer' and the one for whom death is best. She calls the burial of her brother the crime of piety and explains that she chooses to bury her brother because it is better to please the dead than the living because a longer life will be spent with the dead than the living. Antigone never ceases to call Polyneices her friend. Creon (her uncle and the ruling king who decreed that anyone who buried Polyneices would be stoned to death) says an enemy is never a friend, even after death,[228] to which Antigone responds, "I cannot share in hatred, but in love."[229] Creon tells her that if that is the case, she shall join her beloved dead soon enough, because he will not allow for her insubordination to continue.[230] Of course, as Creon observes, Antigone does not think joining her beloved dead is a worse fate than having not buried her brother. For Antigone death is the better choice, given her predicament. Ismene is notably different in this aspect, especially according to Antigone. When Ismene asks

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[227] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 44-81].
[228] Ibid. Creon: Never the enemy, even in death, a friend. [523]
[229] Ibid. [524]
[230] Ibid. Creon: Then go down there, if you must love, and love/ the dead. No woman rules me while I live. (*Ismene is brought from the palace under guard.*) [526-527]

her sister, "Am I outside your fate?[231] Antigone responds, "Yes. For you chose to live when I chose death."[232] The main concern I aim to address in this chapter is why Antigone desires death or, rather, the salient differences between the two sisters that lead to one choosing life and the other choosing death.

Antigone's choice and action can be better understood if we first acknowledge that Antigone is the one who chooses death and that as such, she is distinct from her sister Ismene who is also a woman, the daughter of Oedipus, and the sister of Polyneices. We cannot see the difference clearly without considering her development throughout the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth. In particular, we must look at Antigone and Ismene in *Oedipus at Colonus* to examine the portion of their lives in which the sisters live apart from one another and lead different kinds of lives. Only with a close enough look at Antigone's separate experience in *Oedipus at Colonus* can we begin to see why Antigone wants a certain kind of death—the kind of death she gives herself because she wants to move from one life to the next having served those she will meet in the next life. Her last action is motivated by a desire to secure her place in Hades. This chapter focuses on contemporary scholarship concerning Antigone's choice to die and how this choice distinguishes her from her sister, Ismene. Scholars have and will continue to explore potential motivations for Antigone's actions. In this chapter, as well as chapters to come, I will demonstrate that Antigone's decisions and actions are rooted in the lessons she learns during her lifetime alongside Oedipus—a journey upon which Ismene did not likewise embark.

Antigone's experience in *Oedipus at Colonus* reveals the difference between the daughters of Oedipus. After Oedipus dies in *Oedipus at Colonus,* the only thing Antigone wants

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[231] *IBID.*? [554]
[232] *IBID.* [555]

is to go to her father's resting place to die there too.[233] Theseus, the noble king of Athens, has agreed to give the daughters of Oedipus anything they want, except for precisely what Antigone wants because he was specifically instructed not to bring them to the place where Oedipus died.[234] Because Ismene and Antigone have been told it is forbidden, Ismene questions Antigone's motion to go there.[235] Antigone tells her she aches to go see where Oedipus died.[236] Ismene reminds Antigone that it was clearly forbidden—that they cannot go to where Oedipus died.[237] The conversation the two sisters have at this moment in *Oedipus at Colonus* resembles the opening conversation between the two sisters in *Antigone* the play. Antigone wants to do something forbidden. Ismene tells Antigone they cannot and should not because it is forbidden. Antigone rejects Ismene's objection.[238] To reckon why the two sisters disagree in both of these conversations we must understand them as two women who live separate lives.

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[233] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Oedipus at Colonus*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). Antigone: Let us run back there! [Line 1722].

[234] Ibid., Theseus: Because your father told me, children,/ That no one should go near the spot,/ No mortal man should tell of it,/ Since it is holy, and is his./ And if I kept this pledge, he said,/ I should preserve my land from its enemies/ I swore I would, and the god heard me:/ The oathkeeper who keeps track of all. [1760-1767].

[235] Ibid., Ismene: Why, what shall we do? [1723].

[236] Ibid., Antigone: I am carried away with longing— [1724] Ismene: For what,—tell me! [1725] Antigone: To see the resting place in the earth— [1726] Ismene: Of whom? [1727] Antigone: Oh, father's! O dear God, I am so unhappy! [1728].

[237] Ibid., Ismene: But that is not permitted. Do you not see? [1729].

[238] Ibid., Antigone: Do not rebuke me! [1730].

Antigone Pushes the Limits that Ismene Abides

This section observes some of the prominent contemporary accounts of Antigone as the pusher of limits, or, someone who reveals new possibilities in the face of limitations and things that seem impossible. When Antigone defies Creon's decree, she transcends the limits of the law and moves to transcend beyond mortal life. Jacques Lacan maintains that Antigone's atë, or tragic flaw, is her push beyond life's limitations. Tina Chanter offers an interpretation of Antigone as the figure of the unconventional. Chanter's Antigone transgresses on behalf of her principles and in service to the marginalized. Judith Butler's Antigone chooses to push the limits of the law in defiance of the restrictions placed upon her personal desires for love relations. This section serves only to examine Lacan's, Chanter's, and Butler's accounts of Antigone's choice to push the limits of possibility. The following sections will do more to establish the difference between Antigone and Ismene by utilizing the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth. First, I turn to Lacan.

In his seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis, Lacan begins by asking, "Is there anyone who doesn't evoke *Antigone* whenever there is a question of a law that causes conflict in us even though it is acknowledged by the community to be a just law?"[239] Lacan links Antigone's fatal action to desire and explains that, "In effect, *Antigone* reveals to us the line of sight that defines desire."[240] In forming his account of her desire, Lacan considers the relation of her action to the actions of her father, Oedipus, and her brother, Polyneices. Both Oedipus and Polyneices were seen as criminals in the eyes of Creon, the arbiter of the law Antigone breaks. Lacan suggests that Antigone's action mirrors the activity of her father and brother. His conclusion about her

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[239] Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII.* Trans. by Dennis Porter. London and New York: 2008. (299).
[240] Ibid., 304.

action involves her desire to be like Oedipus and Polyneices. She is, for Lacan, the epitome of desire in the form of criminality. She moves toward her death for the sake of desire in the form of criminality. By Lacan's interpretation, what makes the burial of Polyneices so important to Antigone is her desire to replicate the criminal act of her brother, which links her to the criminal act of her father (which amounts to the desire for the mother).[241]

Lacan asserts that Antigone disturbs us with her "unbearable splendor."[242] What is so splendiferous in *Antigone* is the expression of a certain dimension between the spheres life and death that embrace both. He observes that what makes Antigone so wondrous and terrifying is that she pushes beyond the limits of life while she is still living. In pushing beyond it, she reveals it to us. She pushes beyond life by acting toward death, but also because Creon's punishment places her in an undefined kind of existence between life and death. Creon sends her underground (in a cave) with only the bare necessities for survival. Antigone then reaches beyond the border of living onto the side of the dead. She crosses the line completely and kills herself before she can be released.

Lacan's answer to his own question about what one finds in *Antigone* is, "First of all, one finds Antigone."[243] He notes that the extraordinary thing about Antigone and her fatal action is that she moves beyond the limits of mortals as she lives in youth—into the sphere of death. Lacan points to the moments wherein Antigone suggests she is ready for death. Lacan depicts a kind of fatalism in that she can see that "her race is run."[244] He directs us to specific lines that

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[241] Ibid., 343.
[242] Ibid., 305.
[243] Ibid. 308.
[244] Ibid. 332. I will continue to use his phrase throughout my project alongside my suggestion that she knows and understands the mortal limits that Lacan insists that she pushes. My claim is that she acts as she does because she knows the mortal race always ends and she has set her sights on what awaits her after the finish line—the eternal marathon.

reveal her belief that, "her soul died long ago and that she is destined to give help, to the dead."[245] In saying so, Lacan describes Antigone's fatalism. She is "destined" to move toward death and the dead. Her actions are consistent with her self-ascribed destiny. She serves the dead by performing burial rites for Polyneices twice. She does so in the face of her own death. She leaves the realm of the living, leaves her sister Ismene and her fiancé Haemon behind when she fully enters the realm of the dead by hanging herself. Lacan argues that her unyielding position in defense of her criminality reveals to us that she knows her race is run.[246] She knows she cannot avoid her inherited *atë*, meaning her tragic flaw or blindness. As Lacan explains, "One can no doubt translate atë by 'misfortune,' but it doesn't have anything to do with misfortune. It is this meaning that is assigned by doubtless implacable gods, as she might say, which renders her pitiless and fearless."[247] By atë, Lacan does not mean Antigone's fall or fault necessarily. According to Lacan, atë is something, "one does or does not approach,"[248] and Antigone does approach hers. He explains that, "man mistakes evil for the good, because something beyond the limits of atë has become Antigone's good."[249] In moving toward death, Antigone moves approaches her atë and mistakes her movement as being toward the good.

Having established the implications of Antigone's push toward her atë, Lacan interprets her to be mistaking her momentum as being headed in the right direction. Her error is not that she does not see her limits, but rather she mistakes her movement beyond the limits as being a good thing. She knows her race is run and runs toward it freely and willingly. Her action is fatalistic in that she pushes toward her atë as if she simply must. Lacan's account offers

[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid. 343.
[247] Ibid., 324.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid., 333.

numerous intriguing insights such as the notion that Antigone's blindness is a familial inheritance and has to do with her own assessment of her actions and decisions.

To explain her familial history of atë, Lacan refers to Oedipus' curse upon his sons in *Oedipus at Colonus* and insists that it is, "the malediction that gives rise to the catastrophic series of dramas to which *Antigone* belongs."[250] The curse to which Lacan is referring is when Oedipus tells Polyneices he hopes he and Eteocles kill each other in battle. Since this is exactly what happens, Creon decides Eteocles should be buried whereas Polyneices should rot like a slave or a dog since Polyneices was the one attacking the city and Eteocles was rightfully ruling it. Lacan concludes that the lineage of crime and indiscretion in Antigone's family is precisely her inherited atë—crime pushes beyond limits. Oedipus' curse suggests the passing of atë from himself to his sons. His sons are cursed to make a fatal, tragic error in their conflict with one another and their mistreatment of their father. Lacan is most interested in this because he wants to understand and analyze Antigone's atë. Lacan refers to the chorus to suggest that Antigone's reaching beyond the limit of life comes from her desire.[251] He brings in her family history and her pure devotion to her brother and father as justification for her desire for the criminal act. She has a desire for the criminality of Oedipus and Polyneices and her desire for crime exceeds her desire for life. Lacan points to the choral poem praising the wondrous nature of man, but also notes that man's only shortcoming is his inability to come to terms with death. This section will not be the last time I refer to Lacan's Antigone, but I would now like to turn to another interpretation of Antigone's limit pushing.

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[250] Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII.* Trans. by Dennis Porter. London and New York: 2008. (316).
[251] Ibid. 341.

In *Whose Antigone? The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery*, Tina Chanter appeals to Antigone's sensibilities toward freedom and individual subjectivity. Chanter outlines a number of ways in which Antigone's actions and arguments convey her conviction to liberate herself and her family from the status of slavery. In terms of gender, Chanter considers the kind of statement Antigone is making given the social and political standing of Thebes in which, "Conventionally, women would have been little more than tokens to be passed between one noble family and another, cementing alliances over which they had little control."[252] Chanter links the commodification of women and Creon's decree regarding the burial of Polyneices to the marginalization of slavery. Chanter's link is supported by Antigone's argument to Creon that it was not a slave that she buried; it was her brother. The significance of Antigone's words and actions for Chanter is that Antigone refuses to allow herself or her brother to be marginalized like slaves. In addition to her act of burial, Chanter argues that Antigone also stands against the marginalization of slavery by refusing to marry Creon's son, Haemon, because, "when the character of Antigone refuses marriage on any terms, whether those of an essentially exogamous or endogamous exchange, hers is a refusal of both the aristocratic system of alliances and the democratic tendency to look inward."[253] Chanter paints Antigone as a character who resists convention, especially those conventions which deal in the commodification of persons within a system of hierarchical exchange. The instance more frequently discussed in scholarship is when Ismene tells Antigone, "You crave what can't be done."[254] Regarding this instance, Chanter purports, "Antigone is said by her sister, Ismene, to be 'in love with the impossible' and yet in her insistence on burying [Polynices] she brings to light a new possibility, the significance of

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[252] Chanter, Tina. *Whose Antigone?: The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery.* Suny: 2011. (14).
[253] Ibid.
[254] *IBID*. [89]

which Ismene ultimately recognizes."[255] On the one hand Chanter, is articulating precisely what so many scholars, including Lacan, find so fascinating about Antigone. Antigone does not recognize the forbidden or the impossible the way one might expect a young female daughter of Oedipus to recognize her limits (the way Ismene does). Antigone has a different idea of what is possible within limits she knows well and accepts. On the other hand, Chanter conflates the two sisters simply because Ismene changes her mind later in the play and tries to take the blame alongside Antigone. As Chanter explains it, Antigone presents a new possibility that Ismene is able to recognize in the end, albeit not at first. But the question remains: why does one sister see it before the other? Further, do accounts like Lacan's and Chanter's take into consideration that Ismene should have the exact same motivation each of them argues is the force behind Antigone's action? According to Lacan, Antigone inherits her atë from Oedipus, but why didn't Ismene inherit it also? Chanter purports that Antigone wants to distinguish herself and her family from the human commodification aspect of slavery, but why doesn't Ismene understand that until later?

Chanter concludes that, "Having wandered the countryside for years, guiding her blind father, Antigone is not one to observe convention for convention's sake. She has been both an outcast and a child of freedom, not bound by the rules of any polis, bound only by her love for and loyalty to her father."[256] Chanter's assessment here is precisely what I think deserves more attention in scholarship on Antigone. If we read the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth, we can more easily explain why Antigone is the way she is. Just as Chanter points out, Antigone is unconventional. What Chanter does not dwell upon, however, is that from her assessment we can acknowledge precisely why Antigone and Ismene come to disagree. Neither Chanter, nor I are

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[255] Chanter, Tina. *Whose Antigone?: The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery.* Suny: 2011. (100).
[256] Ibid.

first to point out that Antigone is unconventional whereas Ismene is conventional, but what Chanter is directing us toward (and what I would like to take further) is that Antigone's role in *Oedipus at Colonus* reveals to us *why* Antigone is less conventional than her sister. Yet, Chanter's follow-up to her conclusions is simply that, "She [Antigone] and her sister, Ismene, are beloved by their father because of their devotion, in sharp contrast to the harsh treatment Oedipus reserves for [Polynices] and Eteocles, whom he not only spurns, but curses."[257] It is certainly true what Chanter has to say about Antigone's loyalty and Oedipus' appreciation for both of his daughters as opposed to his sons, but I want to linger on the difference between Antigone's exhibition of loyalty to Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* and Ismene's.

When we look at the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth, we will see a transition of actions and movements toward death from Oedipus to Polyneices to Antigone. Each walks toward death. Each accepts death and the part the gods have played to lead the way to their particular kind of death. Antigone does not speak the same about her father's death or her brother's death as she does her own. She laments more about their deaths. When it comes time for her to make her way toward death, she suddenly takes a similar stance toward fate as those she witnessed her father and brother take. Antigone learns from her father and brother in *Oedipus at Colonus* what Ismene learns later from Antigone. Ismene is not the one who journeys in exile with Oedipus or the one who pleas with Polyneices in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Antigone learns about limits and pushing limits for the sake of what matters most (regardless of any man's threat) from her father and brother. If Ismene ever learns these things, she must learn from Antigone, as Chanter interprets.

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[257] Ibid.

Judith Butler also refers to *Oedipus at Colonus* to reinterpret the events of Sophocles' *Antigone.* Like Lacan, Butler first acknowledges that Antigone has been previously understood as a figure of anti-authoritarianism and, in particular, a feminine force against the political state. Butler refers most directly to Luce Irigaray who champions and defends Antigone as a feminist heroine.[258] Butler wants to expand the notions by which Antigone is understood as, "a feminine figure that defies the state through a powerful set of physical and linguistic acts."[259] In *Antigone's Claim,* Butler attests that certain conditions for Antigone's political action have been blindly neglected. Butler stresses the ambiguity of Antigone's actions because, "Antigone's deed is, in fact, ambiguous from the start, not only the defiant act in which she buries her brother but the verbal act in which she answers Creon's question; thus hers is an act in language."[260] By analyzing Antigone's verbal actions as well as her physical actions, Butler argues for a reading of Antigone's ambiguous actions that make her more than a feminist champion. Butler's claim is that Antigone is motivated by love and her impossible love relations. So, in burying Polyneices, Antigone fights against the impossible conditions of her ability to love as she desires.

Butler will not identify Antigone's action as a feminine act because, "In defying the state, she repeats as well the defiant act of her brother, thus offering a repetition of defiance that, in affirming her loyalty to her brother, situates her as the one who may substitute for him and, hence, replaces and territorializes him. She assumes manhood through vanquishing manhood, but she vanquishes it only by idealizing it."[261] Butler proposes that Antigone's relationships and actions (including speech acts) with certain male characters complicate how we ought to read her actions. On the one hand, she defies the state as a woman. On the other hand, her brother defied

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[258] Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim.* New York: 2000. (1).
[259] Ibid., 2.
[260] Ibid. 10.
[261] Ibid., 11.

the state first. Since her brother defied the state first, she is repeating the defiant act of a man out of loyalty to that man. Even more so than repeating the action, Butler insists that Antigone assumes the place of her brother and emasculates Creon in doing so. She acts against one man (the ruling king, Creon), but for another (her brother, Polyneices). Antigone becomes like a man (Polyneices) and makes a man feel bereft of his manhood (Creon) at the same time. The trouble Butler sees with this in terms of a feminist political figure is that she champions a man only by becoming like one.[262] This is not Butler's endpoint, however; it is just the beginning. Butler's interest is in Antigone's desire and devotion to two men, Oedipus and Polyneices.

Like Lacan, Butler denotes a familial line of criminality passed down from Oedipus to Polyneices to Antigone—one Antigone actively assumes because of her desire.[263] Butler first reminds us that Oedipus' sons are at least partly responsible for Oedipus' remaining exile. She recounts that, "In *Oedipus at Colonus* the two of them, along with a small party of followers, are given shelter by Theseus in a land governed by Athens. Oedipus learns that his sons have explicitly forbidden his return to Thebes and also learns that they have turned against one another in a bitter battle for the throne."[264] This reminder serves to show that the men in Antigone's family have a history of fighting against each other as ruling parties, which means defying the state. Butler also directs attention to Oedipus' curse in *Oedipus at Colonus*, which is

[262] I think this is another key insight that both Lacan and Butler point out about Antigone. She really does bear striking resemblances in her thoughts and actions to Oedipus and Polyneices that make her more understandable if we understand Oedipus and Polyneices a certain way. I think she resembles Oedipus more in *Oedipus at Colonus* because his choices and actions are different after he has gained knowledge of his fate and the truth about his familial relations. She acts more as he does once he has learned from the gods about his mortal limits than when he is trying to flee them. Similarly, with Polyneices, Antigone is like Polyneices in that Polyneices goes into a battle he knows he is likely to lose because he would rather die courageous than be a coward. Antigone, like her father and brother, chooses to defy Creon's decree even if it means death because she would rather die with grace than be without it.

[263] Lacan and Butler have different ideas about the nature of that desire. As discussed in the previous section, the nature of that desire for Lacan is in the form of the criminal. For Butler, the nature of that desire is incestuous.

[264] Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim.* New York: 2000. (59).

another act of defiance against the rulers of the state, "Toward the end of that play, the second of the trilogy, Polyneices visits Oedipus and calls upon him to return. Oedipus not only refuses but levels a curse against Polyneices, that 'you shall never conquer in war your native land; but shall perish by your brother's hand, and kill him who drove you out!'"[265] The reason for Butler's attention to this curse is to reiterate that Antigone's act against the state followed from her father's act against the state and her brother's act against the state. Butler further insists that, "it remains unclear whether the brother whose act will kill him is Eteocles who delivers the fatal blow, Or Oedipus, whose curse both predicts and mandates the blow itself."[266] In other words, the crime of Polyneices could just as well be interpreted as the crime of Oedipus, since perhaps it was Oedipus' curse that was truly responsible for the death of Eteocles. So, as we saw with Lacan, Butler's interpretation also illuminates the familial transference of actions and decisions involved in Antigone's character and motivations.

Like Lacan, Butler explicates Antigone's push toward death (among other things) as part of her motivation for her fatal action. In the same discussion about Antigone's interactions with Oedipus and Polyneices, Butler explains that Antigone (as has been previously mentioned), "speaks a line that prefigures her own knowing fate: 'Brother, how can anyone *not* mourn, seeing you set out to death so clear before you go with open eyes to death!' Indeed, Antigone will and—given the chronology of the plays—'already has' undergone precisely the fate she predicts for her brother to enter death knowingly."[267] Butler brings us to the point in *Oedipus at Colonus* wherein Antigone predicts that her brother is entering his death knowingly. Butler also points out that Antigone enters death knowingly just like her brother. She considers the "chronology of the

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[265] Ibid.
[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid.

plays" in terms of when Sophocles wrote them when she suggests that Antigone "already has" walked toward her death knowingly. Indeed, *Antigone* was written and performed prior to *Oedipus at Colonus*, but Butler insists that Antigone's interactions with Polyneices in *Oedipus at Colonus* are helpful for our understanding of her whether it means that Antigone prefigures her own fate or speaks about what her character has already undergone.

Butler's interpretation continuously incorporates Antigone's experiences in *Oedipus at Colonus*. She refers to the losses Antigone suffers in multiple plays because, "Antigone not only loses her brother to her father's curse, words that quite literally yield to the force of annihilation, but she then loses her father to death by the curse that is upon him."[268] Though Antigone does not actually lose her brothers in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Butler insists upon thinking about Antigone as someone whose experience and familial relationships influence her action toward death in *Antigone*. Butler tells us Antigone has practically lost her brothers and her father in *Oedipus at Colonus* because Oedipus' words, "quite literally yield to the force of annihilation."[269] Butler's point is that Antigone's movement toward death is preceded by the loss of three of her dearest family members. For Butler, Antigone's loss of kin and thereby loss of loved ones should be considered a central motivation for Antigone's action. Antigone is not just a sister or a woman for Butler. Antigone is a lover whose political fight for the family is about the rights of aberrant kinship relationships (not unlike the fight for gay marriage in the United States).

Antigone's experiences and relationships form a basis for Butler's speculation about what is on Antigone's mind as she moves toward her own death, "Antigone worries over their [Polyneices and Eteocles] fate even as she embarks upon her own course of action for which death is a necessary conclusion. Her desire to save her brothers from their fate is overwhelmed, it

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[268] Ibid., 60.
[269] Ibid.

seems, by her desire to join them in their fate."[270] The suggestion here is that Antigone's fatal action in *Antigone,* is strongly influenced by a desire that Butler suggests becomes clearer when looking at *Oedipus at Colonus*. Her claim is in part that Antigone's desire has something to do with repeating or emulating the fates of her father and brother. Butler states that Antigone would prefer to die with her brothers than to save them[271] and, as has already been discussed to some extent, Antigone does explicitly express a desire for death at the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Butler interprets Oedipus' final words to Antigone to be a curse or a condemnation to a life of loving the dead over the living, "Before he dies, Oedipus makes several utterances that assume the status of a curse. He condemns her [Antigone], but the force of the condemnation is to bind her to him. His words culminate in her own permanent lovelessness, one that is mandated by Oedipus' demand for loyalty…"[272] but Butler does not believe Antigone monogamously accepts Oedipus' demand. To the contrary, Antigone is being "promiscuous" by loving her dead brother as well as her dead father. To flesh this idea out Butler refers to some lines spoken by Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* that she believes amount to, "a demand that verges on incestuous possessiveness: 'From none did you have love more than from this man, without whom you will now spend the remainder of your life'."[273] Approaching his death, Oedipus expresses a deep pity for Antigone and her sister because they are both about to lose the man who loves them more than any other man.

Butler argues that, "His words exert a force in time that exceeds the temporality of their enunciation: they demand that for all time she have no man except for the man who is dead, and though this is a demand, a curse, made *by* Oedipus, who positions himself as her only one, it is

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[270] Ibid.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Ibid., 60.
[273] Ibid.

clear that she both honors and disobeys this curse as she displaces her love for her father onto her brother."[274] The quote Butler refers to regarding Oedipus' curse comes from the account of Oedipus' death and is delivered by a messenger. If we examine the messenger's report, we will find that everything Butler refers to as Oedipus' curse upon Antigone is also said to Ismene. We will also see that upon Oedipus' death, Antigone is not alone in expressing a wish to die. Ismene does the same. So, let us continue in the next section to establish the aspects of Antigone's experience that are uniquely hers.

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[274] Ibid.

Lessons on Limits in the *Theban Plays*

Continuing from where we left off in the previous section, Butler takes up Lacan's assessment of Antigone's desire for death and presents Oedipus' condemnation as a reason for that desire, but it is unclear why Butler's reason could not also apply to Ismene. Oedipus' condemnation is not to Antigone alone. It applies to both of his daughters. Here is the messenger's full report to the chorus to which Butler refers:

> Messenger: Citizens, the briefest way to tell you/ Would be to say that Oedipus is no more;/ But what has happened cannot be told so simply—/ It was no simple thing.
>
> Chorus: He is gone, poor man?
>
> Messenger: You may be sure that he has left this world.
>
> Chorus: By God's mercy, was his death a painless one?
>
> Messenger: That is the thing that seems so marvelous./ You know, for you were witnesses, how he left this place with no friend leading him,/ Acting, himself, as guide for all of us./ Well, when he came to the steep place in the road,/ The embankment there, secured with steps of brass,/ He stopped in one of the many branching paths./ This was not far from the stone bowl that marks/ Theseus' and Pirithous' covenant./ Half-way between that place of stone/ With its hollow pear tree, and the marble tomb,/ He sat down and undid his filthy garments;/ Then he called his daughters and commanded/ That they should bring him water from a fountain/ For bathing and libation to the dead./ From there they could see the hill of Demeter,/ Freshener of all things: so they ascended it/ And soon came back with water for their father;/ Then helped him properly to bathe and dress./ When everything was finished to his pleasure,/ And no command of his remained undone,/ Then the earth groaned with thunder from the god below;/ And as they heard the

sound, the girls shuddered,/ And dropped to their father's knees, and began wailing,/ Beating their breasts and weeping as if heartbroken./ And hearing them cry out so bitterly,/ He put his arms around them, and said to them:/ "Children, this day your father is gone from you./ All that was mine is gone. You shall no longer/ Bear the burden of taking care of me—/ I know it was hard, my children.—And yet one word/ Makes all those difficulties disappear:/ That word is love. You never shall have more/ From any man than you have had from me./ And now you must spend the rest of life without me."/ That was the way of it. They clung together/ And wept, all three. But when they finally stopped,/ And no more sobs were heard, then there was/ Silence, and in the silence suddenly/ A voice cried out to him—of such a kind/ It made our hair stand up in a panic fear:/ Again and again the call came from the god:/ "Oedipus! Oedipus! Why are we waiting?/ You delay too long; you delay too long to go!"/ Then, knowing himself summoned by the spirit,/ He asked that the lord Theseus come to him;/ And when he had come, said: "O beloved one,/ Give your right hand now as a binding pledge/ To my two daughters; children, give him your hands./ Promise that you will never willingly/ Betray them, but will carry out in kindness/ Whatever is best for them in the days to come."/ And Theseus swore to do it for his friend,/ With such restraint as fits a noble king./ And when he had done so, Oedipus at once/ Laid his blind hands upon his daughters saying:/ "Children, you must show your nobility,/ And have the courage now to leave this spot./ You must not wish to see what is forbidden,/ or hear what may not afterward be told./ But go—go quickly. Only the lord Theseus/ May stay to see the thing that now begins."/ This much every one of us heard him say,/ And then we came away with the sobbing girls./ But after a little while as we withdrew/ We turned around—and nowhere saw that man,/

> But only the king, his hands before his face,/ Shading his eyes as if something awful,/ Fearful and unendurable to see./ Then very quickly we saw him do reverence/ To Earth and to the powers of the air,/ With one address to both./ But in what manner/ Oedipus perished, no one of mortal men/ Could tell but Theseus. It was not lightning,/ Bearing its fire from God, that took him off;/ No hurricane was blowing./ But some attendant from the train of Heaven/ Came for him; or else the underworld/ Opened in love the unlit door of earth./ For he was taken without lamentation,/ Illness or suffering; indeed his end/ Was wonderful if mortal's ever was./ Should someone think I speak intemperately,/ I make no apology to him who thinks so.[275]

First, the messenger emphasizes that Oedipus has passed in a most unusual manner.[276] The chorus asks if the gods showed mercy and gave him a painless death.[277] The messenger explains that it was painless and marvelous—that the blinded Oedipus led the way and instructed his daughters in the bathing ritual as the earth rumbled with thunder speaking for the god below.[278] After Antigone and Ismene had done all he had asked of them and the thunder suggests the time has come, Antigone and Ismene "shuddered,/ And dropped to their father's knees, and began wailing,/ Beating their breasts and weeping as if heartbroken."[279] The words Butler considers a condemnation motivated by possessiveness are the words he speaks upon "hearing them cry out so bitterly."[280] Oedipus holds them and tells them they are about to be relieved of him as their burden, "Children, this day your father is gone from you./ All that was mine is gone. You shall

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[275] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Oedipus at Colonus*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 1579-1666].
[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.

no longer/ Bear the burden of taking care of me—."[281] Oedipus releases Antigone and Ismene from service to him before he dies. He also acknowledges how difficult it must have been for his daughters to care for him and states that the only thing he could give them was his insurmountable love for them, "I know it was hard, my children.—And yet one word/ Makes all those difficulties disappear:/ That word is love. You never shall have more/ From any man than you have had from me./ And now you must spend the rest of life without me."[282] Butler wants to draw out the fact that the last words Antigone hears from her father before he dies is that she must spend the rest of her life without the man who loved her the most. This is an experience that Butler insists ought to brighten our understanding of Antigone's approach to love and to life, but I must acknowledge that it is not an experience unique to Antigone. At least, it is not unique to Antigone until we press further into the difference in experience the two sisters have up to the point of Oedipus' death. Only once we consider that such a moment meant something different to the daughter who traveled with Oedipus in exile than it did to the daughter who lived with Creon the majority of her life can we really begin to correlate such a moment with Antigone in particular.

Hearing Antigone and Ismene lament bitterly, Oedipus reminds his daughters that they are about to be freed from their difficult burden of caring for him. Yet, he cannot leave it at that. He has to tell them he loved them for taking him on as their burden. He has to tell them he loved them for it more than any man ever would. Then, he understands why they are crying so bitterly. They are losing the man who loves them more than any other man could possibly love them—who needed him more than any other man will ever need them—who values them over his own sons (whom he bitterly hopes kill each other nonetheless). For that, Oedipus does truly pity both

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[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid.

of his daughters in that moment, despite their freedom from his burdensome existence. He wants at first to stop their bitter tears and tell them what they have to look forward to, but ends instead with his own lamentations for them and his expression of his love and gratitude for them.

Butler calls it a curse or condemnation that Antigone should not love any man more than her dead father. Her interpretation asks that we consider Antigone's actions in light of Oedipus' condemnation of Antigone to have a loveless life. Yet, he says the same thing to Ismene, so what else is going on with Antigone in these moments and experiences in *Oedipus at Colonus* that might inform her famous act in another play? Or, why might his condemnation mean something different to each of his daughters? Returning to the moment of *Oedipus at Colonus* where we last left off, after some shared crying and embracing between the three of them, the voice of a god cries out and tells Oedipus to stop delaying. Oedipus then turns to Theseus to make him promise to care for and never betray Antigone or Ismene, to which Theseus agrees. Then, Oedipus tells Antigone and Ismene they have to leave and be noble enough to do so without protest because it is forbidden that anyone but Theseus should go with him.[283] At this point, Antigone does not push limits. She does as she is told. She leaves, accepting alongside her sister the restrictions from her father.

Antigone gets told numerous times by numerous characters that she asks for/desires the impossible, but what she chooses to push is particular. When Antigone tells Polyneices, "Withdraw your troops to Argos as soon as you can,"[284] Polyneices replies, "But that is impossible."[285] Antigone does not initially understand Polyneices' decisions and actions. She thinks he should withdraw his troops. Polyneices says it is too late for that. Even though he

[283] Ibid.
[284] *CTC* [1416-1417]
[285] *CTC* [1418-1419]

knows he is most likely marching off to his death, he would rather die courageously in battle than live in shame and cowardice. Antigone thinks he is being foolish for heading toward death, but she makes the same decision later. They both decide it's better to live or die with honor than live or die without it. Their conversation begins with Antigone begging Polyneices to take her advice.[286] Polyneices seems to respect and appreciate his sister enough to hear her out.[287] As I mentioned earlier, Antigone tells Polyneices to withdraw his troops and return to Argos,[288] but Polyneices tells her he cannot do that without forfeiting his rank completely.[289] Antigone asks why he sounds so angry still and what good could come from attacking his own home.[290] Polyneices says, "It is shameful to run; and it is also shameful/ To be a laughing-stock to a younger brother."[291] Antigone reminds Polyneices that the choice he is making is exactly what will make the curse Oedipus just placed upon him come true.[292] At this point in the play, Antigone has devoted her entire life to helping Oedipus get to the place where Apollo said he should die. Yet, Antigone is still pained to hear that Polyneices intends to walk right into the curse he just received from his father. She cannot see the sense in him doing exactly what will make the curse come true. Polyneices tells her that Oedipus' curse was just a mere "wish" and states that he simply cannot back down from the battle.[293] Antigone exclaims her feeling of

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[286] Ibid., Antigone: Polyneices, I beseech you, listen to me! [1413].
[287] Ibid., Polyneices: Dearest—what is it? Tell me, Antigone. [1415].
[288] Ibid., Antigone: Withdraw your troops to Argos as soon as you can. [1416-1417].
[289] Ibid., Polyneices: But that is impossible. How could I command/ That army, even backward, once I faltered? [1418-1419].
[290] Ibid., Antigone: Now why, boy, must your anger rise again?/ What is the good of laying waste your homeland? [1420-1421].
[291] Ibid., [1422-1423].
[292] Ibid., Antigone: But see how you fulfill his prophecies!/ Did he not cry that you should kill each other? [1424-1425].
[293] Ibid., Polyneices: He wishes that. But I cannot give way. [1426].

abandonment and suggests his armies might not want to fight after hearing Oedipus' curse.[294] Polyneices tells her they don't have to hear about it; and they won't hear it from him.[295] This conversation between Antigone and Polyneices resembles the conversation between Antigone and Ismene in the beginning of the play *Antigone*, but the role Antigone plays is reversed in the latter. With a little time, counsel, and experience, Antigone begins to reason more like her brother.

Antigone asks Polyneices one more time if he cannot be swayed from his decision.[296] Polyneices says he cannot be swayed or held back—that the only way she will ever be able to help him is after his death (making sure he is properly buried in reverence to the gods of the underworld).[297] Antigone tells her brother, "You break my heart!"[298] Polyneices tells Antigone not to grieve for him.[299] Antigone wonders how anyone could not grieve for someone walking toward his or her own death.[300] Polyneices repeats his resignation of death if it is necessary.[301] Antigone cries out a final plea for him to yield to her advice.[302] Polyneices says what she asks is not possible.[303] Antigone tells him she'll be lost without him.[304] Before Polyneices exits with a heavy silence, he says that whatever will be is in the hands of the gods and prays the gods will

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[294] Ibid., Antigone: Ah, I am desolate! But who will dare/ Go with you, after hearing the prophecies? [1427-1428].
[295] Ibid., Polyneices: I'll not report this trifle. A good commander/ Tells what is encouraging, not what is not. [1429-1430].
[296] Ibid., Antigone: Then you have made up your mind to this, my brother? [1431].
[297] Ibid., Polyneices: Yes. And do not try to hold me back./ The dark road is before me; I must take it,/ Doomed by my father and his avenging Furies./ God bless you if you do what I have asked:/ It is only in death that you can help me now./ Now let me go. Good-bye! You will not ever/ Look in my eyes again. [1432-1436].
[298] Ibid., [1437].
[299] Ibid., Polyneices: Do not grieve for me. [1438].
[300] Ibid., Antigone: Who would not grieve for you,/ Sweet brother! You go with open eyes to death! [1349-1440].
[301] Ibid., Polyneices: Death, if that must be. [1441].
[302] Ibid., Antigone: No! Do as I ask! [1442].
[303] Ibid., Polyneices: You ask the impossible. [1443].
[304] Ibid., Antigone: Then I am lost,/ If I must be deprived of you! [1444].

have pity on his sisters.[305] Again, there is an obvious parallel between this conversation between Polyneices and Antigone and the opening conversation between Antigone and Ismene in *Antigone*. Both Ismene and Antigone (at different points in the *Theban Plays*) do not want to see their respective sibling do something that will result in that sibling's death, but they find that they cannot convince their sibling to back down from what their sibling believes must be done, even if it leads to their own death. Whereas Antigone does not initially understand why Polyneices insists upon death if necessary to avoid shame, she takes on his position that death can be the preferred choice of action before Ismene does (though Ismene, too, seems to understand this position eventually, albeit later than Antigone). If this particular approach to atë is inherited, the children of Oedipus do not develop or embark upon it at the same time. It takes some experience and lessons learned from one another before each of them really sees atë in a certain light that leads them toward death.

To push this idea further, let us observe the striking similarity between Oedipus, Polyneices, and Antigone in their movements toward death once they, as Lacan puts it, know their race is run. Each of them decides, knowing they're moving toward death sooner or later anyway, that to die well is better than to live wretchedly. Oedipus decides he would rather die at Colonus than return to Thebes with his enemies. Polyneices decides he would rather die in battle than shamefully withdraw. Antigone decides that she would rather die with grace than live or die without it. Antigone's conversation with Polyneices suggests that she knows the odds of her stopping the war were as bleak as Polyneices' chances of winning the battle. She knows the curse Oedipus placed upon her brothers as well as Polyneices did. Yet, she decides it is better to

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[305] Ibid., Polyneices: All that/ Rests with the powers that are over us,—/ Whether it must be so or otherwise./ You two—I pray no evil comes to you,/ For all men know you merit no more pain. (*Polyneices goes out, left. There is a dead silence; then the Chorus meditates.*) [1445-1449]

go to Thebes than go to the place of refuge offered by Theseus. She chooses to spend the remainder of her life serving the family and the gods she shall spend eternity with as opposed to accepting a place of refuge away from the things that matter to her.

Antigone expresses her grievances for Polyneices walking toward his own death. She tries to convince her brother to withdraw his troops. He explicitly tells her she can only help him after he has died—by burying his body. I think this is a helpful piece of her experience for consideration in attempting to understand what motivates her final act to bury him. Polyneices incentivizes his sisters to bury him by telling them it will quiet his ghost and they will be honored even more for their services by Oedipus than they already are.

After the chorus bids Polyneices adieu, letting him know he has brought no joy to the land at all,[306] Polyneices expresses his feeling of utter defeat.[307] He cries out that everything he had done—the armies he had acquired—and everything he went through to see Oedipus was for nothing. Yet, he comes up with one request for his sisters with regard to the curse Oedipus placed upon him. He asks his sisters to find a way to perform the burial rites for his death if Oedipus' curse comes true (which, as we know, is a task Antigone takes very seriously). He promises that if they will do this, they will be honored as much by the gods for serving Polyneices' in death as they are already honored for serving Oedipus in life. Antigone has argued that no man can escape his fate. Polyneices determines that everything he has done in his life has

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[306] Ibid., Chorus: Polyneices, your coming here has given me/ No joy at all. Now go away at once. [1397-1398].

[307] Ibid., Polyneices: Ah, what a journey! What a failure!/ My poor companions! See the finish now/ Of all we marched from Argos for! See me…/ For I can neither speak of this to anyone/ Among my friends, nor lead them back again;/ I must go silently to meet this doom./ O sisters—daughters of his, sisters of mine!/ You heard the hard curse of our father:/ For God's sweet sake, if father's curse comes true,/ And if you find some way to return home,/ Do not, at least, dishonor me in death!/ But give me a grace and what will quiet me./ Then you shall have, besides the praise he now/ Gives you for serving him, an equal praise/ For offices you shall have paid my ghost. [1399- 1413].

been for nothing. After his conversation with Oedipus, Polyneices knows his race is run. He is ready to accept his fate and move toward his death just like his father had been doing in making his way to Colonus. The only request he has is that his sisters find a way to bury his corpse.

Since Antigone, too, knows her limits, her last act is precisely what will give her honor from each of her deceased family members and give her a better eternal life than her temporal mortal one. Antigone's acquired knowledge and experience in *Oedipus at Colonus* in addition to her inherited knowledge of her familial history inform her actions and decisions just as the individual experiences of her other family members inform their actions and decisions. Therein lies the difference between Antigone and Ismene. Each possesses the same inheritance; but since they do not possess the same experience, they learn different lessons at different times. In the end the stories show that the characters of the *Theban Plays* learn to approach limits differently at different points of their lives having had different kinds of experience.

Antigone Chooses which Limits to Push and which to Abide

The intention of this section is to acknowledge the ambiguity involved in understanding Antigone in relation to limits. Though Antigone learns to push against certain laws and limitations, Antigone has a kind of fatalist disposition—she believes that no one can escape their mortal fate. She defends her father against the chorus of elders they meet at Colonus by telling them they are being too hard on Oedipus because no mortal can escape misfortune if the gods will it. The people Antigone and Oedipus meet in *Oedipus at Colonus* do not recognize them as the infamous Oedipus and his daughter Antigone at first. They do not see Oedipus for who he was or who he has become. They simply see a pitiful blind wanderer and his pitiful starving daughter. The truth about Oedipus and Antigone is that they have both experienced enough suffering at the hands of the gods to know and respect mortal limitations. They have also learned to survive and adjust to the miserable lives they have been given. Oedipus has accepted the fate the gods have bestowed upon him to the extent that he is willing to work against anyone who would have him moved from the place he knows the gods have said he should be. He even believes he can speak with the ruler of the lands and express to him the importance of letting him stay and die where he is. Oedipus accepts the terms of his existence and his fated misery and death. He eventually appreciates that he knows better than most men—that he has gained more knowledge though he has also suffered greatly for it. I think his knowledge and experience gets passed down to Antigone.

Antigone demonstrates that she has learned from her father's tragic downfall (that she, too, understands the control the gods have over the fate of mortal men) when she chimes in with a most persuasive plea on her father's behalf. She asks that they take mercy on a suffering man

and his daughter for all mortals are but victims in the face of their destinies. Antigone shows her understanding that no man can escape his fate—that the gods govern the mortal realm:

> Antigone: O men of reverent mind!/ Since you will not suffer my father,/ Old man though he is,/ And though you know his story—/ He never knew what he did—/ Take pity still on my unhappiness,/ And let me intercede with you for him./ Not with lost eyes, but looking in your eyes/ As if I were a child of yours, I beg/ Mercy for him, the beaten man! O hear me!/ We are thrown upon your mercy as on god's;/ Be kinder than you seem!/ By all you have and own that is dear to you;/ Children, wives, possessions, gods, I pray you!/ For you will never see in all the world/ A man whom god has led/ Escape his destiny![308]

Antigone reminds the chorus that Oedipus acted in ignorance. He was fated to suffer despite every effort made to avoid his fate. He did not knowingly marry his mother, murder his father, or beget children with his mother. He was unable to escape his destiny, which Antigone insists is the same with all of mankind. As Lacan suggests, Antigone has learned her father's lesson well enough to understand natural limits and to identify certain things as impossibilities. She speaks about fate being inescapable and believes the gods cannot be outrun. She knows that anyone a god has decided to lead into a certain fate has run their race, because the gods are quicker than mortals. She speaks in this tone and poses these arguments as the young child/adolescent/woman we meet in *Oedipus at Colonus* who, chronologically in terms of age, experience, and myth, precedes the Antigone of the play *Antigone*.

At a later point in *Oedipus at Colonus,* however, Antigone is less inclined to follow a certain rule. She is angered when Ismene tells her that they cannot go where Oedipus died. Antigone's anger does not stop Ismene from telling Antigone that there is yet another reason not

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[308] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Oedipus at Colonus*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 236-253].

to go,[309] which is that Oedipus was not actually buried and has no tomb to visit.[310] Antigone does not seem to care whether it is permitted for her to go or if there is a tomb to see there. She wants to go die where her father died.[311] Then, when Theseus tells Antigone and Ismene not to mourn anymore because they've been blessed with retribution,[312] Antigone responds to him as if he were an answer to her prayer and says, "Theseus: We fall on our knees to you!"[313] Yet, after Theseus asks what Ismene and Antigone wish for,[314] Antigone tells him what she had told Ismene—that she'd like to go to where Oedipus died,[315] which is precisely a wish Oedipus told her she should not have. Theseus rejects Antigone's request and tells her (just as Ismene told her) that she is not permitted to go there[316] because he swore an oath before the god that no mortal should ever see the place. He did so because Oedipus said that if he kept that oath his land would be safe from enemies.[317] Antigone accepts that she cannot go there as soon as she is told it would be against Oedipus' wishes and against an oath sworn to the gods. Antigone prefers to please those she most should please—the gods and the dead—well before she returns to Thebes and buries her brother. We can see that she is consistent throughout the three *Theban Plays* (noting that she does not speak in *Oedipus the King*). She does not transgress all rules and limits—only some.

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[309] Ibid., Ismene: —And remember, too— [1731] Antigone: Oh, What? [1732].
[310] Ibid., Ismene: He had no tomb, there was no one near! [1733].
[311] Ibid., Antigone: Take me there and you can kill me, too! [1734].
[312] Ibid., Theseus: Mourn no more, children. Those to whom/ The night of earth gives benediction/ Should not be mourned. Retribution comes. [1751-1753].
[313] Ibid., [1754].
[314] Ibid., Theseus: What is it that you desire, children? [1755].
[315] Ibid., Antigone: We wish to see the place ourselves/ In which our father rests. [1756-1757].
[316] Ibid., Theseus: No, no./ It is not permissible to go there. [1758].
[317] Ibid., Theseus: Because your father told me, children,/ That no one should go near the spot,/ No mortal man should tell of it,/ Since it is holy, and is his./ And if I kept this pledge, he said,/ I should preserve my land from its enemies/ I swore I would, and the god heard me:/ The oathkeeper who keeps track of all. [1760-1767].

Antigone determines that she must be satisfied with her father's wish, and so decides to return to Thebes for the purposes of protecting her brothers from each other.[318] Perhaps Antigone already knows when she makes this decision that the only way to help her brother is after his death. In any case, her actions are based upon her understanding of duty toward her family members as long as she is still alive (even if they're attacking each other). Antigone would have preferred to die then and there where Oedipus died rather than return to Thebes, but since her death at Colonus would not please the dead, she chooses to return to Thebes where there is sure to be a war—where she can spend the remainder of her existence doing whatever she can for her brothers.

Antigone clearly expresses a desire for death in *Oedipus at Colonus* after Oedipus dies, but it is also clear that she wants to die in that moment in a certain way. She is not able to die the way she wishes at that moment because she does not know how to find the place where she wishes to go and the only person who knows refuses to take her (Theseus). She accepts Theseus' refusal once he says it was Oedipus' wish that she shouldn't be taken there, but when the chorus tells her not to lament and insists that there is a place of refuge where no harm will come to her, she is not interested in a place of refuge. A place of refuge is a place to stay safe—to avoid peril. Antigone is courageous in the face of peril because she knows death is an inescapable part of being human, so she works toward securing her best afterlife in the meantime. She learned this as her father's companion in exile with a certain goal—to die in a certain place—to die at Colonus.

Ismene does not understand Antigone any better in *Oedipus at Colonus* than she does at the beginning of *Antigone*. The two sisters reunite in *Oedipus at Colonus* for the first time in about twenty years. They are different women. They see things differently. After losing their

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[318] Ibid., Antigone: If this was our father's cherished wish,/ We must be satisfied./ Send us back, then, to ancient Thebes, And we may stop the bloody war/ From coming between our brothers. [1768-1772].

father, Antigone asks Ismene how they are to "eke" out their lives[319] as if their lives are comparable to that last bit of toothpaste you want to use up before you let yourself open up a new tube. Antigone is not alone in speaking this way. Ismene answers, "I cannot guess. But as for me/ I wish that charnel Hell would take me/ In one death with our father./This is such desolation/ I cannot go on living."[320] Ismene is actually the first of the girls to explicitly wish for death, but Antigone quickly agrees and laments, "One may long for the past/ Though at the time indeed it seemed/ Nothing but wretchedness and evil./ Life was not sweet, yet I found it so/ When I could put my arms around my father./ O father! O my dear!/ Now you are shrouded in eternal darkness,/ Even in that absence/ You shall not lack our love,/ Mine and my sister's love."[321] Though Antigone includes her sister and vouches for her sister's love of Oedipus in this lamentation, Antigone also directs our attention to her past (which is hers alone and not Ismene's in that Ismene was not with them on their journey). According to Antigone in this moment, her past was sweet in that she could put her arms around her father, albeit wicked and evil in all other aspects. Ismene shares in Antigone's lamentations about the future without him, but Ismene cannot really long for her past with him as Antigone does. Ismene does not share that past, not the past twenty years.

Recall the conversation between Antigone and Ismene at the beginning of the play *Antigone.* Ismene tells Antigone to remember that their father, "perished abhorred, ill-famed."[322] It is precisely after Ismene's speech about their family's shame and their subordination to the men in power that Antigone separates herself from Ismene in speech and act, declaring that even

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[319] Ibid., But we are lost. A deathly/ Night is ahead of us./ For how, in some far country wandering,/ Or on the lifting seas,/ Shall we eke out our lives. [1683-1688].
[320] Ibid., [1689-1691].
[321] Ibid., [1696-1701].
[322] *Antigone*, [50].

if Ismene changed her mind Antigone would no longer be pleased to have her as a partner.[323] If we examine the difference between what the two women say and believe about their father's death, we can get a better idea of why Antigone and Ismene are not initially in agreement about what to do regarding Polyneices. The only thing Antigone laments about her father's death is that she could not be with him. The chorus tells the grieving daughters of Oedipus that, "He [Oedipus] lived his life,"[324] to which Antigone adds, "He did as he had wished."[325] This is yet another piece of the picture, I think, of what Antigone learns from her experience with her father and how she understands her father's death and the events leading up to it in stark contrast to Ismene's understanding of his dying 'abhorred' and 'ill-famed.'

When the chorus asks Antigone for clarification about what she means when she says Oedipus did as he wished, [326] Antigone replies, "In this land among strangers/ He died where he chose to die./ He has his eternal bed well shaded,/ And in his death is not unmourned./ My eyes are blind with tears/ From crying for you, father./ The terror and the loss/ Cannot be quieted./ I know you wished to die in a strange country,/ Yet your death was so lonely!/ Why could I not be with you?"[327] Ismene's follow-up does nothing to indicate an agreement with Antigone's declaration. Ismene is not the daughter of Oedipus who determines that Oedipus did as he wished. Ismene's cry conveys that her most immediate concern is about herself: "O pity! What is left for me?/ What destiny awaits us both/ Now we have lost our father?"[328] Again, whereas Antigone laments her past, present, and future regarding Oedipus, Ismene dwells solely on what

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[323] Ibid., [69].
[324] *Oedipus at Colonus*, [1702].
[325] Ibid., [1703].
[326] Ibid., Chorus: What do you mean? [1704].
[327] Ibid. [1705-1714].
[328] Ibid., [1715-1719].

is yet to come. The chorus tells them both that they should not grieve so much for Oedipus because he died so well and honorably.

The lecture from the chorus concludes, "Dear children, remember/ That his [Oedipus] last hour was free and blessed./ So make an end of grieving!/ Is anyone in all the world/ Safe from unhappiness?"[329] Unlike Ismene, who has spent the last twenty years as a princess in a palace, Antigone has the experience to understand what the chorus is telling them. Antigone knows suffering. She knows grief. She also better understands that Oedipus' death was free and blessed because no one knows better than Antigone that Oedipus wanted to die at Colonus because Antigone alone shared in his journey to Colonus. Antigone's response to the notion that perhaps no one in the world is safe from unhappiness and that she should not grieve for Oedipus because he died so well is the exclamation, "Let us run back there!"[330] Once again, Antigone and Ismene are not of the same mind. Ismene asks, "Why, what shall we do?"[331] Ismene expresses her anxiety and despair about the loss of her father and the bleakness of her future, but Ismene does not respond to Oedipus' death or to the wisdom of the chorus the way Antigone does. Ismene says she can't go on living and that she wishes she could also be taken to death with Oedipus, but when Antigone actually proposes to do it, Ismene questions her sister and makes a statement about their limitations[332] (much like she does at the beginning of *Antigone*).

Lacan tells us that Antigone's splendor is due to her push beyond the limits of life, or her approach toward atë. He paints her as a figure of death, desire, and criminality. The majority of Antigone's life is spent moving toward death. She knows Oedipus was unable to avoid his fate; and she joins him as he determines he will spend the rest of his life moving right toward the fate

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[329] Ibid., [1720-1721].
[330] Ibid., [1722].
[331] Ibid., [1723].
[332] Ibid., Ismene: But that is not permitted. Do you not see? [1728].

the gods set out for him. After Oedipus dies, Antigone has to determine what is best for her own course of action in life. She knows she has to die as all mortals do. She knows that as a mortal she can never be safe from misfortune and unhappiness. Yet, she also knows that after Oedipus suffered and made his way toward his fated place of death he was eternally redeemed, rewarded, and extracted from the earth by the grace of the gods. So, Antigone moves toward her death with her intentions set on receiving grace, especially after death. Death does not stand in the way of her goal for eternal grace. Fates worse than death, as she has discovered, result from defiance of the gods. She knows the suffering the gods are capable of bringing about. She also knows that they can bring them about for an eternity. She would rather cut her mortal life short and have an eternity of grace than risk an eternity of suffering in this life and/or the next.

I do not think any of the conclusions I'm putting forth remove her splendor, but I do think they might allow us to see more clearly what Antigone believes to be worth pushing the limits of her strength for (and toward) and why she believes them to be so. Antigone knows mortal lives are prone to suffering even the most unforeseeable misfortunes. She suffers from the fated misfortune of her father. Yet, she also spends a lifetime devoted to her father and his acceptance of his fate as they travel together to the place where he has been fated to die. Ismene is like Antigone in many ways. They share in kinship, gender, and an ill-famed inherited misfortune. They choose differently, however. The first variant choice we know of (reading the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth) is that Antigone chooses to go with Oedipus and Ismene chooses to stay. After this choice, there is no reason to think that Antigone and Ismene will ever choose the same again. After this choice, the lives of the two women deviate profoundly.

CHAPTER IV

ANTIGONE AND CREON

Creon: Your act of grace, in his regard, is crime.

Antigone: The corpse below would never say it was.

Creon: When you honor him and the criminal just alike?

Antigone: It was a brother, not a slave, who died.

Creon: Died to destroy this land the other guarded.

Antigone: Death yearns for equal law for all the dead.

Creon: Not that the good and bad draw equal shares.

Antigone: Who knows that this is holiness below?

Creon: Never the enemy, even in death, a friend.

Antigone: I cannot share in hatred, but in love.

Creon: Then go down there, if you must love, and love/ the dead. No woman rules me while I live.[333]

When Antigone buries her brother, Polyneices, she is defying the decree of her uncle Creon who has inherited the throne upon the death of Eteocles, but it is not simply her audacious defiance that makes her action so tirelessly iconic. It is also the conversation between Antigone and Creon that inspires incendiary philosophical discussion. The thirteen lines quoted above stimulate enigmatic inquiries into the natures of law, crime, kinship, passion, gender, and even

[333] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 515-527].

slavery in such way that all aspects seem interrelated in unforeseen ways. The fascinating thing about this conversation is that in just 13 lines Creon and Antigone put forth opposing positions about rule, laws, crime, death, honor, grace, holiness, friendship, enemies, family, and gender. In a way, it is simply amazing to think about two people disagreeing about so many things at once with such swift dialogue. The only way I can think to begin to ground the topic of this chapter is to first turn to the philosopher with the most famous account of opposing forces between Antigone and Creon. That philosopher, of course, is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

The Dialectic of Opposing Laws

Hegel's Antigone is motivated by her obedience to divine law—by her devotion to that which resides outside the mortal realm. Hegel's Creon is motivated by his obedience to human law. Their conflict is a conflict between two ethical laws. These two laws oppose each other and reveal themselves in opposition to one another because, "The law that is manifest to it is linked in the essence with its opposite; the essence is the unity of both; but the deed has only carried out one law in contrast to the other."[334] Their opposition to one another links divine law and human law and in *Antigone* there is a certain deed that, once carried out, creates the conflict that brings both laws to light. When Antigone acts according to divine law and against human law, the two laws manifest as opposites. Antigone does a deed that carries out the divine law when she buries her brother—performing sacred burial rights—but that same deed reveals itself in contrast to the other law. As Creon upholds human law, both laws appear as they oppose one another.

Though the two laws are linked in their essential appearances, "the fulfillment of the one evokes the other and—the deed having made it so—calls it forth as a violated and now hostile entity demanding revenge."[335] Antigone's deed fulfills divine law and reveals human law by opposing it. Human law reveals itself upon its violation because it seeks retaliation just as Creon seeks revenge once Antigone's deed fulfills a law which opposes his own. Hegel tells us the most important aspect of Antigone's deed is that she knows what she is doing because, "In the action, only one aspect of the action as such is clearly manifest. The resolve which knows what it does."[336] It is not simply that she does the deed. Antigone recognizes her deed as obeying one law and transgressing another.

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[334] Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Trans. By A.V. Miller. Oxford: 1977. [Section 437].
[335] Ibid.
[336] Ibid.

Antigone has to recognize that she has acted against the (human) law in her obedience toward the (divine) law. For the laws to manifest, "The doer cannot deny the crime or his guilt: the significance of the deed is that what was unmoved has been set in motion, and that what was locked up in mere possibility has been brought out into the open, hence to link together the unconscious and the conscious, non-being with being." In other words an act out of ignorance cannot make the laws appear in any actual kind of tension or opposition with one other. When a law is violated in ignorance, "a power which shuns the light of day ensnares the ethical self-consciousness, a power which breaks forth only after the deed is done, and seizes the doer in the act," and so it is only in the acknowledgment of guilt that, "the deed is brought out into the light of day,"[337] for otherwise it is shrouded in darkness, unknown. Only by recognizing her violation of a law can Antigone recognize, "something in which the conscious is bound up with the unconscious, what is one's own with what is alien to it, as an entity divided within itself; whose other aspect consciousness experiences and also finds to be its own, but as the power it has violated and roused to hostility."[338] If the arbiter of the law does not understand that she acted in violation of a law, there is no recognition to be discovered (to see the light of day) through the opposing forces and violent reaction from that which was violated. If Antigone cannot recognize that she was in violation, there can be no conscious resolve about that which was an act of violation and that which was violated and responds with hostility.

Hegel makes Antigone the figurehead for this depiction of movement in consciousness because her act is committed in full knowledge of her guilt and, "the ethical consciousness is more complete, its guilt more inexcusable, if it knows *beforehand* the law and the power which it opposes, if it takes them to be violence and wrong, to be ethical merely by accident, and, like

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[337] Ibid.
[338] Ibid.

Antigone, knowingly commits the crime."[339] Antigone helps Hegel paint his picture of ethical consciousness because she does not act in ignorance, which makes her crime more inexcusable. She knows that she is violating the law and does it anyway. She also perceives the law as something violent and wrong. Her action, in its being recognized as defiance of the law, makes her recognition of guilt directly follow because, "the ethical consciousness must, on account of this actuality and on account of its deed, acknowledge its opposite as its own actuality, must acknowledge its guilt. Because we suffer we acknowledge we have erred."[340] In acting against the law knowingly, Hegel proposes that Antigone's guilt manifests with her actualization of the crime and, "With this acknowledgement there is no longer any conflict between ethical purpose and actuality; it signifies the return to an ethical frame of mind, which knows that nothing counts but right. But the doer thereby surrenders his own *character* and the *reality* of his self, and has been ruined."[341] If Hegel's Antigone is the character of the doer in this dialectic of ethical self-consciousness, then what follows is that she acknowledges her error through suffering, surrenders her being, and accepts that she has been ruined by her deed. The reason being because she was, "incapable of surviving the destruction of this ethical power by its opposite"[342] or incapable of upholding her law behind her deed without suffering the consequences inflicted by the holder of the law she violated.

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[339] Ibid.
[340] Ibid., [470].
[341] Ibid.
[342] Ibid., [471].

The Dialectic of Opposing Desires

One would be hard-pressed to deny that Antigone has a bent toward the dead and the divine that goes beyond her living counterparts (just as Creon points out when he tells her to go and love them down there). Likewise, one could scarcely deny Antigone's recognition of her transgression given the powerful way in which she declares to Creon, "I knew, of course I knew. The word was plain."[343] However, there are a number of contentious aspects of Hegel's Antigone such as the following: 1) Can we really be so sure Antigone recognizes her transgression as error or failure and that reconciliation is achieved? and 2) Is it sufficient to say her act is motivated by upholding the divine law passed down to mortals through the household gods of kinship? Recent scholarship over the past two decades tends to answer 'no' to both questions, seeking a fuller account of what is at stake in the conflict between Antigone and Creon as well as what motivates her action and her recognition of that action.

Lacan finds the weakness in Hegel's account of Antigone to be the suggestion that there is a movement toward reconciliation. Her action is better understood, Lacan insists, as an act that moves against reconciliation in every way imaginable. Lacan references *Oedipus at Colonus* and forms the conclusion that the message revealed in *Oedipus at Colonus* is far too bleak to mean anything regarding reconciliation. Specifically, he references the choral lines, "Never to have been born were best…" and asks, "How can one talk of reconciliation in connection with a tone like that."[344] It is precisely Antigone's position against any kind of reconciliation that makes her so splendid by Lacan's account. She moves against reconciliation with her insistence upon fulfilling her fated atë. She is aware that there can be no reconciliation because, after all,

[343] Ibid. [448]
[344] Ibid., 307.

her "race is run."[345] Reconciliation means staying within limits. To push beyond them is to do the opposite. Again, the limits Antigone pushes are the limits of life toward the sphere of death. The attitude that death is second best to never having been born is the kind of attitude Lacan ascribes to Antigone's fatal action. She has given into her familial history of atë. In evaluating her experiences as the daughter of Oedipus who travels with Oedipus in exile[346] to his death, it should become clearer why she learns at such a young age that no man is free from misfortune until his death. Further, she learns that being a king (like her father) does not make a man able to overrule or outrun the gods.

Lacan points out that Goethe's Creon is also very different from, "The Hegelian view that Creon is opposed to Antigone as one principle of the law, of discourse, to another,"[347] because, "Goethe, on the other hand, shows Creon is driven by his desire and manifestly deviates from the straight path; he seeks to break through a barrier in striking at his enemy [Polynices] beyond limits within which he has the right to strike him."[348] Lacan discusses the conflict between Creon and Antigone as a conflict of opposing desires rather than laws. Creon's desire, according to Lacan, is "to promote the good of all."[349] Antigone's desire takes shape in the form of her transgression of the law. Lacan is not so convinced by Antigone's claim that she shares only in love and not in hatred. He argues that the manner in which Antigone speaks to Creon and

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[345] Ibid., 332.
[346] The crucial point of departure for interpreting Antigone and Ismene, I think, is in recognizing that Ismene did not accompany Oedipus in exile. So, my suggestions of what Antigone learns is in part that she is the daughter of Oedipus, but also that she spent her life with Oedipus and in wretched starvation and homelessness. Ismene did not have the same experiences, so she does not make the same decisions or take the same actions though she is also the daughter of Oedipus.
[347] Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII.* Trans. by Dennis Porter. London and New York: 2008. (313).
[348] Ibid.
[349] Ibid.

Ismene contradicts her claim that she is made only for love and not hate.[350] Lacan's example is when Antigone tells Ismene, "Go back to your Creon, since you love him so"[351] and thereby demonstrates her capacity for cruelty and enmity in both relations.

Lacan insists that Antigone's act is motivated by her personal desires. She is neither open to a resolution nor does she recognize her error. When Lacan references *Oedipus at Colonus,* it is to suggest that Hegel is being too optimistic to think Antigone ever feels a sense of recognition and resolve.[352] She chooses to act in knowledge of her defiance and determines that either she is wrong and will accept her punishment from the gods in the next life or she is right and will be vindicated in the realm of the gods at the same time she receives a warm embrace from her deceased family members. As Lacan tells us, this is not exactly an indication of a resolution. It indicates that the gods will decide in the end who was right and who was wrong, but she defers to their judgment.

Antigone recognizes her subordination to the gods until the end, but it is not clear that she recognizes that she erred: "Should the gods think that this is righteousness,/ in suffering I'll see my error clear./ But if it is the others who are wrong/ I wish them no greater punishment than mine."[353] These are some of the last lines Antigone speaks before she is taken away to the tomb. In life, Antigone suffers, but she defers absolute judgment of her act to what the gods will have to say in the afterlife. She projects that she will recognize her error if the gods punish her in Hades. She awaits her judgment in the afterlife. She laments that she feels abandoned in life and believes her piety has been misunderstood. She determines that she will accept her error *in the afterlife* if the gods see fit to punish her. If, on the other hand, she is rewarded and receives the

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[350] Ibid., 324.
[351] Ibid.
[352] Ibid., 307.
[353] Ibid., [891-928].

relief from suffering in the afterlife, Antigone wishes nothing worse for those who did err than the same punishment they inflicted upon her.[354] On the other hand, Creon receives great punishment and recognizes his error. The reason given for his punishment is that he dishonored the gods by burying the living and not burying the dead.

Having previously referenced Aristotle's account of the tragic catharsis of fear and pity, Lacan remarks that neither Antigone nor Creon feels fear or pity.[355] Furthermore, Lacan insists that of the two, it is Antigone that *never* feels fear or pity, whereas Creon does eventually.[356] Lacan supports this claim by pointing out that Creon does explicitly recognize his error (rather than await the decision of the gods in the afterlife). Antigone says she will recognize her error in her suffering in the afterlife if the gods so choose. Creon recognizes his error in his suffering by the end of the play. Creon confesses, "O crimes of my wicked heart,/ harshness bringing death./ You see the killer, you see the kin he killed./ My planning was all unblest./ Son, you have died too soon./ Oh, you have gone away/ through my fault, not your own."[357] Creon owns his mistakes and recognizes his error in a way that Antigone does not. Antigone is still awaiting either punishment or redemption from the gods to determine whether or not her decision was

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[354] It seems clear that she means Creon here. Creon, of course, does suffer as great of a punishment as that which Antigone laments about having endured. She laments going to death alone, without a spouse or a child, which becomes precisely Creon's fate. He is carried out, presumably to death in the end having lost his son and his wife to suicide (which they both performed cursing Creon and which Creon takes responsibility for).

[355] Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII.* Trans. by Dennis Porter. London and New York: 2008. (317).

[356] Ibid.

[357] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 1261-1269].

made in error. Her reluctance to yield throughout the entirety of the play is one reason that Lacan dubs Antigone the 'real hero'.[358]

Once again, Creon's purpose according to Lacan, is "to promote the good of all."[359] By Lacan's interpretation, Creon's error of judgment (explained with reference to Aristotle), is precisely his desire to promote the good of all. So, Lacan, marvels at why Antigone finds living with Creon and abiding by his laws so unbearable. He explains, "She lives in the house of Creon; she is subject to his law; and this is something she cannot bear,"[360] but immediately asks, "But why not after all? She is fed and housed, and in Sophocles, she isn't married off like Giraudoux's Electra."[361] Lacan's point here is that Goethe's Antigone offers a better assessment of the situation between Antigone and Creon than Hegel does. Goethe's Antigone and Goethe's Creon reveal opposing desires which makes their disagreement more impassioned—more personal—than the disagreement between a man and a woman upholding two sets of laws. The fact that Antigone seems to really hate Creon matters to Lacan and, quite frankly, seems to make Antigone more interesting to him.

Lacan's question about Antigone's hatred for Creon is another instance in which Antigone becomes more understandable if we think about what she learns and experiences in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Antigone has plenty of reasons to hate Creon. For one thing, Oedipus really hates Creon by the time they meet again in *Oedipus at Colonus.*[362] According to Oedipus, Creon

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[358] Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII.* Trans. by Dennis Porter. London and New York: 2008. (317). Another reason Lacan offers on the same page is that the first lines are spoken by Antigone rather than Creon.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Ibid. 323.
[361] Ibid.
[362] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Oedipus at Colonus*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). Oedipus: You brazen rascal! Playing your rascal's tricks/ In righteous speeches, as you always would!/ Why do you try it? How can you think to take me/ Into that snare I should so hate if taken?/ That time

waited a long time to make a decision about his exile. Once Oedipus began to feel better about his life and no longer wanted to be killed or exiled, Creon suddenly decided to exile him. If this is so, Antigone has reason to blame Creon for the fact that she spent most of her life wandering homeless and wretched in exile. Shortly after the speech in *Oedipus at Colonus* to which I am referring, Creon kidnaps Antigone and she is violently restrained by Creon's soldiers as she tries to hold onto her father.[363] With the *Theban Plays* in mind, she is less enigmatic and more straightforward once we read her whole story.

Regardless of why Antigone appears to hate Creon, Lacan's Antigone differs from Hegel's in that she desires the act of transgression as such—Antigone gets what she wants through her act of defiance. It is not about two opposing laws; it's about a woman who hates a man and wants to follow in her brother's and her father's footsteps in crime and a man who errs

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when I was sick with my private/ Agony: when I would lightly have left the earth—/ You had no mind to give me what I wanted!/ But when at long last I had had my fill/ Of rage and grief, and in my quiet house/ Began to find some comfort: that was the time/ You chose to rout me out./ How precious was this kinship to you then?/ It is the same thing now: you see this city/ And all its people being kind to me,/ So you attempt to coax me away from them!/ A cruel thing, for all your soothing words./ What pleasure is there in being amiable/ To those who do not want your amiability?/ Suppose that when you wanted something terribly/ A man should neither grant it you nor give/ Sympathy even; but later when you were glutted/ With all your heart's desire, should give it then,/ When charity was no charity at all?/ Would you not think the kindness somewhat hollow?/ That is the sort of kindness you offer me:/ Generous in words, but in reality evil./ Now I will tell these men, and prove you evil./ You come to take me, but no to take me home;/ Rather to settle me outside the city/ So that the city may escape my curse,/ Escape from punishment by Athens./ Yes;/ But you'll not have it. What you'll have is this:/ My vengeance active in the land forever;/ And what my sons will have of my old kingdom/ Is just so much room as they need to die in!/ Now who knows better the destiny of Thebes?/ I do, for I have had the best informants;/ Apollo, and Zeus himself who is his father./ And yet you come here with our fraudulent speech/ All whetted up! The more you talk, the more/ Harm, not good, you'll get by it!—/ However, I know you'll never believe that.—/ Only leave us! Let us live here in peace!/ Is it a bad life, if it gives us pleasure? [Lines 761-779]
[363]Ibid., Creon (*to Guards*): You there: it would be well to take her now,/ Whether she wants to go with you or not. (*Two Guards approach Antigone.*) Antigone: Oh, God, where shall I run? What help is there/ From gods or men? Chorus: What are you doing, stranger? Creon: I will not touch this man; only her who is mine. Oedipus: O masters of this land! Chorus: This is unjust! Creon: No, just! Chorus: Why so? Creon: I take what belongs to me! Oedipus: O Athens! (*The Guards pinion Antigone's arms.*) [826-836].

(and recognizes his error)[364] in his desire for the good of all. Lacan dismisses Hegel's claims of reconciliation by appealing to the bleakness of the tone in *Oedipus at Colonus*, the impassioned hatred involved in the conflict between Antigone and Creon, and Antigone's lack of recognition that she erred. More recently than Lacan, we get a similar rendering of Antigone from Slovaj Źiźek as well as Źiźek's 2016 version of *Antigone* that brings Antigone back to life in an added scene wherein she is forced to finally recognize her error.

Źiźek interprets Antigone as having a Freudian death drive whose pure desire for destruction (which is much like Lacan's account of her pure desire in the form of the criminal) objects to the sovereign authority. Antigone's desire is emblematic, according to Źiźek, of a feminine desire concerned with the individual and with chaos. This feminine desire is opposed to the masculine desire, which is concerned with the community and with order (this part seems to resemble Hegel as much as it resembles Lacan):

> However, we shouldn't forget that the paradigmatic case of such an act [transgression] is *feminine*: Antigone's 'No!' to Creon, to state power; her act is literally suicidal, she excludes herself from the community, whereby she offers nothing new, no positive program—she just insists on her unconditional demand…The very masculine *activity* is already an escape from the abysmal dimension of the feminine *act*. The 'break with

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[364] The most consistent question I am asked when I give a talk about Antigone at conferences is about her status as a tragic hero. I feel as though I would need to write a separate dissertation on the 'tragic hero' in order to sufficiently answer. Limiting myself to a strictly Aristotelian notion of the tragic hero, I would say that Creon, not Antigone, is the tragic hero of the play *Antigone.* This is not to say I don't find Antigone heroic, but I agree with Lacan that she does not recognize her error. I also agree that she does not evoke or enact the same kind of fear and pity we expect from a tragic hero like Oedipus or Creon. Aristotle holds Oedipus up as the paradigmatic tragic hero with an exemplary tale of reversal and recognition. Creon's arc is just like that of Oedipus. Antigone's is strikingly different. Antigone's character does not offer us a reversal or a recognition. At least, not in an obvious way or one that takes shape in a single play. If Antigone is a tragic hero, she is of a different kind. She is more like the tragic female characters of Euripides who are excessively virtuous and who overpower the men in power (although she does so in a much less clever manner than the women in Euripides).

nature' is on the side of woman, and man's compulsive activity is ultimately nothing but a desperate attempt to repair the traumatic incision of this rupture.[365]

Źiźek points us to Hollywood cinema for the disclosure of examples of what he proposes are reproductions of the originating 'no' from the death seeking Antigone of Sophocles' *Antigone.* Źiźek's point here is not far off from Lacan's in that he interprets Antigone's drive toward death as a drive toward chaos, criminality, and destruction obtained by means of transgressing the authority figure.

In *Antigone's Claim,* Judith Butler asks us to consider what Hegel and Lacan missed and offers a response to, "Slovaj Źiźek's brief account of Antigone offered in *Enjoy Your Symptom!*"[366] in which, "he suggests that Antigone's 'no!' to Creon is a feminine and destructive act, one whose negativity leads to her own death."[367] In Butler's account, Antigone's desire for love is intertwined with her desire for death and, "If the love toward which she moves as she moves toward death is a love for her brother and thus, ambiguously, her father, it is also a love that can only be consummated by its obliteration, which is no consummation at all."[368] Butler considers that Antigone's death drive is incited by her desire for the kind of love that cannot be consummated in a typical fashion. Due to the incest taboo followed up with legal restrictions from the state, Antigone cannot have the kind of love she desires and her desire for that kind of love can only be expressed in her death and obliteration.

Butler expands upon the notion of what Antigone accomplishes in terms of gender to political policies on kinship and love relations. First, Antigone transgresses her gender performance because, "The insistence on public grieving is what moves her away from feminine

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[365] Źiźek, Slovaj. *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out.* Routledge: 2001. (46).
[366] Ibid., 68.
[367] Ibid.
[368] Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim.* New York: 2000. (76).

gender into hubris, into that distinctively manly excess that makes the guards, the chorus, and Creon wonder: Who is the man here?"[369] Antigone's assertiveness, public speech, and excessive behavior make her "manly" like her brother and like her father in their hubris. A significant departure Butler is making from some of her interlocutors here is that she is forming her claims around Antigone's manliness as opposed to interpreting her act as feminine, which Hegel and Źiźek do. The move Butler is making is most like Lacan in this instance because both Butler and Lacan interpret Antigone's act as being bound up with her male family members.

Butler elucidates, "There seem to be some spectral men here, ones that Antigone herself inhabits, the brothers whose place she has taken and whose place she transforms in the takings."[370] Like Lacan, Butler's Antigone operates in the form of desire in which she takes on a similar action as that of her brother and father. The difference between Lacan and Butler is that Butler pushes the sense of Antigone's desire toward the incest taboo, whereas Butler attests that Hegel, Lacan, and many other scholars before her seem to steer vehemently away from the incest taboo. Butler stresses that Antigone embraces a kind of manliness in her act of defiance because of her desire for her brother, her father, and for death. Furthermore, Antigone's desire is an impossible desire, which leads to her great distress. Butler refers to Antigone's tragic despair as the psychological depiction we get from Freud regarding melancholia. In Antigone's melancholia, Butler sees Antigone's registration of her claim expressed in violent language to direct hostility toward Creon and toward the state.

One of Butler's accounts of Antigone's transgression is that she harbors incestuous desires for her dead brother and father and, "Thus she acts not in the name of the god of kinship but by transgressing the very mandates of those gods, a transgression that gives kinship its

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[369] Ibid.
[370] Ibid.

prohibitive and normative dimension but that also exposes its vulnerability."[371] Antigone claims that she acts in the name of the unwritten laws of the gods, but Butler insists that she also transgresses the laws of the gods in her continuation of her incestuous heritage in terms of her desires. Antigone further transgresses the laws of kinship regarding incest, which are upheld by the state through her defiant act in burial and in speech to defy Creon, and therefore, the state. In doing so, she also transgresses the limits of her gender:

> Although Hegel claims that her deed is opposed to Creon's *the two acts mirror rather than oppose one another*, suggesting that if the one represents kinship and the other the state, they can perform this representation only by becoming implicated in the idiom of the other. In speaking to him, she becomes manly; in being spoken to, he is unmanned, and so neither maintains their position within gender and the disturbance of kinship appears to destabilize gender throughout the play.[372]

Within Butler's analysis, the conflict between Antigone and Creon emanates a number of alternative ways to consider Antigone's action and character. Antigone defies her gender role when she emasculates Creon with her assumed masculinity. Antigone assumes the manliness of her brother and father to emasculate Creon with her defiant and public act of burial and speech. Antigone disturbs the laws of kinship, the laws of the state, and the laws of gender by choosing to act as she does and by demanding she be heard. [373]

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[371] Ibid., 10.
[372] Ibid.
[373] Ibid., 11. "Antigone comes, then, to act in ways that are called manly not only because she acts in defiance of the law but also because she assumes the voice of the law in committing the act against the law. She not only does the deed, refusing to obey the edict, but she also does it again by refusing to deny that she has done it, thus appropriating the rhetoric of agency from Creon himself. Her agency emerges precisely through her refusal to honor his command, and yet the language of this refusal assimilates the very terms of sovereignty that she refuses. He expects that his word will govern her deeds, and she speaks back to him, countering his sovereign speech act by asserting her own sovereignty."

In a sense, Butler's Antigone is more Hegelian than Lacan or Źiźek's because her depiction of Antigone's desire is *not* (as understood by Lacan and Źiźek) purely for the sake of transgression and *is* (as understand by Hegel) about the laws that oppose her own private familial devotion. Her deviation from Hegel, however, is that Butler's Antigone acts and speaks not on behalf of the laws of kinship but rather as a declaration of her love and a rebellion against the laws by which her love cannot be otherwise expressed. Furthermore the profoundest difference is that Butler's Antigone acts in an aberrant form of kinship and moves against traditional roles of gender, sisterhood, and marital relations. Because of her aberrant desires, Butler questions how anyone could ever read Antigone as Hegel does, as a standardized feminine force of the divine laws of kinship.[374]

This particular critique of Hegel's rendering of Antigone has been further taken up by a number of scholars responding to Butler as well as her interlocutors Lacan and Źiźek. For instance, In *Antigone's Line* Mary Beth Mader offers an interpretation of Antigone that strongly opposes Lacan's Antigone and takes Butler's Antigone in yet another direction regarding Antigone's motivation in terms of kinship relations and incest. Mader argues that Antigone is motivated by the horror of her family's incest: "If 'doom extends to all the kin' precisely *as* the kin, if the helplessness of human beings in such netted bonds as families joins them by their choice and [k]not,[375] then Antigone's election of her brother Polyneices as the point at which to pluck at the generational tangle is likewise the choice to release all her kin from their family

[374] In the next chapter, I discuss John Seery's critique of Butler's reading of Hegel (as well as her reading of Steiner).

[375] I am assuming this is an appropriate correction to a typo given the context of the sentence and the imagery of the "generational tangle."

shame."[376] Mader's argument is that Antigone defies the decree for her brother specifically to maintain the designated tie she has to Polyneices as *only* a brother. Eteocles and Polyneices are not only Creon's nephews; they are Antigone's nephews as well due to the unusual circumstances of the Oedipal family line. Considering that Oedipus and Antigone are both the offspring of Jocasta, Oedipus is Antigone's half-brother as well as her father, so his sons are her brothers and her nephews. Mader's proposition is that Antigone's words and action aim forcefully and specifically at maintaining traditional lines of kin. Antigone's main objective, according to Mader, is to draw the line between her siblings and her parents. She must maintain that Eteocles and Polyneices are her brothers, and nothing other than brothers. Likewise she draws the line to Oedipus as her father, and only her father.

Mader's depiction of Antigone's aims, "agrees with Butler's performative construal of the socially contingent nature of kinship, but takes the iterative character of the kinship norm in this case to indicate not Antigone's aberrant deformation of kinship, but rather her essentially reparative effort at re-formation of an unshamed and unashamed family constellation."[377] Much like with Butler's Antigone, Mader reveals the possibility that Antigone's action is out of a desperate attempt to respond to social kinship norms. Taking a strong turn away from Butler, Mader forms the opposite conclusion about Antigone's desire and motivation for doing so. Whereas Butler pushes us to consider that Antigone might very well have incestuous desires and impulses motivating her action, Mader argues in the opposite direction. Mader's illustration of Antigone is a young woman so opposed to her family's violation of kinship, she will stop at nothing to restore order to her family tree.

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[376] Mader, Mary Beth. "Antigone's Line" in *Feminist Readings of Antigone*, ed. Fanny Söderbäch (Suny Press 2010), 170.
[377] Ibid.

Tina Chanter takes Mader's account of Antigone's restorative movement beyond kinship. Chanter recounts that, "In her important article, 'Antigone's Line,' Mary Beth Mader suggests that Antigone's insistence upon burying [Polynices] should be read as an effort to disambiguate the symbolic order of the father from the son, an order that Oedipus had conflated through incest."[378] Chanter offers an extension to Mader's argument by proposing that, "the ramifications of Antigone's burial of her brother not only asserts the importance of differentiating between the familial roles of father and son, but also implicates her both in an attempt to articulate the significance of the fact that [Polynices] is a free man, rather a slave."[379] Chanter extends Mader's argument into a conversation about race and slavery. In Chanter's interpretation of Antigone's argument with Creon, Antigone explicitly brings slavery into the conversation because she is, at least in part, motivated by restoring her family's honor and diverting it from the ranks of slaves (which Creon is doing by denying the burial rites for Polyneices). Chanter's extension does not stop there. She argues that Antigone is also, "clarifying the conditions under which women are exchanged through marriage, for the sake of male inheritance. In distinguishing her brother from a slave, Antigone is at the same time distinguishing herself from a slave, claiming a voice in order to assert the bonds of philia between women, rather than between men."[380] Mader and Chanter both make a return the overall assessment that Antigone's action is, as Hegel argued centuries ago, about upholding the divine laws of kinship, but each adds an additional motivation involving status and the drawing of lines.

Chanter distinguishes her account of the bonds of philia from Hegel in that she believes Antigone makes herself an active participant in her devotion to philia rather than a passive one

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[378] Chanter, Tina. *Whose Antigone?: The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery.* Suny: 2011. (162n10).
[379] Ibid.
[380] Ibid.

because, “Whereas archaic, aristocratic convention dictated the exchange of women between one aristocratic family and another, with the intention of establishing, solidifying, or guaranteeing bonds of philia between the male guardians who orchestrated such exchanges, Antigone aligns herself with philia.”[381] Hegel’s Antigone bears an inherent link to the chthonic laws of kinship as a woman and as a sister, which Chanter proposes reflects an archaic convention that makes Antigone out to be a passive recipient of the bonds male arbiters of the family impressed upon women.

Chanter’s Antigone, on the other hand, “refuses to be a merely passive participant in an exchange that is premised on construing her as a mere token, an object to be passed from one man to another, rather than a subject capable of forging a relationship for herself, an active participant establishing her own value.”[382] Speaking directly about Hegel, Chanter concludes that, “In this regard, Hegel’s insistence on construing Antigone’s action of burying [Polynices] on the basis of her natural relationship with her brother, rather than as an act motivated by the philia she herself cites.”[383] What Chanter means when she refers to Antigone’s active establishment of value and philia is that Antigone chooses to devote her cause to her brother (unlike Hegel’s Antigone who devotes herself to her brother because he is her brother and she is his sister).

By Chanter’s assessment, Hegel’s reading of Antigone is a, “refusal to grant her an active role in constructing her relationship to [Polynices],”[384] in that it assumes she does so as a passive participant of a law as opposed to someone who actively recognizes, “the importance of

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[381] Chanter, Tina. *Whose Antigone?: The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery.* Suny: 2011. (15).
[382] Ibid.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Ibid. Different spellings of Polyneices/[Polynices] occur due to different translations. Though the translation I am using for this project spells it Polyneices, I refer to the spellings of the author when citing quotations.

philia,"[385] or, in other words, the importance of willful love and loyalty. Furthermore, Chanter declares Hegel's account of Antigone's motivation is, "a failure to read Antigone as contesting the idea that she should serve merely as a conduit for circulation among men, rather than as an agent capable of making a natural relationship into a relationship of loyalty."[386] To confirm Antigone's agency and active participation in reflective attribution of loyalty (of philia), Chanter asks rhetorically, "If Antigone's bond to her brother is unreflective, how and why is the ostensibly natural bond to her sister differentiated from it? How is Antigone's familial duty to her brother elevated above any relationship she might develop toward her sister?"[387] The point Chanter works out is that Antigone's bond to her brother is reflective and therefore active. As we will discuss in the next chapter, Antigone clearly does not devote herself to all kin in the same way.

In regard to Antigone's preferred choice of kin when it comes to loyalty Chanter posits that, "when Antigone claims that her nature is to love and not to hate, she should be understood as asserting her spiritual capacity, as someone who is making a determination about her right as a subject to recognize other subjects as subjects worthy of love, rather than someone who merely acts unreflectively, and whose act is driven by her status as a blood relative."[388] Chanter considers that the reason Hegel fails to acknowledge Antigone's claim to love whom she subjectively chooses is because he does not, "entertain the significance of Antigone's attitude toward her sister, whom Antigone refuses to recognize as worthy of love, once Ismene has refused to help her bury [Polynices]."[389] Reminding us about the opening conversation between

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[385] Ibid.
[386] Ibid.
[387] Ibid.
[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid.

Antigone and Ismene (as well as Antigone's response to Ismene's later decision to claim responsibility for the burial alongside Antigone), Chanter indicts Hegel for not acknowledging Antigone's choice of loyalty as a choice. She further speculates that, "Perhaps Hegel fails to take this difference into account because he assumes Ismene's actions (or lack of them), and Antigone's relationship to her sister, are of little consequence."[390] Chanter considers that Hegel's assumption would not necessarily run counter to, "ancient Greek assumptions about the incongruous fit between women and politics, and the subordinate role of women to men in all aspects of life."[391] Creon's assumptions about the subordinate role of women to men in all aspects of life are consonant with Hegel's. So too, is Ismene's assumption at the beginning of *Antigone* the play. Antigone, the character, assumes nothing of the sort; and, as Lacan points out, she *never* changes her mind about whose rule she is or is not subordinate to (though Hegel's reading seems to suggest otherwise and Źiźek's 2016 *Antigone* adds a scene so that she can recognize her error after death).

In partial response to Źiźek, Fatima Festic's "Antigone in (Post-) Modern Palestine" (featured in the 2003 Hecate Journal) presents the notion of Antigone's feminine act of destruction in defiance of the state as a psychological exposé of a growing trend in girl suicides in Jerusalem. Festic made the connection while teaching a course on world mythologies at Grand Valley State University in West Michigan where she, "devoted considerable time to the play and character of Antigone."[392] Festic observes, "The usual demarcation of her [Antigone], as a *bride of death*, was too close to my years of writing about raped Bosnian girls who later committed suicide, usually hanging themselves; and the 'return of the repressed,' the other name for

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[390] Ibid.
[391] Chanter, Tina. *Whose Antigone?: The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery.* Suny: 2011. (15).
[392] Festic, Fatima. "Antigone in (Post-) Modern Palestine." *Hecate* 2003. (86).

symptom in modern psychoanalysis, turns the border between law and terror into a fragile sign that resists interpretation."[393] The combination of rape, suicide, and revenge of the repressed culminate an Antigone-inspired understanding of a Palestinian girl with whom Festic had taken an interest during her research on the Bosnian Holocaust.

Festic asks, "Should we today read Antigone only through her 'passionate attachment' to her male kin, or should we, rather, try to look for the sources of her-being-towards-death beyond that, elsewhere?"[394] Festic is referring the "passionate attachment" Butler notes as well as the passion Lacan is so "enchanted by."[395] Festic looks for the sources of Antigone's death drive and, "links the figure of the classic Antigone to the girl suicide in Palestine," because of the similarly, "intolerable conditions in the horror of the proximity of everything, the proximity that deconstructs any possible symbolic edifice in advance."[396] The first point of comparison Festic makes is the immense suffering and abjection of the young Antigone and the young raped Palestinian girl. Her next point of comparison is the rebellion. Her interest is in, "a possible shift from passive raped girl to a Palestinian girl rebel, a transition from passivity of victim to an activity of vengeance that would be neither tragic nor delinquent."[397] The analog presented between Antigone and the Palestinian girl is that each of the young women transition from passive victims to active revenge seekers.

Accounting for the Palestinian girl, Festic says, "Her defiance against the rule of the State of Israel was for the sake of her own homeland certainly, 'in the name of Allah' perhaps—but most of all, I thought, she committed it for herself." Festic takes a psychoanalytic approach to the

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[393] Ibid.
[394] Ibid., 88.
[395] Ibid.
[396] Ibid.
[397] Ibid.

actions of the Palestinian girl in the same vein as Butler and Lacan on Antigone. Festic suggests the girl did not simply act on principle, for her kin, or for religious martyrdom. Festic's draws a line between the interpretations of Antigone's pure criminality and destruction that we get from Lacan and Źiźek to the destructive suicidal act of the Palestinian girl. The difference, however, is that Festic expands their readings of Antigone's criminal and/or destructive act to argue that both the action of Antigone and the action of the Palestinian girl are not simple or pure acts of chaos, criminality, desire, or destruction.

For Festic, both actions from the two women are acts of vengeance in direct response to violations of human rights and the human body. This is not to say Festic denies the "horror of her act," and in fact Festic stresses that, "Girl suicide is one of the most serious issues facing the humanities and society."[398] Festic's argument does not aim to promote or condone the destructive nature of the act, but it does insist upon a closer account of the issue. One similarity to note about Butler's Antigone and Festic's Palestinian girl is the desperate need to accomplish one's mission only by obliteration—there is no other way. Lacan and Źiźek put forth an Antigone who defies and crosses boundaries because of her desire to do so. Butler and Festic put forth an Antigone who defies and crosses boundaries because it is the only viable course of action she can see from her devastated and "melancholic" vantage point.

Festic considers the Freudian concept of melancholia alongside Butler with regard to Antigone. Butler refers to Freud's psychological picture of the melancholic and explains that, "Her [Antigone's] melancholia, if we can call it that, seems to consist in this refusal to grieve that is accomplished through the very public terms by which she insists on her right to grieve. Her claim to entitlement may well be the sign of melancholia at work in her speech." Butler's

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[398] Ibid., 89.

assertion is that Antigone expresses her unfulfilled desires for a kind of love that the state could not accept by insisting upon her public grief. In other words, Antigone defies the public body that scorned her true desires for love by forcing that same public body to endure her cries of grief, which would result in their recognition of the wrongful pain inflicted upon her. Butler argues, "The psychological picture of, 'The melancholic,' Freud tells us, registers his or her 'plaint,' levels a juridical claim, where the language becomes the event of the grievance, where emerging from the unspeakable, language carries a violence that brings it to the limits of speakability."[399] In Butler's account, Antigone transgresses the state in multiple ways. Her transgression takes shape in the form of desire, language, and action. In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at Freud's notions of mourning and melancholia and scrutinize Butler's ascription of melancholia to Antigone. The point, for now, is that the idea that Antigone depicts an expression of melancholia is popular in contemporary scholarship.

For instance, Festic urges us to consider the "psychodrama" of "Woman's death through exclusion from a symbolic community,"[400] and insists that the "Palestinian Antigone"[401] evokes a "history of women's suicides"[402] which have "contained that other, performative form of self-destruction"[403] brought about because, "one is obviously forced into it—the only defense a woman has is her own performance of death within death."[404] Her sympathies are clear. Festic moves away (to a certain extent) from Źiźek's account of the monstrous feminine act. Her task is for us to first consider the abjection and complete violation of humanity experienced by these girl suicide bombers and then face the "real question" which is, "how to make a change—and

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[399] Ibid., 80.
[400] Ibid., 93-94.
[401] Ibid., 90.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Ibid.
[404] Ibid.

what can change Antigone's already cursed life?"[405] Festic concludes the article by suggesting that, "we should read anxiety in Źiźek's claim against 'the overblown celebration of Antigone.'"[406] The kind of reading Festic suggests is that we begin to understand the Palestinian Antigone as, "A case-history of a girl who, instead of hanging herself, 'rapes back' with her suicide."[407] Antigone's 'no' becomes radicalized in this sense of the death drive in that it is aimed at revenge. The sense of a suicide that punishes the state that violated the rights of the young women becomes a resourceful way to transition from passive victim to active vengeful victor (albeit a sacrificial one). The act is still destructive and death driven, but Festic's admonition is that we must ask examine the origin of the death drive in examples like Antigone and girl suicides in Palestine.

Festic asks, "What is the death drive and repetition and the girl's suicide bombing, if you will, if not a recovered narrative of losses we can never fully utter and with which we can never fully identify, if not the testimony of the entombment of the woman that abolishes any discourse on 'normal' teleologically oriented psychic economy?"[408] Festic's account of the death drive is linked to Antigone and the Palestinian girl suicide bomber because of their entombment, their suicide, and the way in which their narratives provide a testimony that depicts a dramatic resignation for life and turns against life[409] at every point. Festic's response to her own question concerning the death drive is that, "Perhaps the point is the difference in conceptualizing the act of 'suicide bombing'."[410] She remarks that she was told that it is disrespectful for her to call them

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[405] Ibid., 95.
[406] Ibid.
[407] Ibid., 96.
[408] Ibid., 90.
[409] The name Antigone, of course, can be translated from the Greek to mean "against life."
[410] Festic, Fatima. "Antigone in (Post-)Modern Palestine." *Hecate* 2003. (90).

suicide bombers instead of women-martyrs.[411] She also suggests that the words recorded by a small boy after an Israeli bombing in which the boy said, “but when I grow up, I will become a suicide bomber and kill many, many Israelis…” are not words, “about terrorism, or even about the ideological pre-set of weaponry. These words are about the guilt and shame of humankind.”[412] Festic’s point is that we ought to consider the kind of victimization and grief behind these acts of suicide bombing—the kind of dehumanization that leads a woman, or anyone, to develop the kind of death drive Antigone and the Palestinian girl might be acting upon.

My point for this section has been to show that the opposition between Antigone and Creon has been a crucial point of scholarly discussion on *Antigone* since Hegel, but it has brought forth Antigones with more personal desires and motivations than Hegel’s account extracts. An important aspect of their contributions to consider is that Antigone develops the motivation to bury her brother and chooses to do so accordingly. Each of the interlocutors discussed in this section aim to make Antigone a more active participant in the actions she takes and the decisions she makes. Even though Lacan and Butler link Antigone’s action to the actions of her father and brother, they still emphasize Antigone’s agency in choosing to follow in the footsteps of her father and one brother in particular. Their point in doing so is supportable by the fact that Ismene does not do the same, so it is not simply a quality Antigone inherits. Chanter and Festic also push the notion that Antigone is an active participant with motivations and concerns that should concern all humans in that they stand for the rights of human bodies. Źiźek might seem like a trickier case because he attributes Antigone’s act to the feminine ‘no,’ but his

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[411] Ibid.
[412] Ibid.

additional scene in his own rendition of *Antigone* suggests she is an agent that ought to be held accountable for her actions and tried in the afterlife.

Mader's argument on behalf of Antigone's motivations runs counter to Butler's speculations about Antigone's incestuous desires. However, it does not run counter to the idea that Antigone is operating from her own desires. According to Mader, we should consider that Antigone thinks (at least at first) that Ismene will also want to bury their brother. This fact is Mader's main support for her claim that Antigone's motivation cannot be incestuous desire. If it were, she would not expect Ismene to be completely on board for the same reasons. Mader's counter-proposal is still a proposal of Antigone's desire. This new proposal is that Antigone wants to draw the lines between her kin and say that she must bury her brother because he *is her brother*, as opposed to any other kind of kin that would reiterate the incestuous nature of her familial line. Oedipus married his mother, who is also Antigone's mother. So, Oedipus is also Antigone's half-brother. Antigone's siblings are also Antigone's aunts and uncles since they are also Oedipus' half-siblings. Mader's case is that Antigone maintains the distinction that Oedipus is strictly her father and Polyneices is strictly her brother by declaring that she buries him *because he is her brother*.

As you can see, the most prominent contemporary Antigones convey desires and agency that transcend and transform the dialectic of opposing laws in Hegel's Antigone. The disagreement has become about why she opposes Creon and why she says she does it for Polyneices though she would not have done it for a husband or child. Since current scholarship maintains that we ought to be reading Antigone as a developing character with personal desires and motivations, we should read into her development in the order of the myth. The following section aims to do just that.

The Development of Opposition in the Order of the Myth

Chanter, Mader, Festic, Butler, Lacan and Źiźek all reach beyond the limits of understanding Antigone through Hegel. Yet, for each of them the focal point remains that to which Hegel draws such close attention: Antigone not only defies the law, but defies it knowingly. She blatantly challenges Creon's authority. Contemporary scholars from the past two decades continue to explore what makes Antigone's speech and actions so remarkable and each claim to provide a new insight as to why Antigone does and says what she does and says. Butler argues that Antigone's fight is on behalf of the love she could not entertain in life due to social and political restraints on relationships and kinships.[413] Butler's Antigone offers a strong interpretation of Antigone's actions as being framed in love rather than hatred, which gets taken up by Chanter and Mader. Chanter and Mader separate their interpretation from Butler's in that their Antigone is not acting upon her incestuous love, but rather her love of family honor and a need to restore her family's status out of her active sense of duty and loyalty.

Chanter's extension of Mader's contribution is that Antigone is both restoring the proper lines of her family's kinship (Mader) and rejecting the slave-like marginalization of herself and her brother. By rejecting marriage and burying Polyneices, she renounces the male authority, which would have her body, and her brother's body reduced to the status of slavery and commodification (Chanter). One major point of departure each of these interlocutors seems to make from Hegel is that they are each viewing Antigone as a subject of desire rather than a passive holder of a naturally inherited law. As Steiner demonstrates in his *Antigones*, Lacan is not the first to make Antigone a subject of desire (or a desirous subject), but he is a primary point of reference for discussions of Antigone's desires over the past two decades. From Lacan, we get

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[413] Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim.* New York: 2000.

a picture of Antigone as pure desire in the form of the criminal,[414] and, from Źiźek, in the form of destruction. From Butler, we are given an Antigone whose pure desire is in the form of aberrant kinship love relations. Chanter and Mader show us a love-filled Antigone with a drive for honor and restoration played out in a multitude of ways.[415] The goal for scholarship on Antigone has long been (and I will discuss how long in the next chapter) to explore new facets of Antigone by revealing what has yet to be seen. The way this has been done involves reading her indirectly, putting new words in her mouth, and emphasizing that what is unspoken in the play might be more interesting that what is actually said in the play. Moving from opposing laws to opposing desires creates a space for conjecture about what the subjects of the play desire.

We can keep approaching Antigone as a subject with all kinds of possible desires, but I want to demonstrate a way of understanding her by looking into her history—into *Oedipus at Colonus* read in the order of her age progression and the myth. We can use the information about her history to better understand her desires, her loyalty to Polyneices, and her relationship with Ismene. As far as I can tell (based upon the surrounding scholarship) the most popular opposition to Hegel's idea that Antigone expresses a natural law is an interpretation of an alternative motivation by which Antigone could be expressing a subjective desire. What we gain from such oppositions is a litany of potential subjective motivations and desires for our ancient and iconic figure of Antigone. However; in doing so, we may have missed or circumvented the straightforward philosophical position Antigone presents. We may have missed the lesson she learns at Colonus and therefore misunderstood the position she explicitly offers.

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[414] Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII.* Trans. by Dennis Porter. London and New York: 2008.
[415] Chanter, Tina. *Whose Antigone?: The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery.* Suny: 2011.

By looking into Antigone's previous experiences and thereby her knowledge gained as the daughter of Oedipus who spent her lifetime in exile with her father—the only one—we can examine the desires and motivations that seem to be Antigone's alone. In doing so, we gain a better understanding of Antigone's rationale to Ismene at the beginning of *Antigone*. We can understand her argument to Creon better than Creon does. The picture of Antigone's desires and motivations that recent scholarship offers will extend through this closer look at Antigone as a subject with a history that we can read into.

Allow me to demonstrate. Let us return to my aforementioned assessment that the similarities between Oedipus, Polyneices, and Antigone are indeed crucial as Butler and Lacan suggest. All three of them knowingly walk toward their deaths and choose their actions according to what matters most to them in the face of impending death, but we need to turn to *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone* to get a picture of each one. Also, if we are to understand Antigone as following from the precedents set by her father and brother (as Butler and Lacan would have us do) we need to look at the two plays in the order of the myth. If we read *Antigone* in isolation, we get an Antigone that moves toward death like her other family members and an Ismene that says let's not be like the rest of our family by perishing dreadfully, but we do not get a picture of *why* one sister does one thing and the other does another. It seems to me that limiting one's study to the play *Antigone* in isolation (or as the chronological precedent) makes it much more difficult to account for Antigone's following in her family's footsteps since Ismene has the same footsteps to follow but does not do so (at least not at first and not in the way Antigone does).

In a number of ways, scholars have dealt with the fact that Ismene and Antigone disagree in the opening conversation about whether or not to bury Polyneices. Chanter's justification is

that when Ismene changes her mind, she essentially affirms the new law of possibility that Antigone brings forth.[416] Others consider it to be of little consequence (as Chanter points out about Hegel), such as Lacan and Butler who make Antigone an individual subject with individual desires. These approaches to the dispute between Antigone and Ismene leave us without an answer as to why Ismene only sees things Antigone's way later (if in fact she even truly does so). An individual subjective desire attributed to Antigone that could just as easily be attributed to Ismene is not individual after all. Reasons based upon the criteria of gender and kinship loyalty could likewise be applied to Ismene. The reasons Chanter, Mader, Butler, Źiźek, Lacan, and Hegel provide for why Antigone acts as she does could also apply to Ismene. Why shouldn't Ismene care about protecting her family's status above slavery just as much as Chanter's Antigone? To this, Chanter says Ismene does eventually, but why not at first? Why shouldn't Ismene follow in her family atë just like Lacan's Antigone? She has the same criminal brother and father. She came from the same womb as the rest. Why shouldn't Ismene have the same aberrant kinship desires as Butler's Antigone? Mader points this out to defend her own argument that Antigone attempts to reconstruct her family lines rather than participate in its aberration: "Note that Antigone does not consider this restorative effort to be solely her mission, either, at least not initially. The fact that she initially expects her sister Ismene to share her illicit initiative shows that on Antigone's view her sister is placed just as well to wish to carry out the burial duties as she is."[417] Mader's point here is crucial. The fact that Antigone initially believes that she and Ismene are of one mind (as well as the fact that it turns out they are not) is not of little consequence.

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[416] See introductory chapter.
[417] Mader, Mary Beth. "Antigone's Line" in *Feminist Readings of Antigone*, ed. Fanny Söderbäch (Suny Press 2010), 170.

For Mader, "it demonstrates that the play cannot be about the incestuous desire of the individual figure Antigone, at least if the thought of Antigone should be counted in answering the question of her ultimate motivations. Surely, we have no reason to think that she was enjoining her sister to risk death for an incestuous desire they both shared for their ungrieved brother."[418] For me, it demonstrates that the play cannot simply be about any desire of Antigone's that could just as easily be shared by Ismene. The point is that despite the wealth of desires the two women might share in common given their almost identical circumstances, Antigone acts and Ismene does not. It is helpful to note what a figure like Antigone or Ismene (or anyone) might desire, but tragedy at its core concerns the human struggle between life and death—the difficulty to accept one's own mortality. At the beginning of the play named for her, Antigone has achieved that acceptance. Ismene has not. What we should be asking is why the one daughter of Oedipus does so and the other does not.

I suspect the answer is just as Hegel explicates—Antigone operates according to a sense of divine law that she understands in a way other men and women do not. However, the reason for which she has this kind of sense ought to be approached in the vein of recent scholarship. This vein insists that Antigone is not simply born with this sense; rather, she develops it as an individual subject. My own justification for this particular point of departure from Hegel is that if Antigone acts upon some innate spirit of divine law because she is a woman and a sister to a brother, Ismene should be of the same mind from the beginning of the play. In order to take on the task of identifying when or how Antigone develops whatever sense of divine law leads to her act, we must read the *Theban Plays* in the order of myth. Otherwise, we are stuck at a beginning wherein two women disagree on something and there is no telling why. *Oedipus at Colonus*

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[418] Ibid.

shows us two different backgrounds for Antigone and Ismene, which illuminate how they could come to be of a different mind about a shared situation regarding a common brother. At least, this is my claim. To defend it, I will now shift to a demonstration of what scholarship on Antigone stands to gain from reading the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth.

Since the focus of this chapter is largely Antigone's dispute with Creon, let us revisit their positions in the play *Antigone.* Next, we will see what the Antigone of *Oedipus at Colonus* has to say that might allow us to understand her position better than Creon does. Antigone's own position is that she is obeying authority—a higher authority than Creon's. She argues that Zeus did not make the law; Creon did. Furthermore, she insists that the laws she upholds are the laws marked out for all human beings and are eternal laws that cannot be overruled by any man's orders:

> Antigone: For me it was not Zeus who made that order./ Nor did that Justice who lives with the gods below/ mark out such laws to hold among mankind./ Nor did I think your orders were so strong/ that you, a mortal man, could over-run/ the gods' unwritten and unfailing laws./ Not now, nor yesterday's, they always live,/ and no one knows their origin in time./ So not through fear of any man's proud spirit/ would I be likely to neglect these laws,/ draw on myself the gods' sure punishment./ I knew that I must die; how could I not?/ even without your warning. If I die/ before my time, I say it is a gain./ Who lives in sorrows many as are mine/ how shall he not be glad to gain his death?/ And so, for me to meet this fate, no grief./ But if I left that corpse, my mother's son,/ dead and

unburied I'd have cause to grieve/ as I grieve not./ And if you think my acts are foolishness/ the foolishness may be in a fool's eye.[419]

Antigone claims that she follows the orders of Zeus and that no man has the power to decree orders that outrank the laws of Zeus. She is willing to abide by the unfailing laws of the gods put forth to be held by men. She is unwilling to rank the law of a mortal man higher than the laws of the gods. She is more afraid of punishment from the gods than she is afraid of a proud man's spirit. She is aware death awaits her at some point, for she is mortal, but she thinks death would be a gain for her due to her extreme suffering and grief. In sum, Antigone believes her fate would have been worse than death if she had denied honor to the deceased body of her mother's son.

The fact that this is the position she puts forth to Creon is understood and agreed upon. It is hardly the case that anyone rejects Hegel for expounding that Antigone *says* she is obeying divine law over human law. The concern is whether or not we can take her at her word. The underlying cause for this concern is the refusal to accept Hegel's explanation that Antigone passively embraces an innate sense of a divine spirit of kinship. Refusing to accept this particular aspect of Hegel's account, contemporary scholars such as Butler, Lacan, Źiźek, Mader, and Chanter argue that Antigone has ulterior motives underlying her testimony. These proposed ulterior motives ground her as an individual subject. Furthermore, they open a discussion in which her action is taken to be the result of a hidden drive that is psychological, social, or political (as opposed to spiritual). I, on the other hand, do not find it necessary to suspect that Antigone's word is illegitimate. As long as we allow the Antigone of *Oedipus at Colonus* to speak as well, we can take the Antigone of the play named for her at her word without losing sight of her individual subjectivity and desires.

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[419] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 450-470].

When read in the order of the myth, *Oedipus at Colonus* reveals Antigone's particular development into the young woman who stands in defiance of the king of Thebes. It allows us to take her at her word and still portray her active participation as an individual subject. Consider the last thing she says to Creon in her argument cited above. Antigone says that those who find her decisions foolish are fools. In this way, Antigone purports that she knows something that others have yet to learn. In a later speech, she declares, "And yet the wise will know my choice was right."[420] Antigone tells us she is not acting unreflectively or passively. Her own assessment of her action is that she is choosing wisely, though there is a price to pay for her wisdom in a world with fools.

Creon sees that Antigone does not fear death, so he sentences her to a living death in a tomb—giving her further punishment by deferring her reunion with her beloved dead. Antigone asks him if death is not a sufficient punishment. Specifically, she asks, "Do you want more than my arrest and death?"[421] Though, Creon's response is, "No more than that. For that is all I need,"[422] he comes up with a more elaborate punishment than the one he declared along with the decree. The punishment for defying the decree as Antigone understands it initially is death by public stoning:

> Antigone: It has indeed. Creon will give the one/ of our two brothers honor in the tomb;/ the other none./ Eteocles, with just entreatment treated,/ as law provides he has hidden under earth/ to have full honor with the dead below./ But Polyneices' corpse who died in pain,/ they say he has proclaimed to the whole town/ that none may bury him and none bewail,/ but leave him unwept, untombed, a rich sweet sight/ for the hungry birds'

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[420] *IBID*. [904].
[421] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Line 497].
[422] Ibid., [498].

> beholding./ Such orders they say the worthy Creon gives/ to you and me—yes, yes, I say to *me*—/ and that he's coming to proclaim it clear/ to those who know it not./ Further: he has the matter so at heart/ that anyone who dares attempt the act/ will die by public stoning in the town./ So there you have it and you soon will show/ if you are noble, or fallen from your descent.[423]

Antigone begins the action of the play by expressing the fact that Creon has given an order that specifically pertains to her and her sister. In declaring what she plans to do, Antigone brings up the language of nobility. Antigone believes the noble action is to defy the decree despite the threat of public stoning, so she asks Ismene if she has fallen from her descent or if she, too, recognizes the noble thing to do as Antigone does. Antigone later tells us why she is suited to serve the dead when she tells Ismene, "Take heart. You live. My life died long ago./ And that has made me fit to help the dead."[424] Antigone's lack of fear of death seems foolish and strange to Ismene and to Creon, but Antigone insists that she already experienced death in such a way that makes her fit to serve the dead.

Again, the fact that Antigone expresses this position—that she moves toward death—is generally accepted. What everyone wants to know is why and, more specifically, why for the sake of burying Polyneices. I argue that the way to understand why is to take Antigone's own reasons at face value and then gaze into the experiences she has in *Oedipus at Colonus,* which would lead her to make decisions that are wisely grounded in her perspective and foolish from the perspective of others such as Ismene and Creon. To demonstrate, I turn to a conversation between Oedipus and the chorus in *Oedipus at Colonus* that Antigone is present for, but Ismene is not. The presence of one daughter and not the other is carefully orchestrated. The scene takes

[423] Ibid., [21-38].
[424] Ibid., [559-560].

place after Ismene has appeared out of nowhere to warn her father and sister that Creon is coming. She leaves to perform a sacred ritual. It is her decision to be the one that leaves to do so. She tells Ismene to stay with Oedipus and opts to go alone to carry out the task of ritual.

To set the scene a bit more, the chorus has declared Oedipus worthy of pity and has offered him some advice. The chorus is a group of elderly men of Colonus who have been portrayed in the previous section as extra pious and deferential toward their sacred region that is in turn blessed by the gods. They continue to present their piety by advising Oedipus to atone for his trespassing by making an offering to the furies.[425] Oedipus eagerly asks them to instruct him on how to do so.[426] The chorus instructs him to bring holy water from a certain spring in the bowls provided there by a crafty potter and to make sure it is done with clean hands.[427] He is also instructed to put the fleece of a young lamb around the brims of the bowls.[428] There are also specific directions for the pouring of the libations.[429] There are also prayers to be said after the libations are poured.[430] Oedipus is excited about the power of the prayer, which the chorus says can be done either by him or someone who prays for him by addressing the Eumenides on his

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[425] *CTC* Chorus: Oedipus: you are surely worth our pity:/ You, and your children, too. And since you claim/ Also to be a savior of our land,/ I'd like to give you counsel for good luck. [461-464] Oedipus: Dear friend! I'll do whatever you advise. [465] Chorus: Make expiation to these divinities/ Whose ground you violated when you came. [466-467]
[426] *CTC* Oedipus: In what way shall I do so? Tell me, friends. [468]
[427] Chorus: First you must bring libations from the spring/ That runs forever; and bring them with clean hands. [469-470]
CTC Oedipus: And when I have that holy water, then? [471]
[428] *CTC* Chorus: There are some bowls there, by a skillful potter;/ Put chaplets round the brims, over the handles. [472-473] Oedipus: Of myrtle springs, or woolen stuff, or what? [474] Chorus: Take the fleeces cropped from a young lamb. [475]
[429] *CTC* Oedipus: Just so; then how must I perform the rite? [476] Chorus: Facing the quarter of the morning light,/ Pour your libations out. [477] Oedipus: Am I to pour them from the bowls you speak of? [478] Chorus: In three streams, yes; the last one, empty it. [479] Oedipus: With what should it be filled? Tell me this, too. [480] Chorus: With water and honey; but with no wine added. [481]
[430] *CTC* Oedipus: And when the leaf-dark earth receives it? [482] Chorus: Lay three times nine young shoots of olive on it/ With both your hands; meanwhile repeat this prayer: [483-484]

behalf.[431] Oedipus addresses Antigone and Ismene.[432] Antigone does not hesitate to agree to do what he says must be done.[433] Oedipus says that since he does not have the strength or sight to perform the ritual one of them must do it as soon as possible.[434] Ismene immediately agrees to be the one to do it. She only lingers long enough to find out where she must go and to tell Antigone to stay and care for Oedipus.[435]

Once Ismene has left, the chorus pries into Oedipus' past.[436] Oedipus asks them not to be so cruel as to reopen his wound.[437] The chorus insists upon him telling them the true story, since the story has been told so many times in so many ways all over.[438] Oedipus conveys his pain once more, but the chorus promises to grant him refuge if he tells them his story.[439] Oedipus says he had to face a terrible thing that he did not will to do.[440] The chorus urges him to go on.[441]

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[431] *CTC* Oedipus: This I am eager to hear: it has great power: [485] Chorus: that as we all call them Eumenides,/ Which means the gentle of heart,/ May they accept with gentleness/ The suppliant and his wish./ So you, or he who prays for you, address them;/ but do not speak aloud or raise a cry;/ Then come away, and do not turn again./ If you will do all this, I shall take heart/ And stand up for you; otherwise, O stranger,/ I should be seriously afraid for you. [486-492]
[432] *CTC* Oedipus: Children, you hear the words of these good people? [493]
[433] *CTC* Antigone: Yes; now tell us what we ought to do. [494]
[434] *CTC* Oedipus: It need not be performed by me; I'm far/ From having the strength or sight for it—I have neither./ Let one of you go and carry out the ritual./ One soul, I think, often can make atonement/ For many others, if it be sincere./ Now do it quickly.—Yet do not leave me alone!/ I could not move without the help of someone. [495-501]
[435] *CTC* Ismene: I'll go and do it. But where am I to go?/ Where shall I find the holy place, I wonder? [502-503] Chorus: On the other side of the wood, girl. If you need it,/ You may get help from the attendant there. [504-505] Ismene: I am going now. Antigone, you'll stay/ And care for father./ Even if it were hard,/ I should not think it so, since it is for him. (*Ismene goes out, right. The chorus draws nearer to Oedipus.*) [506-509]
[436] *CTC* Choral Dialogue Chorus: What evil things have slept since long ago/ It is not sweet to awaken;/ And yet I long to be told— [510-512] Oedipus: What? [513] Chorus: Of that heartbreak for which there was no help,/ The pain you have had to suffer. [514]
[437] *CTC* Oedipus: For kindness' sake, do not open/ My old wound, and my shame. [515-516]
[438] *CTC* Chorus: It is told everywhere, and never dies;/ I only want to hear it truly told. [517-518]
[439] *CTC* Oedipus: Ah! Ah! [519] Chorus: Consent I beg you;/ Give me my wish, and I shall give you yours. [520]
[440] *CTC* Oedipus: I had to face a thing most terrible,/ Not willed by me, I swear;/ I would have abhorred it all. [521-523]
[441] *CTC* Chorus: So? [524]

Oedipus says, "Thebes married me to evil;/ Fate and I were joined there."[442] Oedipus, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, has grown to tell his story as something that was done to him—the fate that was dealt him. He says Thebes married him and joined him with his fate. He does not say it was a fault of his that caused his misfortunate, but rather his fate and the deeds done to him.

The chorus asks him to confirm that the marriage he referred to was to his mother.[443] Oedipus shudders at hearing the say it and adds that his daughters were born to him and to his mother.[444] The chorus hesitates to call them his sisters as well as his daughters, but Oedipus says it for them.[445] The chorus cries out in pity and horror.[446] Oedipus says something to the effect of, "you have no idea" or "you can't even imagine."[447] The chorus acknowledges that Oedipus has suffered,[448] to which Oedipus agrees.[449] But when the chorus says that Oedipus sinned,[450] Oedipus disagrees vehemently.[451] The chorus is confused[452] until Oedipus explains that he thought Jocasta was his reward for saving Thebes.[453]

The chorus takes pity on him once they realize that he did not know he was being married to his mother when he saved a country,[454] but the chorus also addresses the other part of the

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[442] *CTC* Oedipus: Though I did not know, Thebes married me to evil;/ Fate and I were joined there. [525-526]
[443] *CTC* Chorus: Then it was indeed your mother/ With whom the thing was done? [527-528]
[444] *CTC* Oedipus: Ah! It is worse than death to have to hear it!/ Strangers! Yes: and these two girls of mine… [529-530] Chorus: Go on— [531] Oedipus: These luckless two/ Were given birth by her who gave birth to me. [532-533]
[445] *CTC* Chorus: These then are daughters; they are also— [534] Oedipus: Sisters: yes, their father's sisters… [535]
[446] *CTC* Chorus: Ah, pity!
[447] *CTC* Oedipus: Pity, indeed. What throngs/ Of pities come into my mind!
[448] *CTC* Chorus: You suffered—
[449] *CTC* Oedipus: Yes, unspeakably.
[450] *CTC* Chorus: You sinned—
[451] *CTC* Oedipus: No, I did not sin!
[452] *CTC* Chorus: How not?
[453] *CTC* Oedipus: I thought/ Of her has my reward. Ah, would I had never won it!/ Would I had never served the State that day! [540]
[454] *CTC* Chorus: Unhappy man—and you also killed—

story—that Oedipus killed his father.[455] Oedipus is pained, but admits that part of the story is true too, though it is complicated—he of course did not know it was his father and was just defending himself against a man trying to kill him at a crossroads.[456] At this point, Oedipus declares himself innocent. He realizes that the gods orchestrated his fate in such a way that he never knew what he was doing and never willed to do what he did. Upon a lengthy reflection over the lessons he learned about himself and his existence, Oedipus learns to forgive himself for the things that were outside of his control. He is humbled by the power of the gods and the limitations of mortal fates. After his exile that he turns into his journey to accept the terms of his mortal fate as willed by the gods, Oedipus grows closer to the gods as he moves toward the death he was destined for. He feels graced by the gods and the play indicates that he is. The oracles say so and the citizens of Thebes come to fear the power Oedipus has gained over the fate of the city.

Antigone—and no one other than Antigone—accompanies Oedipus on his journey to accepting his fate and forgiving himself for what was always out of his control and beyond his knowledge. Other than the chorus, Antigone is also the only witness to Oedipus' cry, "Before the law—before God—I am innocent!"[457] Both Ismene and Antigone know the story of Oedipus' fate. Both Ismene and Antigone witness the miraculous nature of Oedipus' death and the divine intervention with which Oedipus is gifted the ability to curse his enemies in Thebes and grant perpetual protection to his friends in Athens. Yet of the two of them, only Antigone bears witness to Oedipus' journey from his terrifying fate to his glorious death. Only Antigone learns what redemption looks like for someone who suffers greatly but remains innocent before God.

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[455] *CTC* Oedipus: What is it now? What are you after? Chorus: Killed your father!
[456] *CTC* Oedipus: God in heaven!/ You strike again where I am hurt.
Chorus: You killed him. Oedipus: Killed him. Yet, there is— [545] Chorus: What more? [546] Oedipus: A just extenuation./ This:/ I did not know him; and he wished to murder me./ Before the law—before God—I am innocent! (*The Chorus turns at the approach of Theseus.*) [547-548]
[457] Ibid.

Both daughters of Oedipus know his death was more graceful than his life, but only Antigone sees why. Only Antigone learns that while there is no freedom for mankind from suffering or from death, those who remain innocent before the gods stand a chance at eternal redemption. If we take her at her word, Antigone tells Ismene and Creon that this is precisely her reason for burying Polyneices.

Returning to the play *Antigone,* let us have a look at the moment when Ismene decides to where the chorus announces Ismene's entrance and observes that she is crying for Antigone.[458] Creon calls Ismene a snake and asks her if she will admit to being complicit in Antigone's crime or deny it.[459] Ismene tells him that if Antigone says she helped, then she will not deny it and she will take responsibility.[460] Antigone tells Ismene that it is unjust for her to claim participation when it isn't the truth.[461] Ismene tells Antigone that she would unabashedly share in her troubles and suffering.[462] Antigone says Ismene would only be sharing in the deed through words while the dead know the truth.[463] Ismene begs Antigone to let her share in the honors from the dead.[464] Antigone tells her, "Don't die along with me, nor make your own/ that which you did not do. My death's enough."[465] Antigone's position in this argument with Ismene is consistent with what she learns from Oedipus, which is that in order for one's death to be graceful one must be innocent

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[458] *IBID.* Chorus: Look there! Ismene is coming out./ She loves her sister and mourns,/ with clouded brow and bloodied cheeks,/ tears on her lovely face. [528-530]
[459] *IBID.* Creon: You, lurking like a viper in the house,/ who sucked me dry. I looked the other way/ while twin destruction planned against the throne./ Now tell me, do you say you shared this deed?/ Or will you swear you didn't even know? [531-535]
[460] *IBID.* Ismene: I did the deed, if she agrees I did./ I am accessory and share the blame. [536-537]
[461] *IBID.* Antigone: Justice will not allow this. You did not/ wish for a part, nor did I give you one. [538-539]
[462] *IBID.* Ismene: You are in trouble, and I'm not ashamed/ to sail beside you into suffering. [540-541]
[463] *IBID.* Antigone: Death and dead, they know whose act it was./ I cannot love a friend whose love is words. [542-543]
[464] *IBID.* Ismene: Sister, I pray, don't fence me out from honor,/ from death with you, and honor done the dead.[544-545]
[465] *IBID.* Antigone: Don't die along with me, nor make your own/ that which you did not do. My death's enough. [546-547]

before the gods. Antigone will neither take part in Ismene's lie nor condone Ismene's decision to lie. Antigone stands by her position that the ultimate judges of error are the gods. She tells Ismene the dead will know a lie from the truth, so Ismene's lie will do neither of them any good. A lie will prevent them both from what Antigone wants, which is to be innocent before the gods so that she dies with grace.

Ismene asks what friend she will have once Antigone dies[466] and, as Lacan points out, Antigone tells her she can love Creon.[467] Though Ismene does not understand why Antigone says lying will do them no good, Ismene asks Antigone, "Why hurt me, when it does yourself no good?"[468] Antigone tells her, "I also suffer, when I laugh at you,"[469] so as to say she also wishes things were different between them, but that does not change her position. Ismene asks what she could possibly do to help.[470] Antigone tells her to save herself, but not to think herself enviable for it.[471] Ismene expresses regret that she cannot be a part of Antigone's fate.[472] Antigone says, "Yes. For you chose to live when I chose death."[473] Ismene's attitude changes to match Antigone's harshness, "At least I was not silent. You were warned,"[474] to which Antigone responds, "Some will have thought you wiser. Some will not."[475] Antigone explains multiple times that she knows her choice will not seem wise to everyone, for many would choose life over death. In the beginning of the play *Antigone*, Antigone thinks Ismene will choose death with her. Once Ismene does not, Antigone knows that they are of a different mind.

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[466] *IBID*. Ismene: When you are gone what life can be my friend? [548]
[467] *IBID*. Antigone: Love Creon. He's your kinsman and your care. [549]
[468] *IBID*. [550].
[469] *IBID*. [551].
[470] *IBID*. Ismene: What further service can I do you now? [552].
[471] *IBID*. Antigone: To save yourself. I shall not envy you. [553].
[472] *IBID*. Ismene: Alas for me. Am I outside your fate? [554].
[473] *IBID*. [555].
[474] *IBID*. [556].
[475] *IBID*. [557].

Ismene continues to insist they share equally in blame.[476] Antigone tells Ismene, "Take heart. You live. My life died long ago./ And that has made me fit to help the dead."[477] In the previous chapter, I discussed the moment in *Oedipus at Colonus* wherein both Ismene and Antigone express a desire to die after Oedipus has gone from the earth. If we recall that moment, a few things become clearer about the tension between Antigone and Ismene. First of all, it makes sense that Antigone lashes out at Ismene for lying. Antigone tells her that claiming a deed does not amount to doing the deed. Since Ismene said at Colonus that she could not stand to go on living after Oedipus' death, it makes sense that Antigone initially thinks she and her sister will be on the same page about Polyneices—that neither of them loves life so much they would dishonor their family out of fear of death. A natural conclusion to Ismene's refusal for Antigone to form is that Ismene says things she does not really mean. Scholars have suggested that Antigone says things she does not really mean, but I argue that if we read the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth we will see that Antigone is consistent with what she says and what she does whereas Ismene is the one who changes course and demonstrates her willingness to lie.

Once we have taken Antigone at her word and better grasped what she means by examining her experience in *Oedipus at Colonus*, we can see that Antigone and Ismene are never on the same page in the play *Antigone*. When Creon insults the girls by saying Antigone never had any sense and Ismene has just lost hers,[478] Ismene respectfully explains to Creon that senselessness is a natural effect of distress.[479] Antigone never questions her senses. She knows her action may appear senseless to those with less sense than her, but that does not change her

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[476] *IBID.* Ismene: And yet the blame is equal for us both. [558].
[477] *IBID.* [559-560].
[478] *IBID.* Creon: One of these girls has shown her lack of sense/ just now. The other had it from her birth. [561-562].
[479] *IBID.* Ismene: Yes, lord. When people fall in deep distress/ their native sense departs, and will not stay. [563-564].

mind. When Ismene tells her that it is, “Wrong from the start, to chase what cannot be,”[480] Antigone responds, “If that’s your saying, I shall hate you first,/ and next the dead will hate you in all justice. But let me and my own ill-counseling/ suffer this terror. I shall suffer nothing/ as great as dying with a lack of grace.”[481] Antigone thinks that what Ismene says in the context of their shared circumstance is loathsome. She also seems certain that she has the sense to know that the worst thing a mortal can suffer is death with a lack of grace. Since her sister lacks such sense, Antigone tells Ismene to let her do what she must do alone, to which Ismene responds, “Go, since you want to. But know this: you go/ senseless indeed, but loved by those who love you.”[482] Ismene does not see the sense in Antigone’s decision, but Antigone claims from beginning to end that the wise will know she acted sensibly. Antigone makes it clear that she will not be deterred by anyone who thinks her action is foolish, because only a fool would say so.

Creon tells Ismene that she chose to lack sense when she chose to work with Antigone (a wicked girl up to wicked things).[483] Ismene asks him plainly how she is supposed to live without Antigone.[484] Creon tells her not to talk about her ever again because she is as good as dead.[485] Ismene reminds Creon that Antigone is engaged to marry his son.[486] Creon's comment that there will be more fields for his son to plow is a cruder version of the idiom that there are plenty of fish in the sea. He is certain his son, Haemon, will find another woman to marry.[487] Ismene suggests that, though there are many women, Antigone is the one that has already formed a bond

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[480] *IBID*. [92].
[481] *IBID*. [97].
[482] *IBID*. [98-99].
[483] *IBID*. Creon: You chose your mind’s distraction when you chose/ to work out wickedness with this wicked girl. [565-566].
[484] *IBID*. Ismene: What life is there for me to live without her?
[485] *IBID*. Creon: Don’t speak of her. For she is here no more.
[486] *IBID*. Ismene: But will you kill your own son’s promised bride?
[487] *IBID*. Creon: Oh, there are furrows for his plough.

with Haemon unlike the others.[488] Creon rejects her concern again because he would never want his son to marry a wicked woman like Antigone.[489] Ismene declares that his father, Creon, has robbed Haemon of his rights.[490] Creon says he is grateful that her death sentence will put a stop to Antigone's marriage to his son, Haemon.[491]

Speaking of Haemon and his engagement to Antigone, the following chapter concerns Antigone's declaration that she would not have buried a husband or child in defiance of the decree. Scholars such as those that have already been brought into the discussion as well as interlocutors I have yet to mention have a lot to say about Antigone's preference for Polyneices. John Seery points out that Butler is not the first to take bring incest into the discussion of *Antigone,* but as we have already observed, Butler's account of incest has inspired further thought among the most recent Antigone scholars. The question concerns whether or not Antigone's action on behalf of Polyneices involves an excessive love for him. Butler, in particular, suggests it is a love that renders Antigone "melancholic." To be melancholic is to be stuck, just as Butler and Festic paint a picture of an Antigone that can see no way out except for her own destruction, but Festic adds something new to the picture. Festic's comparison of Antigone and a post-modern girl suicide bomber points to the choice to destroy oneself in a certain way—a way that accomplishes a desire for retribution and redemption. The next chapter's objective is to establish that Antigone's choice to bury Polyneices in particular is a carefully directed and progressive movement toward self-fulfillment and *not* a result of melancholia or incestuous desire.

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[488] *IBID.* Ismene: But where the closeness that has bound these two? [570]
[489] *IBID.* Creon: Not for my sons will I choose wicked wives. [571]
[490] *IBID.* Ismene: Dear Haemon, your father robs you of your rights. [572]
[491] *IBID.* Creon: Yes. Death will help me break this marriage off. [573]

CHAPTER V

ANTIGONE AND POLYNEICES

Last, Polyneices knows the price I pay/ for doing final service to his corpse./ And yet the wise will know my choice was right./ Had I had children or their father dead,/ I'd let them [moulder]. I should not have chosen/ in such a case to cross the state's decree./ What is the law that lies behind these words?/ One husband gone, I might have found another,/ or a child from a new man in the first child's place,/ but with my parents hid away in death,/ no brother, ever, could spring up for me./ Such was the law by which I honored you./ But Creon thought the doing was a crime,/ a dreadful daring, brother of my heart./ So now he takes and leads me out by force./ No marriage-bed, no marriage-song for me,/ and since no wedding, so no child to rear.[492]

What is so special about Polyneices? What makes Antigone's brother more worthy of defying Creon's decree against burial than a husband or child? Antigone's answer is that she abides the natural law by which her brother is irreplaceable whereas a husband and child are replaceable. Aristotle names Antigone's argument exemplary for the proclamation of natural or universal law. In the thirteenth section of *Rhetoric,* Aristotle classifies two kinds of laws as distinct from one another—particular law and universal law. In defining the latter, Aristotle states, "Universal law is the law of Nature. For there really is, as every one to some extent divines, a natural justice and injustice that is binding on all men, even on those who have no association or covenant with each other."[493] Evoking the discussion between Antigone and Creon wherein Antigone claims that she followed the unwritten and timeless laws, Aristotle

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[492] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 891-928].

[493] Aristotle. *Rhetoric*. Trans by w. Rhys Roberts. www.bocc.ubi.pt (58). Last modified July 28, 2005.

states that the natural justice that binds all men is what "Sophocles' Antigone clearly means when she says that the burial of Polyneices was a just act in spite of the prohibition: she means that it was just by nature. '*Not of to-day or yesterday it is, But lives eternal: none can date its birth*.'"[494] Whether we call this set of laws timeless, unwritten, universal, or natural, the point is that there are laws to which no human being is exempt: for example, the laws of death. According to Aristotle, the case Antigone makes to justify her action is clear. She is abiding universal law over a particular law because that particular law does not override universal law. The laws of nature are such that no one could ever replace a sibling without living parents whereas a spouse or child can be replaced. Antigone explains that this is the law by which she honored Polyneices. Aristotle proclaims that her statement is a clear argument on behalf of universal law.

Since before Hegel (and certainly well after) scholars have challenged the idea that Antigone simply makes her own argument based upon reason and according to natural, universal law. Scholarship exhibits a bent toward understanding her argument in terms of gender, kinship ties, personal desires, and political beliefs. Whether the suggestion is that she adheres to universal law over particular law *because* she is a woman and a sister as Hegel explicates or some other new idea about her own particular form of desire, scholars have brought forth new ways to understand what is behind Antigone's argument. The purpose of this chapter is *not* to argue that we must understand her as Aristotle did, or that the new ways of reading her are not as good as the old. The purpose of this chapter is to show where the new ideas come from and why Aristotle's points can still contribute to new questions and new interpretations. Ultimately, it argues that the reason Polyneices is special is something she explains to us.

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[494] Ibid.

Contemporary Notions of Antigone's Unspoken Claim about Polyneices

Antigone says she would not have defied Creon's decree for a husband or child because she could get a new husband or a new child, or even a new child from a new husband if she had lost both.[495] On the other hand no new brother could replace Polyneices due to the deaths of both of her parents. In Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim,* Butler examines Antigone's announcement that she chose to take her fatal course of action for her brother specifically—an action she would not have taken for just any kind of kin—and suggests Antigone harbors incestuous desire for both her father and brother. Butler's claim is that Hegel's interpretation of the absence of sexual desire in the relationship between brother and sister has created a blind spot in scholarship on Antigone, which she attributes to Lacan among others. Lacan illuminates a hint of scandal in this passage. Yet, ultimately, Lacan determines that Antigone's preference for Polyneices supports his thesis that she is pure desire in the form of criminality. Butler asks what it might mean to take Hegel's emphasis on kinship and Lacan's emphasis on desire together and consider that Antigone has incestuous impulses motivating her.

Since Butler's contribution, contemporary scholars have continued to examine Antigone's claim for Polyneices' particularity. Scholars also point out that Antigone's willingness to sacrifice her life for her brother is a willingness to sacrifice her potential husband and children. Antigone is affianced to her cousin Haemon, Creon's son, when she makes her decision to defy the decree. The scholarly discord on *Antigone* involves Haemon, because it often leads to the question concerning who Antigone really loves. Some "Antigones" truly love Haemon, such as Kierkegaard's, but even Kierkegaard's Antigone is haunted by her incestuous

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[495] Ibid.

heritage.[496] The notion that her love for the dead transcends her love for the living is also a heavy theme for discussion, not only in scholarship, but also in the play. In his critique of Butler (which I will discuss in the following section) John Seery questions Butler's neglect for discussing Antigone's aberrant desires as both incest and necrophilia, given Butler's assertion that Antigone's desire for her dead brother and dead father transcends her desire for her living fiancé. In doing so, Seery suggests that Butler reveals a blind spot of her own even as she calls out figures like Hegel and Lacan for being blinded by the incest taboo. Hegel completely denies the potential for desire between the brother and sister and gives his reason in the *Philosophy of Right*. Lacan is more open to the possibility of scandal.

Lacan reasons that Antigone's claim, as Butler calls it, presents a sort of scandal (or at least the appearance of one) that even, "Goethe tells us he was shocked, rattled, by."[497] Lacan calls the claim historically boggling and reports that, "Over the centuries the reasoning found in that extraordinary justification has always left people uncertain."[498] Antigone's reason for choosing death on behalf of her brother in particular is another concern that draws scholarly attention to a potential ambiguity in interpreting Antigone's stated claims. Since she would not have defied the decree for just any family member, someone defending her act in the name of her pious duty to her family must defend the significance of her act being for her brother in particular (as Hegel does). Others find the passage strange (as Goethe does), and Lacan tells us that, "Goethe cannot help emitting a wish. 'I wish,' he says, 'that one day some scholar will reveal to us that this passage is a later addition.'"[499] Since Goethe's wish has yet to come true,

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[496] See Steiner's *Antigones,* Section 5 on Kierkegaard.
[497] Ibid., 313.
[498] Ibid., 314.
[499] Ibid., 314.

Antigone's final justification for her action remains a lively part of scholarly conversation surrounding Sophocles' *Antigone*.

On the one hand, Lacan recalls that, "this passage is so little apocryphal that these two lines are quoted roughly ninety years later by Aristotle in the third book of his *Rhetoric* in a passage that explains how one should explain one's acts. It is difficult to believe that someone who was living ninety years after Sophocles would have quoted lines, if they carried with them the odor of scandal."[500] Lacan does not push the notion of scandal to suggest that Antigone's explanation could be an expression of her incestuous desire for her brother because we would not have had Aristotle quoting the lines as exemplary argumentation if the lines were meant to be anything quite so scandalous. And yet, Lacan cannot ignore the concern or confusion surrounding Antigone's position in those lines either because, "In the end, precisely because it carries with it the suggestion of a scandal, this passage is of interest to us. You can already see why; it is only there so as to furnish additional evidence to something that next time I will try to define as the aim of *Antigone.*"[501] Lacan insists that Antigone's statement about the significance of her act being for her brother functions as evidence for his claim about Antigone's aim. Lacan tells us that, "it cannot be denied that Antigone is after all concerned with the chthonic laws, the laws of the earth,"[502] in reference to Hegel. And of course this is something that cannot be denied for she is clearly in their service in her act of burial. So, what does her brother specifically have to do with it? And how, after all, does that get us nearer to understanding her aim?

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[500] Ibid., 314-315.
[501] Ibid., 315.
[502] Ibid.

Lacan's answer is that by resisting Creon's order for her brother's sake her act is, "in the name of the most radically chthonian of relations that are blood relations."[503] It matters to Lacan that she is doing everything she can to be sure her act will place, "the gods on her side,"[504] because it is further evidence for his conclusions about her ultimate aim. Lacan acknowledges the classic interpretation of her as the pious servant of the laws of the gods, but suggests that Antigone's actions result from her desires that push her toward her atë. Lacan draws support from the chorus in *Antigone* for his claim about Antigone's desire and atë, reporting that when the chorus says, "She's [Antigone's] the one who violates the limits of *Atë* through her desire," they are revealing that Antigone's actions reflect her reach beyond the limits of mortals.[505]

We can begin to understand what Antigone's aims and atë have to do with her choosing Polyneices in particular once we look at the 'paradoxically fixed stance' that Lacan's Antigone takes, "My brother is what he is, and because he is what he is and only he can be what he is, that I move forward toward the fatal limit."[506] Lacan's interpretation rides on Creon's interpretation of what Antigone's brother is—a criminal. He extracts Antigone's aim from her position against Creon when Creon defines Polyneices as a criminal. Lacan paraphrases Antigone's response to Creon's attempt to persuade Antigone that Polyneices did not deserve burial:

> My brother may be whatever you say he is, a criminal. He wanted to destroy the walls of his city, lead his compatriots away in slavery. He led our enemies on the territory of our city, but he is nevertheless what he is, and he must be granted his funeral rites. He doubtless doesn't have the same rights as the other. You can, in fact tell me whatever you want, tell me that one is a hero and a friend, that the other is an enemy. But I answer that

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[503] Ibid.
[504] Ibid.
[505] Ibid.
[506] Ibid. 343.

> it is of no significance that the latter doesn't have the same value below. As far as I am concerned, the order that you dare refer me to doesn't mean anything, for from my point of view, my brother is my brother.[507]

Lacan interprets Antigone's statement to mean that she knows her brother's crime as well as she knows her own crime. She knows that her brother is a criminal, but that does not make him anything other than her brother. Even if he doesn't bear the same rights as her other brother, Antigone must carry out her brother's funeral rites because he is her brother regardless of anything else he might be.

Given that Antigone's position rests on the concept of Polyneices being her brother above all else, Lacan interprets Antigone to mean that the only thing that matters to her is, "the fact of having been born in the same womb"[508] which is significant because that means he was, "related to the same father."[509] The reason it is so important to Lacan that Antigone acts on behalf of her brother in particular is that it binds her action to, "that criminal father, the consequences of whose crimes Antigone is still suffering from,"[510] which is precisely what makes Polyneices, "something unique."[511] Polyneices is special from having had the same parents as Antigone *and* for sharing in the criminality of her father. In this way, the family atë is passed down through criminal action as well as kinship. Lacan concludes his paraphrase of Antigone's argument to say that, "it is this alone which motivates me to oppose your edicts"[512]—Antigone's essential motivation, according to Lacan, joining in the criminal act of Polyneices which joins her in the

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[507] Ibid.
[508] Ibid.
[509] Ibid.
[510] Ibid.
[511] Ibid.
[512] Ibid.

criminal act of Oedipus. The primary link, Lacan argues, is the womb from which each of them came.

Lacan insists that we have a lot to gain from taking a careful look at this passage in that, "It is at that moment that the tragedy is illuminated with a new light, in the form of Antigone's complaint or lamentation. And it is significant that certain commentators have been scandalized by it."[513] In other words, if those with classical interpretations of her pure piety find it scandalous that she says she would not have done the same thing for a husband or child, perhaps that is because her position is more radical than the classical interpretation. By Lacan's interpretation, this moment sheds new light on *Antigone* by virtue of this lamentation that tells a new tale of Antigone's atë. It is not simply that Antigone reveals a desire for death because, "In effect, Antigone herself has been declaring from the beginning: 'I am dead and I desire death.'"[514] Lacan argues that there is something more to be found in her final lamentations as to what she truly desires.

Lacan's assessment of Antigone's preference for Polyneices focuses on laws and crime. Lacan's Antigone breaks the law to uphold another one, just like Hegel's Antigone. As Lacan understands her, Antigone chooses to break the law for her brother in part because she is concerned with the laws of the subterranean world and, "it is for the sake of her brother who has descended into the subterranean world…that she resists Creon's order."[515] At this point, Lacan is taking Antigone at her word. He is acknowledging the laws she is undeniably concerned with. But the question remains for Lacan why she chooses to uphold one set of laws over another. He breaks down this decision by examining her choice between the two brothers. On the one hand,

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[513] Ibid.
[514] Ibid., 346.
[515] Ibid.

she could approach the situation like Creon and choose to honor her brother, Eteocles, by dishonoring his attacker, Polyneices. Yet, she chooses to act more like one of her brother's than the other. She joins Polyneices in the action of the criminal. In doing so, she joins her father in his crime as well.

Lacan's understanding of Antigone's claim leads to his conclusion that Antigone follows in her family atë—tracing her back to Oedipus' crime of incest:

> The desire of the mother is the founding desire of the whole structure, the one that brought into the world the unique offspring that are Eteocles, [Polynices], Antigone and Ismene; but it is also a criminal desire. Thus at the origin of tragedy and of humanism we find once again an impasse that is the same as Hamlet's, except strangely enough even more radical. No mediation is possible here except that of this desire with its radically destructive character. The fruit of the incestuous union has split into two brothers, one of whom represents power and the other crime. There is no one to assume the crime and the validity of crime apart from Antigone. Between the two of them, Antigone chooses to be purely and simply the guardian of the being of the criminal as such.[516]

Lacan's Antigone chooses an action which fulfills her father's criminality in the form of desire for his mother and the mother of Antigone and her siblings. Having inherited her family's inescapable atë, Antigone's destructive desire must choose a form represented by one of her two brothers. In choosing Polyneices, she chooses crime. Her deadly desire takes on the form of the criminal as such.[517] It might seem as if Lacan sets the stage for scholarly discussion on Antigone's desire (since he paints her in the form of pure desire as such), but as we will see

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[516] Ibid., 348.
[517] Ibid.

when we get to Seery's references to Steiner in response to Butler, Antigone's desires were a point of discussion centuries before Lacan. First, let's turn once again to Butler.

Butler's interpretation of Antigone's claim—that she would not have buried a husband or child, but she buried her brother because of his irreplaceability—calls Hegel's Antigone into question:

> Antigone here hardly represents the sanctity of kinship, for it is for her brother or, at least, in his name, that she is willing to defy the law, although not for every kin. And though she claims to act in the name of a law that from Creon's perspective can appear only as a sanction of criminality, her law appears to have but one instance of application…Although Hegel claims that her deed is opposed to Creon's, *the two acts mirror rather than oppose one another,* suggesting that if the one represents kinship and the other the state, they can perform this representation only by becoming implicated in the idiom of the other."[518]

Butler contends the idea that Antigone represents kinship because it is clear that she only acted on behalf of a certain kind of kin. Hegel poses the conflict in *Antigone* as two opposing laws, but Butler is concerned that Antigone cannot really be representing the law of kinship if she would not have acted the same for a husband or child.[519]

As discussed in prior chapters, Hegel refers to Antigone's claim about the irreplaceability of her brother, but Butler is not satisfied with Hegel's claim that, "The only kind of recognition she can enjoy (and here it is important to remember that recognition is, by definition in Hegel, reciprocal recognition) is of and by her brother."[520] Butler understands that Hegel offers an

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[518] Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim.* New York: 2000. (10).
[519] Ibid., 5.
[520] Ibid., 13.

account of what makes Antigone's relationship to her brother unique in that, "She can gain recognition only from the brother (and so therefore refuses to let him go)."[521] But Butler is unconvinced by Hegel's explanation that reciprocal recognition is achieved because, "there is ostensibly no desire in the relationship."[522] Butler poses the question to Hegel, "But why?" and posits, "Hegel does not tell us why."[523] Hegel gives an account of why the brother is important to the sister (reciprocal recognition) and "reads the death drive out of desire"[524] for that recognition, but nevertheless does not say why there is a supposed absence of desire between the brother and the sister (according to Butler). The next section considers the ways in which Butler's reading of Hegel and others is significantly limited, but in any case, her claim is that Hegel does not tell us why there is no ostensible desire between the brother and sister.

As for Butler's concerns regarding Lacan's Antigone, she expounds, "What Lacan elides at this moment, manifesting his own blindness perhaps, is that she suffers a fatal condemnation by virtue of abrogating the incest taboo that articulates kinship and the symbolic."[525] Butler's interpretation veers from Lacan's when he concludes that Antigone's love for Polyneices is about pure desire in the form of the criminal. Butler argues that though Lacan focuses on crime in *Antigone*, he misses certain aspects of her particular crime. Butler tells us that Antigone is committing two crimes: "not only defying the edict of the state but the crime of carrying her love for her brother too far."[526] Butler suggests there is no reason for us to think that Antigone does not carry her love for her brother too far, unless we are blind to certain kinds of aberrant relationships and kinships.

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[521] Ibid.
[522] Ibid.
[523] Ibid.
[524] Ibid.
[525] Ibid.
[526] Ibid.

Butler's Antigone must be understood in terms of criminal action and kinship at the same time—a criminal act staking her claim to a kind of love deemed unacceptable by the state. Hegel's Antigone and Lacan's Antigone both have something to say for Butler's Antigone who, "represents neither kinship nor its radical outside but becomes the occasion for a reading of a structurally constrained notion of kinship in terms of its social iterability, the aberrant temporality of the norm."[527] Antigone cannot simply represent kinship because of her preference for her brother over other kinds of kin (and, again, Hegel's explanation that there is an absence of desire between brother and sister is unsatisfactory for Butler). Lacan's account of Antigone's desire for her brother as desire for the ineffaceable character is also unsatisfactory for Butler because burying is the practice of effacing.[528] Furthermore, Butler pushes the idea that Antigone's claim can be best understood if one is willing to consider that Antigone simply loves Polyneices more than is socially acceptable, even if it is unspoken.

Butler emphasizes Antigone's incestuous legacy, "And this question, which seems so hard to ask when it comes to kinship, is so quickly suppressed by those who seek to make normative versions of kinship essential to the working of culture and the logic of things, a question too often foreclosed by those who, from terror, savor the final authority of those taboos that stabilize social structure as timeless truth, without then ever asking, what happened to the heirs of Oedipus?"[529] In Butler's interpretation, Antigone's death drive (a term Butler adopts from Freud) is the result of a desire bred into her from her family's criminal record, which is precisely Lacan's interpretation as well. The difference, as Butler accounts for it, is that Lacan suggests it is about criminality itself, whereas Butler suggests it is about a particular crime in the

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[527] Ibid., 29.
[528] Ibid., 53.
[529] Ibid., 25.

family—incest. Having just discussed Lacan, we should take notice that Lacan does link Antigone's "crime" back to Oedipus by virtue of the shared womb, which is essentially by virtue of that original crime of Oedipus' incest.

Butler acknowledges that Lacan remarks upon the curse of Oedipus being passed down to Antigone, "The curse of the father is in fact how Lacan defines the symbolic, that obligation of the progeny to carry on in their own aberrant directions his very words."[530] Butler's critique of Lacan in this sense is that he accounts for the heirs of Oedipus moving in their own aberrant directions as opposed to taking the same aberrant direction. Butler asks, "Is it not precisely the limits of kinship that are registered as the insupportability of desire, which turns desire toward death?"[531] Her suggestion is that Antigone's desire turns toward death because of her desire for a certain kind of love that could never be fulfilled. In other words, the reason she crosses the limit between life and death and receives a second death (as Lacan describes it) is that she knows she can never fulfill her aberrant desires.

According to Butler, Antigone's desire for her brother turns into a desire for death because she recognizes that she can never have the kind of love she truly desires. Butler's reasoning suggests that Antigone has a desire for death because of her incestuous desires for a kind of life and love that has never been a true option for her. Her choice to bury Polyneices becomes her unspoken expression of her incestuous desires before she fully turns her desires toward death. Antigone's burial of Polyneices is an act on behalf of kinship that defies the public law because, "When she buries her brother, it is not simply that she acts from kinship, as if kinship furnishes a principle for action, but that her action is the action of kinship, the

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[530] Ibid., 54.
[531] Ibid.

performative repetition that reinstates kinship as a public scandal."[532] Antigone's fatal action is then linked to the kind of kinship she enacts it for, since she would not have done so for other kin. Furthermore her act of kinship links her crime to her heritage which means, "Her crime is confounded by the fact that the kinship line from which she descends, and which she transmits, is derived from a paternal position that is already confounded by the manifestly incestuous act that is the condition of her own existence, which makes her brother her father," so her crime is confounded with incest through the nature of her line of kin as well as her stated preference.

Butler maintains that, "The incest taboo did not work to foreclose the love that it should have between Oedipus and Jocasta, and it is arguably faltering again for Antigone."[533] Butler's argument is *not* that there is definitive explicit sexual desire between Antigone and Polyneices, but, rather, that there is no definitive reason not to entertain the possibility aside from the taboo felt from the reader.[534] It is not as though she is saying the incest is spoken, but that it is unspoken and un-confronted and that perhaps it is up to us as scholars to confront the, "socially instituted foreclosure of the intelligible, a socially instituted melancholia in which the unintelligible life emerges in language as a living body might be interred into a tomb."[535] Butler's Antigone is a figure of melancholia prompted by social the institution of the taboo. She represents those who have been denied the right to certain expressions of kinship relations due to heteronormative institutions.

Antigone lives with social ostracism as a product of incest throughout the plays. Butler refers to *Oedipus at Colonus* to illustrate Antigone's condemnation to a loveless life in that, "The condemnation follows Oedipus' act and his recognition, but for Antigone, the condemnation

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[532] Ibid., 58.
[533] Ibid., 78
[534] Ibid.
[535] Ibid., 80-81.

works as foreclosure, ruling out from the start any life and love she might have had."[536] Butler interprets Antigone's death drive to be out of her entrapment from achieving her forbidden desires. Butler's appeal is to Oedipus' condemnation in *Oedipus at Colonus*, but she could just as well refer to Oedipus' final speech in *Oedipus the King.* Of the two, the more explicit condemnation is in *Oedipus the King*. After Oedipus realizes he has had four children with his mother and killed his father, he tells his daughters:

> Oedipus: God bless you for it, Creon,/ and may god Guard you better on your road/ than he did me!/ O children,/ where are you? Come here, come to my hands,/ a brother's hands which turned your father's eyes/ those bright eyes you knew once, to what you see,/ a father seeing nothing, knowing nothing/ begetting you from his own source of life./ I weep for you—I cannot see your faces—/ I weep when I think of the bitterness/ there will be in your lives, how you must live/ before the world. At what assemblages/ of citizens will you make one? To what/ gay company will you go and not come home/ in tears instead of sharing in the holiday?/ And when you're ripe for marriage, who will he be,/ the man who'll risk to take such infamy/ as shall cling to my children, to bring hurt/ on them an those that marry with them? What/ curse is not there? "Your father killed his father/ and sowed the seed where he had sprung himself/ and begot you out of the womb that held him."/ These insults you will hear. Then who will marry you?/ No one, my children; clearly you are doomed/ to waste away in barrenness unmarried./ Son of Menoeceus, since you are all the father/ left these two girls, and we, their parents, both/ are dead to them—do not allow them wander/ like beggars, poor and husbandless./ They are of your own blood./ And do not make them equal with myself/ in wretchedness; for

[536] Ibid.

> you can see them now/ so young, so utterly alone, save for you only./ Touch my hand, noble Creon, and say yes./ If you were older, children, and were wiser,/ there's much advice I'd give you. But as it is,/ let this be what you pray: give me a life/ wherever there is opportunity/ to live, and a better life than was my father's.[537]

Regardless of which condemnation is the more explicit of the two, Butler's claim is that Antigone's fatal action (and perhaps love/attraction) is informed by events in either of the other two *Theban Plays.* The point is that what Oedipus tells Antigone seems to affect Antigone's decisions and actions. Butler wants it to be understood that Oedipus' condemnation from another one of the *Theban Plays* informs Antigone's fatal decision in *Antigone*. The complication with such a claim is that whichever the play, Oedipus' condemnation is to both Antigone and Ismene. So, if that condemnation is the cause, why doesn't it affect Ismene the same way?

Butler's claim is that Antigone's death drive is caused by her impossible love. Butler's Antigone accepts death because she abandons any kind of real hope for a mate in her mortal lifetime. After all, Antigone does eventually mention that her mate is in Hades—Acheron, specifically.[538] Butler's Antigone harbors a secret incestuous desire for an impossible love for both her father and her brother. Because social institutions oppress her desires, she becomes melancholic and turns toward death. Butler's aim is to illustrate the individual psychological ramifications of state regulations on ties of kinship, such as the restriction of gay marriage. Antigone has desires that she does not speak, but her actions and speech dramatize her 'melancholia' for us to examine. Ultimately, she likens homophobia to the taboo of incest in that it restricts individual choice with regard to relationships socially as well as politically.

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[537] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Oedipus the King*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 1479-1524.]

[538] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Line 816]. Acheron is the guardian of the river in Hades.

Butler stresses that, "If kinship is the precondition of the human, then Antigone is the occasion for a new field of the human, achieved through political catachresis, the one that happens when the less than human speaks as human when gender is displaced, and kinship founders on its own founding laws."[539] Butler's Antigone is meant to induce an intelligible discourse regarding relationships not simply between the family and the state, but also in the social strata of taboo and moral judgment of aberrant desires and unconventional kinship relations. Her mission seems well and good, but John Seery gives us reason to question Butler's boldness as well as her strategy. By maintaining that Antigone has aberrant desires for her dead brother and dead father that she carries too far, Butler paints Antigone as a promiscuously incestuous necrophiliac. Is this really the kind of hero she should use to promote gay rights? Does she really want to link homosexuality to incest and necrophilia? In the following section, I will examine Seery's critique of Butler via George Steiner and move into a closer read of Steiner's *Antigones*. In doing so, I hope to elucidate what Butler may have missed and develop a broader scope for examining the historical treatment of the Antigone legend.

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[539] Ibid.

Steiner contra Butler, or, 18th and 19th Century Antigones

In "Acclaim for *Antigone's Claim* Reclaimed (or, Steiner, contra Butler)" John Seery questions whether or not Butler's discussion of incest in *Antigone* is as bold, original, or strategic as Butler claims. Seery explains that for many years, he "took her [Butler's] emphasis on incest to be stunningly insightful, its unspoken gothic connection to heteronormativity to be nothing less than brilliant, and her portrayal of Antigone's living death to be hauntingly profound."[540] After teaching *Antigone's Claim* in several of his classes, a creeping suspicion became strong enough for Seery to read Steiner's *Antigones.* His discovery was that Butler's reading of figures she calls blind to certain kinship relations, such as Hegel, is limited. Further, what Butler calls a 'brief' discussion from Steiner about Antigone and incest is actually not brief at all. Seery affirms that, "A principal thesis of *Antigone's Claim* is that Hegel's reading of the play has bequeathed to subsequent interpreters, especially state-feminists, a separatist, oppositional, and territorialist understanding of the relationship between a 'kinship' realm and that of the state."[541] Seery questions this bold claim and reveals that when we give Steiner a more thorough read, it becomes clear that Butler is not the first to discuss incest.

Butler limits her reference to Steiner to, "a footnote, that some folks have indeed read a bit of incest into the play: '18. See also George Steiner's brief discussion of incestuous sibling bonds from 1780-1914 in *Antigones*, pp. 12-15.'"[542] Seery contests, "Steiner, as I read him, doesn't confine his discussion of incest in the nineteenth century to a mere section of his book, pages 12-15, nor does he confine his discussion of incest to the nineteenth century—instead, he is clearly *preoccupied* with incestuous readings throughout his book, and throughout the

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[540] Seery, John. "Acclaim for *Antigone's Claim* Reclaimed (or, Steiner, contra Butler)." *Theory & Event* Volume 9, Issue 1, 2006. Johns Hopkins University Press.
[541] Ibid.
[542] Ibid.

ages."[543] Some examples Seery provides for Steiner's 'preoccupation' with incest is that, "Kierkegaard's response to Hegel's view of incest is examined at some length,"[544] and "Steiner asks the question about why so many writers through the ages have returned to the Antigone myth, and conjectures: 'What seems more than probable is the echo in the knot of incest around Oedipus.'"[545] Steiner concludes that the conversation about her incestuous heritage is precisely why (or, at least, a reason why) Antigone legend endures throughout the ages. The web of incest surrounding her story and her family enters the conversation on Antigone well before Butler enters it. Steiner's work on the history of the Antigone legend accounts for an interest in incest and Antigone throughout the ages.

Seery also surmises that, "Surprisingly, for someone who claims that she is reprising (or discovering) an incestuous reading of Antigone against those who ignore it or insist otherwise, Butler doesn't really explore the nature of the incest, and in fact pays little heed to it. Her own book recreates its minimization—reproducing, reperforming and reinforcing the taboo, relegating it to the margins of her account—a charge she levels against others."[546] Butler's main point tends to be that social taboo is what keeps scholars from discussing the hint toward incest she finds in what she calls Antigone's claim. Butler's draw is toward the notion that Antigone's action is motivated by social and political marginalization. Antigone is denied, according to Butler, the kind of kinship/love relation she desires. According to Butler, Antigone's actual desires are unspoken and move toward her brother, her father, or both. She is condemned to a life without the kind of love she desires and her desire is for at least one (perhaps two) dead men. Seery asserts that Butler does not actually spend much time discussing the desire of incest or

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[543] Ibid.
[544] Ibid.
[545] Ibid.
[546] Ibid.

necrophilia whereas scholars before her have (and to a greater extent). Butler's attention is on Antigone's melancholia as a result of her impossible desire (as opposed to tending toward the desire itself).

Seery reconstructs Butler's claim that, "In attacking state-feminists' narrowly reformist, legalistic purview and drawing attention to far wider cultural/linguistic/political discontents, Butler presses Antigone into service as a melancholic stand-in for any and all persons who are marginalized under terms of heteronormativity (even though they may not fully realize it)."[547] Butler's Antigone is melancholic because her incestuous desires will not be accepted by the state due to regulations, taboos, and cultural norms. Butler uses Antigone to bring forth her concern about state regulations on kinships and the social spread of heteronormativity as the only acceptable form of kinship relations. Seery argues, "That move may therefore make Butler vulnerable to the charge, similar to that which she levels against Hegel, that she effaces Antigone's particularity in order to use her example to map out a new future."[548] And, indeed, Butler does seem to be creating an Antigone who does not actually participate in incest but can stand in as a political figure that opposes the state. The reason behind her action is of greatest import to Butler—that Antigone's right to love has been violated by the public rules about whom she can love. But whether or not Butler is right about Antigone's incestuous desires and/or melancholic state resulting from her desire, I think it is best to take a cue from Seery and spend more time with Steiner's anthology than Butler does.

As his subtitle explicates, Steiner's *Antigones* takes up the task of explaining *How the Antigone Legend Has Endured in Western Literature, Art and Thought*. Steiner's work reveals that throughout the history of Western literature, Antigones become progressively more

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[547] Ibid.
[548] Ibid.

subjective, secretive, devious, gloomy, and mentally unsound after Hegel and his contemporaries. Steiner maintains that the authority of the ancient Greek text remains, but Antigones after antiquity take on a vast array of new forms that bring forth new meaning. Moving through the Antigones before Butler, it becomes clear that Seery is right to reveal that Butler's Antigone is not altogether novel. Neither is Lacan's Antigone, who is clearly linked to Goethe's and Hölderlin's. Hölderlin's translations of the Greek tragedies influence German critics of Antigone and the early philosophers of the German Aesthetic tradition. German readers of Antigone and those producing artistic revivals of Antigone influence contemporary scholarship work from Hölderlin's translations as well. Steiner duly draws out that new translations and reproductions of *Antigone* contribute to the legend's endurance and at the same time remove her character from the Antigone of Sophocles. Hints of melancholia and scandalous desire develop in the character Antigone throughout the ages. To put it plainly, there is less of a reach from Hölderlin's Antigone to Lacan's or from Lacan's to Butler's than from Sophocles' Antigone to Lacan's or Butler's.

Steiner begins with Hegel and marks an important spike for the legend of Antigone in Western literature because, "we find in Hegel's successive and, at decisive points, internally contrasting interpretations of the *Antigone* of Sophocles one of the high moments in the history of reading."[549] Misogynistic aspects of Hegel's interpretation that have been adeptly discussed by feminist scholars notwithstanding, we should acknowledge Hegel's prominent role in Antigone's endurance throughout the ages. Hegel put forth an *exaltation* of Antigone that "undermines thoroughly the dialectic of perfect equilibrium between Creon and Antigone,"[550] but the latter is what became the most influential for German aesthetics in the nineteenth

[549] Steiner, George. *Antigones.* Oxford: 1984. Section 3.
[550] Ibid.

century.[551] In describing Hegel's exaltation of Antigone, Steiner resolves, "The sacramental overtones in Hegel's idiom are unmistakable. Antigone is set above Socrates, a formidable elevation if we bear in mind the literally talismanic status of Socrates as the wisest and purest of mortals throughout Idealist thought and Romantic iconography."[552] But again, Antigone's superiority to Socrates is not the Hegelian reading that inspired further scholarship on Antigone by F. Schlegel, who says Antigone makes the divine visible, or by A.W. Schlegel who begins with Hegel's reading of symmetry and counters with the possibility of Creon's criminality.[553] The dialectic of symmetry is the Hegelian interpretation that inspired future scholarship and became the subject of tragic reproductions of Antigone in the mid-nineteenth century, such as August Boeckh's *Uber die Antigone des Sophokles* (1824) or H.F.W. Hinrich's *Das Wesen der antiken Tragödie* (1827).[554]

In this era the working definitions of the tragic and the tragic hero are "Hegelian to the core,"[555] such as Max Scheler's. The German Romantic spirit we get from figures like Hegel and his contemporaries such as Scheler tell us that, "When we experience tragic drama, an ineluctable constituent 'of the *World*—and not of our ego, of its feelings, of its encounters with pity and fear' is revealed to us.'"[556] The fact that tragic characters suffer the wrath of the world (as opposed to the wrath of their own egos) is precisely what is so enticing about them according to the German Romantic readers. Goethe's *Iphigenie* bears a striking resemblance to Sophocles' *Antigone* and provides the platform for Hölderlin's poetic interpretation of Antigone.[557] Goethe's

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[551] Ibid.
[552] Ibid.
[553] Ibid.
[554] Ibid.
[555] Ibid.
[556] Ibid.
[557] Ibid., Section 4.

characters look inward, but in a certain kind of way. Steiner provides a passage from the *Iphigenie* and expounds, "In the moment of supreme bewilderment, knowing her own values compromised by tactical falsehood, Iphigenie turns inward, to the threatened sanctuary of the moral self, as does Antigone: 'What means have I left to defend my innermost self?'"[558] Steiner points out that in Goethe's interpretation Antigone asks herself a question and makes a decision on behalf of herself, moving closer to the staging of Antigone and her personal desires.

The next figure Steiner discusses is a bit off the path of German Romanticism, but, as Steiner puts it, "Singular as he was in stature and strategic indirection, Kierkegaard had, certainly at the outset, been immersed in the Romantic mood and style. Even his polemics against Romanticism derive from the practices of self-mockery familiar to Byron and E.T.A. Hoffman."[559] Steiner asserts that, "Kierkegaard's 'Antigone' is part of 'The Ancient Tragical Motif as Reflected in the Modern: An Essay in the Fragmentary Read before a Meeting of the Symparanekromenoi',"[560] meaning that Antigone's role in Part I of Kierkegaard's 1843 *Either/Or* has been linked (in at least the twentieth century, if not before) to a genre of 'literary Saturnalia' featuring the mastery of, "The hybrid of direct address, personal memoire, philosophic discourse, fictive letters, pseudonymous interventions, and analytic commentary,"[561] each of which is rooted in Romantic letters and postures.[562] Kierkegaard carries the spirit of Romanticism through to a later age.

Kierkegaard's knowledge of Hegel is not entirely clear because, "the question of whether or not Kierkegaard had personal access to Hegel's actual writings remains unresolved and

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[558] Ibid.
[559] Ibid., Section 5.
[560] Ibid. See also Walter Rehm's essay "Kierkegaard's Antigone," (1954).
[561] Ibid.
[562] Ibid.

disputed."[563] Steiner's own belief is that, "there are moments in his [Kierkegaard's] 'Antigone' which force one to ask what he knew of the *Phenomenology*,"[564] and, too, that, "Kierkegaard's opening move is purely Hegelian."[565] The move to which he refers is the sketching of a paradox of 'tragic grace' that precedes the religious, but Kierkegaard's opening remarks also refer to, "a quotation from Hegel's *Aesthetik* on true compassion, which is empathy with the 'moral justification' (*sittliche Berechtigung*) of the tragic sufferer."[566] Kierkegaard admires the notion of the tragic sufferer put forth by Hegel, but he adds to it the distinction between the "ancient and the modern spectator".[567] Mainly the distinction is about guilt. Whereas we saw with Hegel a distinction between Oedipus' ignorant act versus Antigone's knowing act and the force of Antigone's knowledge, with Kierkegaard, "The dialectic leap follows. Tragic guilt is inherited guilt. But 'inherited guilt' (the human legacy of original sin) 'contains the self-contradiction of being guilt and yet not being guilt'."[568] Accepting one's guilt as being *inherited* asserts one's innocence (as opposed to accepting acquired guilt when one becomes guilty by their own hands) at the same time guilt is recognized as an inherited quality. The self-contradiction is recognizing one's innocence and accepting guilt simultaneously.

The tragic characters of the Greek dramas understand the wrath of the gods and accept their subordinate position to that higher power and, "Thus the guilt of the tragic personage 'has every possible aesthetic ambiguity…But the reflexive understanding of the inheritance of guilt, and the terrible pain which springs from this understanding, are not Greek. They are Hebraic."[569]

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[563] Ibid.
[564] Ibid., Section 5.
[565] Ibid.
[566] Ibid.
[567] Ibid.
[568] Ibid.
[569] Ibid.

What Kierkegaard explains in distinguishing the modern from the ancient audience is that the acceptance that one can be innocent and still endure the wrath of the gods is ancient, whereas the acceptance that one experiences the wrath of God even if one is 'innocent' because of 'inherited guilt' is modern. Going back to Hegel, the idea Hegel pulls from Sophocles' *Antigone* that we recognize our error in suffering,[570] seems somewhat modern by Kierkegaard's distinction. If tragic guilt can be likened to the guilt of Oedipus (as it often is, following from Aristotle) it is the guilt experienced in discovering that one could not avoid suffering despite all of one's efforts, virtues, and innocence. It is the guilt felt in recognition of one's prior ignorance or naivety and in the overcoming of one's hubris or pride. It is the notion of failure from having fought against the cosmos and been beaten down for the obduracy and audacity of the attempt. Fitting Antigone into this concept of guilt is a bit trickier (though of course it has been done in a multitude of ways), as Hegel observes when he contrasts her guilt from her father's: Oedipus acted in ignorance. Antigone did not.

Returning to Kierkegaard and the paradox of 'innocent guilt,' "Christianity and reflexive modernity have assigned to this paradox a visibility denied to the Greek 'naivety', to the primitive notion of the hero's fated doom."[571] Whereas the modern paradox of 'innocent guilt' is the reflective acceptance of guilt despite a certain acknowledgment of innocence, the action of the tragic hero is generally deflective resistance until the tragic fall brings about the recognition of hamartia, of a tragic flaw. This brings us to the matter that, "Kierkegaard finds in the relations of *his* Antigone to Oedipus a peculiarly graphic concentrated enactment (his later term will be 'embodiment') of hereditary fatality in the antique sense and of a reflexive apprehension of this

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[570] Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Trans. By A.V. Miller. Oxford: 1977. [470]
[571] Steiner, George. *Antigones.* Oxford: 1984. Section 5.

fatality in the modern."[572] The idea that Antigone inherits the guilt of her father makes her an ancient (or, perhaps, anachronistic) precedential icon for 'innocent guilt' and the, "Antigone—Oedipus relation, as he [Kierkegaard] pictures it, is representative of a classical theological paradox and of the spiritual—psychological consequences of this paradox, on a scale far larger, far more objective, than that of private crisis."[573] Kierkegaard's Antigone has a secret inherited guilt that she accepts as hers, though she is not the doer of the crime.

It is her secret that keeps Antigone from marrying Haemon, "because the lover cannot entrust to the beloved the secret which both constitutes and ravages his identity."[574] Kierkegaard's Antigone, through no fault of her own, has an inherited sense of guilt that she cannot ever be rid of. So, "she would not get married, she would regard herself as a sacrifice to the wrath of the gods because she belonged to the family of Oedipus, but she would not leave behind any family that could again become the object of the angry gods' persecution."[575] Kierkegaard's Antigone practices self-denial on account of her inherited sin. At the same time, she refuses to pass on the sins of her family to another such as to her potential children with Haemon. She remains loyal to the family she belongs to and sacrifices herself to avoid further wrath from the gods for her accursed family line. Her family's curse or sinfulness is hereditary. Antigone sacrifices herself for those who have not yet to contract the sin of her family (Haemon) as well as those who have inherited the sin alongside her (Polyneices).

Steiner's careful tracking of the Antigone legend allows us to see the resonances of figures like Kierkegaard and Hegel in Antigones thereafter. Steiner offers his account of the Hegelian influence upon Kierkegaard's Antigone and then presents an account of the similarities

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[572] Ibid.
[573] Ibid.
[574] Ibid.
[575] Ibid.

between Hölderlin's Antigone and Kierkegaard's. What we find in the progression of Antigones is a shift from an Antigone who sacrifices herself to honor her brother out of her rightful and pious duty (such as we get from Hegel and his contemporaries) to an Antigone who sacrifices herself to honor her brother because of her personal guilt and/or desire (such as Kierkegaard and those who follow him). This progression, in due course, lends itself to a contemporary discourse that denotes Antigone as 'melancholic'. Let's move onto Hölderlin and his contemporaries to see how this progression gets us to where we currently are within the Antigone legend.

The reading of Hölderlin's version of Sophocles' *Antigone* to Goethe and Schiller in 1804 is worth noting because, "To Goethe and Schiller, Hölderlin's treatment of the Greek text gave palpable evidence of mental collapse, of the *Umnachtung* (literally, 'benightedness') in which the poet endured from 1804 to his death in 1843,"[576] a view also put forth by Schelling in a letter to Hegel the year of the reading.[577] This dreary sentiment about Hölderlin's translation persisted until Norbert von Hellingrath's 1911 edition of Hölderlin's versions of Pindar brought forth, "the entire question of the intent and legitimacy of these translations from the Greek and the decisive role they play in Hölderlin's later poetry."[578] Revaluation of Hölderlin's Greek translations and their contribution to understanding his poetry was in prominent circulation when Heidegger was giving lectures on Hölderlin in the 1940s.[579] In 1951, Karl Reinhardt declared, "that Hölderlin's *Oedipus der Tyrann* and *Antigonä* were not failed experiments or the products of derangement, but 'the highest poetry, felicitous to the last'."[580] And so, we find Hölderlin's ancient Greek translations bear a prominent influence that reaches toward Heidegger, beyond

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[576] Ibid., Section 6.
[577] Ibid.
[578] Ibid.
[579] Ibid.
[580] Ibid.

Heidegger, and in other directions such as Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*, Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay on what a true translation does, and other students of poetry and language working in the vein of Lacan and Derrida who hold Hölderlin's *Antigonä* as, "an exemplary function in their analytics."[581] As obvious as it might be that Hegel's Antigone has a strong presence in contemporary scholarship on Antigone, we should not lose sight of the ways in which Kierkegaard's Antigone, Hölderlin's Antigone, and other Antigones have shaped the Antigones carried into the 21st century.

Notably, "In willful error, Hölderlin makes of *Oedipus der Tyrann* the earlier of the two plays,"[582] and, according to Steiner, "He does this so that Antigone's persona and her deed can make manifest, in final form, the *mysterium tremendum* of the agonistic unison between God and man, between the 'organic' in the natural world and the 'aorgic' in the individual, between the cataclysmic time and the common temporality, between antique and Hesperian."[583] Hölderlin's Antigone advances that which is revealed in *Oedipus der Tyrann*. But, Steiner specifically accounts for the fact that Hölderlin places the *two* plays together in order of the myth, rather than the *three* plays. Following from *Oedipus der Tyrann*, *Antigonä* shows the final form of the dialectic unity between the human and the divine. Indeed, "More drastically, even, than *Oedipus*, Sophocles' *Antigone* is, according to Hölderlin, a play set in, and representative of, a moment of 'national reversal and revolution' (vaterländische Umkehr)…In short, and with connotations close to those of Spinoza's title, *Antigone* is, to Hölderlin, a 'theological-political' document."[584] Oedipus paints the picture of the laws of man and the divine meeting in agonistic unison, but, for

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581 Ibid.
582 Ibid.
583 Ibid.
584 Ibid.

Hölderlin, it is Antigone who paints the portrait of the theological-political revolution with the most dramatic strokes.

Of course, it is her conflict with Creon, the sacrificing of herself, and the placement of her love that makes Antigone so notable for Hölderlin, just as we have seen with figures before and after him. For Hölderlin, " Creon incarnates 'das Förmliche', that which is both 'shapely' and 'formalistic', that which in Attic sensibility and statecraft, as well as in the conventions of Sophoclean drama itself, reflects 'Junonian sobriety'. His sphere is the universalizing, harmonious compass of the 'organic'."[585] Creon is for Hölderlin much like Hegel's Creon—the figure of the human, the communal, and the written, formal, stately law. The emphasis, for Hölderlin, is the written versus the unwritten (for Antigone lays claim to the unwritten laws of Zeus). What Hölderlin takes to be the main tension is between the formal/written/organic versus the formless/unwritten/aorgic. This tension is essentially between that which *is with* and that which *is without* because, "By virtue of antithesis, *Anti*gone (does her very name not declare as much?) embodies 'das Unförmliche', the 'formless', with all its implications of primal infinity, of undifferentiated generative energies."[586] Her name, after all, means something like the opposition toward or movement away from (anti) life, the organic, birth, or nature (gone). And so, for Hölderlin, "In her, the 'aorgic' is uncompromisingly unleashed; Apollonian fire possesses every fiber of her being. She is *gesetzlos*, 'lawless',"[587] and *Antigonä* is defined as such in the fourth stasimon.[588]

Though full of added nuances pointing to the dualism of life and death in the conflict between Creon and Antigone, "Analogies with Hegel's view of the conflict between state and

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585 Ibid.
586 Ibid.
587 Ibid.
588 Ibid.

individual, between coercive legalism and instinctive humanism, in *Antigone* are undeniable"[589] in Hölderlin's *Antigonä*. Yet, Steiner marks a salient difference: "Hegel's interpretation makes of Creon a false or superficial pietist and of Antigone's religiosity an authentic inspiration. In Hölderlin's conception, *both* figures are radically religious. They worship the same heavenly powers but experience their relations to these powers, their respective 'god-nearness' or 'god-distance', in irreconcilably opposite ways."[590] Considering this difference we can see that both Kierkegaard's Antigone and Hölderlin's Antigone are more subjective than Hegel's Antigone. Hegel's Antigone reveals a religiosity that is at the core of her being, her spirit, or her nature. The Antigones of Kierkegaard and Hölderlin posit a religiosity that is deeply subjective in that it is something *only* Antigone really understands.

If you recall, Kierkegaard's Antigone has a secret. Having a secret means knowing something that others don't know. Hölderlin's Antigone knows formlessness and the unwritten laws of the 'aorgic' and so she goes against life, as her name indicates. It should now be apparent why Steiner links Hölderlin to Lacan, Derrida, and students of Lacan and Derrida. Hölderlin's *Antigonä* illuminates Antigone as a figure of death and derangement. To make this clearer, note the following comparison, "Sophocles' heroine goes the way to death 'unwept, friendless, unwed, wretchedly alone'. Antigonä goes *trübsinnig*. The term is ambivalent. It signifies both 'gloomy of spirit' and 'mentally bewildered' or even 'deranged'."[591] And so we have, well before Lacan and Butler, death-oriented Antigones with desires, secret guilt, and gloomy spirits. But this gloomy, deranged woman is not Sophocles' Antigone! She is (at least) some combination of Hegel's Antigone, Goethe's Iphigenie, Kierkegaard's Antigone, Hölderlin's

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[589] Ibid.
[590] Ibid.
[591] Ibid.

Antigonä, and those I earlier denoted as post-modern and millennial Antigones. Hence, I will conclude this chapter with another return to the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth to see what Sophocles' *Antigone* and the classical theme of mortality in Attic tragedy contributes to the discussion of Antigone and Polyneices.

Classic Themes of Mortality in Attic Tragedy

The reason I spent the previous section expanding Seery's notion of Steiner contra Butler is that the goal for this chapter is in part, to provide an overview of how current circulation of scholarship on Antigone has evolved in recent centuries. A broad concern that Seery's critique of Butler reveals is that there are instances in which contemporary scholarship claims to be making novel strides that are not actually new ideas at all. In my survey of contemporary scholarship on Antigone, scholars continuously claim to make use of the Antigone legend in ways that go beyond classic themes of mortality.

The way I have referred to this observation previously is in the language of "indirect" readings of what the characters and the chorus say. What I have meant is that scholars have been opting out of the classical tradition of reading Attic tragedy as a general tale of mortal life, action, hubris, and death. Instead, scholars claim to bring something new to the table, such as theories regarding Antigone's politics and/or psychology. Butler's claim is a strong example of this and I am not the first to make this kind of critique. Seery does a fine job of explaining that anthological research provides evidence that Butler's claim to originality is too bold. Steiner, whose anthological research Seery and I both turn to, does a thorough job of showing that Antigone seems to have an eternal presence as she takes on the various forms of the times.

As the way in which we understand Antigone changes (and as scholars endeavor to make her new again) it gets harder to think about her in the traditional ways of understanding Attic tragedy. Again, I'm not claiming originality in pointing this out. Steiner's *Antigones* elucidates this idea beautifully. What I have been doing with this project is examining the way in which scholarship on Sophocles' *Antigone* (and on Antigone) has evolved as well as how reading the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth can provide some potential answers to new questions. The

idea is that embracing the Antigones of the past will help us in our exploration of contemporary questions she has helped us ask. In other words, we do not need to abandon other notions (including classic ones) about the choice and action we get from the character Antigone. In fact, we really should not abandon them. It is worth considering Aristotle's praise of Antigone's argument when doing new theoretical work on Sophocles' *Antigone*. It is useful to consider what Aristotle tells us about Sophocles generally.

Aristotle consistently praises Sophocles for *Oedipus the King* above other tragedies for having the best kind of plot for achieving the proper function of tragedy.[592] In defining a reversal, Aristotle argues, "A reversal is a change of the actions to their opposite, as we said, and that, as we are arguing, in accordance with probability or necessity. E.G. in the *Oedipus,* the man who comes to bring delight to Oedipus, and to rid him of his terror about his mother, does the opposite by revealing who Oedipus is."[593] So, for Aristotle, *Oedipus the King* delivers a paradigmatic example of a reversal within the structure of plot in which expectations are met with their opposite. The person meant to bring joy brings doom in the case of *Oedipus the King.*

Aristotle also praises *Oedipus the King* for having its reversal and recognition play out at the same time, "A recognition is finest when it happens at the same time as a reversal, as does the one in the *Oedipus.*"[594] Aristotle's definition of recognition is, "a change from ignorance to knowledge, and so to either friendship or enmity, among people defined in relation to good fortune or misfortune."[595] The reason this change belongs to the plot of tragedy is because, "such a recognition and reversal will contain pity or terror (tragedy is considered to be a representation

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[592] Ibid. 4 How tragedy can best achieve its function.
[593] Ibid. 3.4.1 Reversal. I have not come across any evidence that Aristotle refers to the title of the play as anything other than the *Oedipus,* but the description that follows matches the plot of *Oedipus the King.*
[594] Ibid. 3.4.2 Recognition.
[595] Ibid.

of actions of this sort), and in addition misfortune and good fortune will come about in the case of such events."[596] The change Oedipus undergoes as he moves from ignorance to knowledge is the root of his suffering and represents a pitiable and terrifying action. His fortune shifts from good to bad as he learns something about himself and the truth of his fortune. Aristotle makes him an example once again of the "best change of fortune."[597]

After describing some inferior changes in fortune, Aristotle protests, "There remains, then, the person intermediate between these. Such a person is one who neither is superior [to us] in virtue and justice, nor undergoes a change to misfortune because of vice and wickedness, but because of some error, and who is one of those people with a great reputation and good fortune, e.g. Oedipus, Thyestes and distinguished men from similar families." The fact that the story of Oedipus applies the best structure of plot, which Aristotle insists is confirmed to be the best by the tragedians' practice[598], means it best achieves its tragic function.[599]

Since plot is the soul of tragedy and the arbiter of tragedy's cathartic function, Aristotle's praise of plot in *Oedipus the King* sings the praise of its achievement of what tragedy ought to do. As Aristotle explains it, "For the plot should be constructed in such a way that, even without seeing it, someone who hears about the incidents will shudder and feel pity at the outcome, as someone may feel upon hearing the plot of the *Oedipus*." Aristotle's aesthetic definitions of tragedy marked the story of Oedipus as the paradigmatic tragic plot of pitiable and terrifying movement from ignorance to knowledge and good fortune to misfortune at the same time. In the order of the myth, Creon is the one that we watch ascend to greatness and then fall from greatness because he refused to listen to good counsel, or so the chorus suggests.

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[596] Ibid.
[597] Ibid. 4.1.1 The deduction of the best change in fortune.
[598] Ibid. 4.1.1.1 The tragedians' practice confirms this.
[599] Ibid. 4.1.1.3 Plot, not speIbid.cle, can best achieve the function of tragedy.

Heidegger expounds that we miss something if we simply and directly listen when the chorus from *Antiogne* rejects anyone who would mistake the living for the dead. He among others insists that we need to reach beneath the surface to extract meaning in *Antigone*. I, on the other hand, am convinced that we miss out on the counsel offered in the play if we refuse to accept what is directly stated. The direct statement of the chorus is that we ought to preserve the distinction between the living and the dead. Painful as it may be, it is perhaps what is necessary and what is best. In any case, reading the *Theban Plays* as a collective pushes this counsel further than the play *Antigone* alone. When read in the order of the myth, there is even more reason to believe that Antigone's explanation for why she buried her brother evokes this same counsel about honoring the distinction between the dead and the living.

Psychologically, as Freud explains, mourning is the process of the ego's acceptance of the reality of a loss. One who mourns undergoes the process of facing the reality that what the libido is attached to no longer exists. Melancholia involves an ambiguous and unconscious loss. The ego of someone afflicted with melancholia is stuck in the activity of self-reviling and cannot move on as long as their experience of the loss remains ambiguous and unconscious. The ego of someone in mourning is busied with the activities of mourning because they are in the process of consciously accepting a loss. Antigone demonstrates profound mourning. Freud expounds, "It is easy to see that this inhibition and circumscription of the ego is the expression of an exclusive devotion to mourning which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests. It is really only because we know so well how to explain it that this attitude does not seem to us pathological."[600] The activity of mourning involves directing one's energy toward concern for

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[600] Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works,* (237-258).

the dead. Mourning is not considered a pathological affliction because it is a process that can be reasonably explained and linked to an actual loss. Further, it is a process that produces an endpoint of acceptance.

When Antigone loses her father, she wants to go to his grave. When Polyneices dies, she wants to bury him. She declares that she performed the rites for each of her other deceased family members. Antigone has experienced the process of mourning enough times in her life that she is able to explain her decisions and actions to those who will listen and take her at her word:

> Antigone: For me it was not Zeus who made that order./ Nor did that Justice who lives with the gods below/ mark out such laws to hold among mankind./ Nor did I think your orders were so strong/ that you, a mortal man, could over-run/ the gods' unwritten and unfailing laws./ Not now, nor yesterday's, they always live,/ and no one knows their origin in time./ So not through fear of any man's proud spirit/ would I be likely to neglect these laws,/ draw on myself the gods' sure punishment./ I knew that I must die; how could I not?/ even without your warning. If I die/ before my time, I say it is a gain./ Who lives in sorrows many as are mine/ how shall he not be glad to gain his death?/ And so, for me to meet this fate, no grief./ But if I left that corpse, my mother's son,/ dead and unburied I'd have cause to grieve/ as I grieve not./ And if you think my acts are foolishness/ the foolishness may be in a fool's eye.[601]

Antigone explains how she overcomes her grief. She maintains her self-regard by abiding the unfailing laws of the gods and honoring her beloved family members that have passed. She goes to death knowing she did not live in fear of any man's proud spirit. She goes to death knowing

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[601] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 450-470].

she did not allow any man's law to corrupt her piety to the gods or loyalty to her family. She goes to death with respect for mortality. In fact, she goes with gratitude for an end to her sorrows. The only thing that could have caused her grief would have been if she had not buried her brother. Then, she would have a reason to grieve. She would be faced with the same fear that made her father decide to blind himself. She would be afraid to see her family in the afterlife, having dishonored the corpse of her mother's son. If we listen to Antigone with *Oedipus at Colonus* in mind, we can hear her echo the chorus. She tells us that dying well is worthy of hope, but dying dishonorably is worthy of grief.

By her own explanation, Antigone tells us that she has chosen wisely because she has done what she needed to do for her own well-being as well as out of respect for the gods and loyalty to her loved ones. Even as she goes to death, she does not grieve because she does not go in fear of what awaits her in the afterlife. She knows her deceased family members should be pleased with her because of her hand in their burial rites. She goes with an undisturbed sense of self because of her courage. She would not let a proud man's spirit thwart her efforts to accept the timeless laws of the gods and show her loyalty to her deceased family. Antigone goes to death believing she has done what was best.

Freud's explanation for the painful process of mourning a death is that reality demands that we acknowledge that the loved one no longer exists and, of course, "This demand arouses understandable opposition—it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them."[602] The opposition Freud posits is not unlike the strangeness of man we discussed with regard to Heidegger in the section titled "Post-Modern Antigones." Man does not want to accept

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[602] Ibid.

the reality of death and his opposition is understandable. Yet, to liberate his ego from the thralls of painful dejection, he must endure the painful process of accepting reality's orders. Though, "It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a matter of course by us,"[603] Freud elucidates that, "The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed, the ego becomes free and uninhibited again."[604] Relief follows acceptance.

The choral benediction for the play *Antigone*, is: "Our happiness depends/ on wisdom all the way./ The gods must have their due./ Great words by men of pride/ bring greater blows upon them./ So wisdom comes to the old."[605] Wisdom comes to the old through the blows dealt by the gods to proud men that have not yet learned their limitations as mere mortals. Painful, terrible experiences yield wisdom from ignorance about the human condition. Creon learns his lesson in *Antigone*. He learns that he was out of his jurisdiction, even as king, to create and enforce a law regarding the dead. The necessity for mortals to acknowledge that the dead are no longer living is a necessity that goes beyond the laws of a king. It can be profoundly painful to do so, but it is the timeless, unwritten law of humanity. To be human is to be mortal. The wisdom to which the chorus refers is the acceptance of ultimate limitations—acceptance of death.

Antigone tells us that she has always known that she would die. She suffered the great blows dealt by the gods to her father. She was born as a result of the blows dealt upon him. So was Ismene, but Antigone spent her life with Oedipus moving toward his death and accepting his fate. For this reason, Antigone knows what Creon learns in his old age, which, again, is that, "Our happiness depends/ on wisdom all the way./ The gods must have their due."[606] Antigone knows the gods must have their due and she tries to tell Creon. She also knows that her

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[603] Ibid.
[604] Ibid.
[605] Ibid., Chorus: [1347-1352].
[606] Ibid.

happiness depends on her knowledge and acceptance of the laws of mortality. If we simply listen to Antigone, unlike Creon who refuses to listen to her, we can observe the way she applies the lessons she learned from her father. In Antigone's case, wisdom came to the young because she spent her life beside old Oedipus (as he is affectionately called in reference to *Oedipus at Colonus*). Creon refuses to listen to Antigone because she is a woman. Creon refuses to listen to his son, Haemon, because he is young. So, Creon gains wisdom only once he is old and has been dealt great blows by the gods in response to his pride. Due to his refusal, Creon becomes the quintessential tragic hero that rises and falls without seeing the fall coming.

Antigone, on the other hand, is not this kind of hero. She is like her father in *Oedipus at Colonus.* She is not like her father in *Oedipus the King*. Creon is like Oedipus in *Oedipus the King.* Creon and Oedipus have similar stories. They rise to become great kings and then they bring their own downfall upon themselves without realizing they're doing so. After his downfall, Oedipus reorients himself. He turns to accept his fate and actively makes his way to Colonus to complete the story the oracles said was the fate of Oedipus. Antigone accompanies him and when he dies, she knows he died as he wished. She heeds the counsel of the chorus that dying courageously is better than living cowardly. When she finds the opportunity to die well, she takes it. She neither falls blindly nor lives blindly. She spends her life as her father's eyes after his fall. Regardless of the differing opinions about why Antigone does what she does, there is an unyielding consensus that whatever it is, she knows exactly what she is doing. And if we read the play directly, it is not Antigone who does not listen to good counsel; it is Creon. If we continue to only read *Antigone* indirectly or in isolation, we too will miss out on the counsel of Attic tragedy and its tragic insights about accepting the universal, unwritten laws of life and death.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

So he has made it very clear to men/ that to reject good counsel is a crime.[607]

I chose the epigraph above because the conclusion of my project is that we can find further counsel in Sophocles' *Antigone* by reading it in the complete context of the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth. Read in the order of the myth, we first meet Antigone as a small child who learns that her father, Oedipus, married his mother and that her family will always be ostracized for his misfortunate fate. The next time we meet her in *Oedipus at Colonus*, she has been traveling in exile with Oedipus for twenty years. *Oedipus at Colonus* informs us that Antigone and her sister, Ismene, lead completely different lives for twenty years. These twenty years encompass portions of their childhood, their entire adolescence, and the beginning of their young adult lives. Examining her earlier years is a way of examining Antigone as an active agent and a figure of desire (as recent scholars have been doing), but without having to interpret her indirectly (as recent scholars have been doing).

I took up multiple tasks for this project. Antigone is such a popular figure and her legend has endured for so long that discussing her popularity and the endurance of her legend was a large task by itself. The other task I took up was to examine the three *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth and show what my examination offers to popular questions about Antigone the character and *Antigone* the play. My ultimate task, given that my project was to produce a philosophical thesis to be discussed and defended, was to produce and uphold some insight

[607] Ibid., [1192-1243].

gained from my examination that would contribute to future scholarship on Sophocles' *Antigone*. The insight brought forth is that if we read Antigone as an evolving character in the complete context of the *Theban Plays,* we witness her learn the lesson that accepting one's death honorably is better than living dishonorably. This insight adds to the conversation about her reasons for doing what she does without having to reinterpret her. My project was not to reinvent Antigone yet again. It was simply to examine her from within a larger context and see what that context could contribute to the conversation about her.

My literature review throughout the project revealed that contemporary scholarship has moved the legend of Antigone toward interpreting her character as a figure of desire and individual agency as opposed to a passive voice for one law against another. I think it was a good move. The best thing about it is that it humanizes her in the sense that she becomes an evolving figure. Her motivations become complex and multiple. Her intentions appear ambiguous. She transcends archetype. Her actions become more fluid. Her character becomes more developed, but less concrete. She pushes the limits of a literary figure. Given this push toward humanization, it seems natural to me that we should view her in light of her experience. She is a character that learns and grows. She does not begin a woman who defies the decree of the king to bury her brother. She *becomes* a woman who defies the decree of the king to bury her brother.

My chapter on Antigone and Ismene argued that Antigone turns out to be more like Oedipus than she is like Ismene because she grew up with Oedipus as her sole companion. *Oedipus at Colonus* clarifies that over the course of twenty years, Antigone has been with Oedipus whereas Ismene has been back at the palace with Creon, Eteocles, and Polyneices. Although, to be precise, Polyneices was off collecting armies to bring to battle with Thebes to take the throne back from his brother for part of that time. Antigone, Oedipus, and Polyneices

have all been on a long journey away from home when we meet them in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Ismene claims to have had difficulty traveling to find Oedipus and Antigone, but it is clear that her life is the most palatial because she arrives with a regal cavalry.[608]

In my chapter on Antigone and Creon, I concluded that reading *Antigone* in isolation makes it more difficult to understand why Antigone is less inclined to follow Creon's rules than Ismene is. Of course it is powerful that Antigone defies the law in full knowledge that the punishment is death. It is remarkable that she tells the ruling king his laws mean nothing to her if they go against the rules of the gods. It is not so puzzling, however, once we recall that Antigone spent her life with her father in exile and then witnessed his divine extraction from the world and his ability to communicate with the gods. Antigone respects the rules of the gods above all else because her father was also a king and yet was subject to the will of the gods. She and Oedipus follow the rules of the gods (and only the gods as they are exiles and not political subjects to a legal body) as they wander in exile toward the place where the gods said Oedipus would die. Antigone and Ismene both have a close encounter with the other world, but Antigone is the one who has been living exclusively by the rules of the gods and outside of the walls of the palace and the city. Antigone is alongside Oedipus as he accepts his fate and moves toward it rather than attempting to flee from it.

Antigone's actions thereby ought be understood and explained through the lens of where she has been, what she has seen, and what she knows. She knows the gods overpower kings. Her family suffers because of it. She spends her entire life devoted to the gods and to her father's journey to die where the gods said he would. My chapter on Antigone and Polyneices examines the part in *Oedipus at Colonus* wherein Polyneices asks his sisters to give him a proper burial

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[608] See footnote of Paul Woodruff's translation of the *Theban Plays* when Ismene arrives at Colonus.

and tells them that they will be rewarded for their services. Only one of them honors his request. Ismene acknowledges that she will have to ask the gods forgiveness for not doing the deed. She says she will tell them that she was forced by powerful men not to perform the burial services. Antigone does not recommend that she ask the gods for forgiveness because of a mere mortal's rule.

Antigone is the daughter who spent twenty years in exile because Creon decided to exile Oedipus as soon as Oedipus had begun to get over his grief. She is the daughter who chose Oedipus over Creon as a child and accompanies Oedipus in exile instead of staying in the palace. These are the features that distinguish Antigone from Ismene dramatically. This is not an addition to the play. This is not another endeavor to read the play indirectly. I am simply discussing the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth. When read in this context, one can observe Antigone's development into the character that acts differently from her sister. Antigone lives a different life. Antigone has a different journey. Antigone sees things in a different light. Many have said Antigone sees things differently. She appears to uphold a certain set of laws or desires to those who study her. Reading the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth explains why she sees things the way she does and upholds the laws as she knows them. Her decisions can be more easily understood once her whole story is told. Many have inserted their notions of what completes her story in order to explain her, but all we need to do is read her story directly through her developmental trajectory.

If we consider what she knows, learns, and suffers to understand before she acts, her decision to act as she does in *Antigone* is plain. Antigone suffers enough in her life to prefer dying with grace to the alternative. She loses her lifetime companion in exile (Oedipus, her father). She witnesses a miraculous divine intervention (in which her father hears the voice of a

god and, albeit blind, leads her and others to a place where the gods extract him from the earth and leave no trace of a body or tomb to be discovered by anyone except for the King of Athens). She knows suffering the wrath of the gods is a worse fate than death. She also knows that gaining favor with them could mean eternal redemption. She even knows how to gain favor with them because she watched her father do it. Her father lived boldly and suffered greatly. Then, upon accepting that he could not change his fate and dying as the gods said he would die the gods took him from the world themselves. Just before the event of his death, Oedipus refused to allow his enemies to take what they wanted from him. He bends to the will of the gods, but defies the wills of men. After witnessing such a feat, Antigone sets out to follow in his footsteps.

Before burying Polyneices, Antigone knows the omnipotence of the gods and cares more about the eternity she will spend in the afterlife than the remainder of her time as a mortal. Antigone welcomes death with grace because her overarching aim is for a better afterlife, which is longer than a mortal life. The worse fate than death with grace, by Antigone's reasoning, is life without grace or death without grace. Antigone wants to please those who can offer true eternal grace, such as those in the underworld. On the other hand, Creon only has the power over her within their finite mortal capacities. Polyneices asks her to bury his corpse if he dies attacking Thebes. He tells her that if she does, she will serve the office of his ghost in the underworld. Antigone tells Ismene she cares more about the dead because the afterlife is forever. It is a reasonable incentive for her to please those whom she will end up reunited with for an eternity. After Oedipus dies Antigone chooses to return to Thebes.

Though Antigone knows her father died well and is most likely better off in his next life, she is miserable in the realm of the living without him. She also knows a misfortunate fate awaits her brothers. Antigone tells the chorus she knows her life before was wretched and evil, but she

could better endure it with her father's presence.[609] The chorus tries to comfort her once more by saying, "He lived his life,"[610] to which Antigone adds, "He did as he had wished."[611] When the chorus asks for clarification, Antigone tells them that her father died the way he chose to die in the place he wished to die, but she regrets that she couldn't have been with him.[612] Ismene does not respond with the same sentiment about their father dying as he had wished. Ismene's response is to wail about their unknown futures.[613] The chorus tells them both that they should not grieve so much for Oedipus because he died so well and honorably and that no mortal escapes unhappiness any other way.[614] It seems that Antigone alone internalizes this particular message from the chorus.

Antigone explains to Ismene that death is the best choice given their options. She learns from her father how to move forward after accepting mortal limitations. The majority of Antigone's life is spent as Oedipus' guide to dying as he wished to die. Therefore when the chorus tells Antigone and Ismene that the best thing mankind can hope for is to die well and honorably, Antigone understands. She has observed that her brother and father held the same philosophy. Antigone loved her brother and her father. She mourns the death of her brother and father. She chooses to die as they did—with brave acceptance when faced with a decision

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[609] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). Antigone: One may long for the past/ Though at the time indeed it seemed/ Nothing but wretchedness and evil./ Life was not sweet, yet I found it so/ When I could put my arms around my father./ O father! O my dear!/ Now you are shrouded in eternal darkness,/ Even in that absence/ You shall not lack our love,/ Mine and my sister's love. [Lines 1696-1701].
[610] Ibid., [1702].
[611] Ibid., [1703].
[612] Ibid., Chorus: What do you mean? [1704] Antigone: In this land among strangers/ He died where he chose to die./ He has his eternal bed well shaded,/ And in his death is not unmourned./ My eyes are blind with tears/ From crying for you, father./ The terror and the loss/ Cannot be quieted./ I know you wished to die in a strange country,/ Yet your death was so lonely!/ Why could I not be with you? [1705-1714].
[613] Ibid., Ismene: O pity! What is left for me?/ What destiny awaits us both/ Now we have lost our father? [1715-1719].
[614] Ibid., Chorus: Dear children, remember/ That his last hour was free and blessed./ So make an end of grieving!/ Is anyone in all the world/ Safe from unhappiness? [1720-1721].

wherein death is preferable to the alternative. Antigone, Oedipus, and Polyneices accept death when it is clear to them that death is necessary.

The reason they are able to do so is because they have humbly accepted their mortal limits and set their sights on dying well. Antigone in particular states this. She would rather die and move onto the afterlife knowing she served the gods and the dead than live in fear of their wrath. Antigone tells Ismene she would not recommend that Ismene ask for forgiveness by claiming she was forced not to bury Polyneices. Antigone has her sights set on dying well, so whereas Ismene plans to claim she was forced not to do what needed to be done, Antigone sees an opportunity to do exactly what she wants to do, which is to die well and honorably. She explains a number of times that dying is preferable for her, including an explanation of the psychological benefit. She tells Creon she does not grieve for having to die, but that she would continue to grieve if she did not bury the body of her brother.

If we read Oedipus' journey in *Oedipus the King* as a reversal from fortune to misfortune in light of his recognition[615], we might consider next what kind of reversal occurs for Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Oedipus journeys to accept the truth he has come to learn—he grows to accept his fate and the governing force of the gods that are the ultimate cause of things in the *Theban Plays*. Oedipus is able to lead the way for others in *Oedipus at Colonus*. He says he is guided by the voice of a god. Oedipus first suffers from his ascension and then grows to see himself as more fortunate than those that still exist in the place he left behind. And, as the chorus

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[615]In discussing Oedipus and Creon in terms of their recognition I am appealing to the traditional understanding of a tragic hero's movement from ignorant pride (hubris) to recognized error (harmatia). See Aristotle's *Poetics* 3.4 "The parts of plot," especially 3.4.2 "Recognition." (Trans. Richard Janko, Hackett: Cambridge, 1987). The classic tragic arc embraced the Delphic wisdom of the dangers of hubris—a foolish pride and disregard for the gods. An explicit expression of this wisdom is made by the chorus in *The Bacchae* (II. 882-86).

suggests, he is.[616] Ismene and Antigone both hear this, but only one embraces their counsel. Ismene remembers her father dying ill famed and wretched, so she advises her sister not to go and make the same blasphemous errors. Antigone understands it all quite differently.

At the end of *Oedipus the King* Oedipus tells Antigone and her sister, Ismene, that they were born of a blasphemous marriage and that their fates are sealed in doom. Antigone learns the same truth Oedipus learns about their existence and accompanies him in his exile as his eyes/as his guide/ as his companion. Antigone's journey mirrors Oedipus' journey to an extent because in *Oedipus at Colonus* we discover that she's been with him since he was exiled, but once Oedipus dies, her journey continues. In *Antigone*, she disagrees with the ruling king, defies his decree, and is sentenced to death. Because her journey runs a different course, Antigone is a different kind of character than the tragic hero whose action is a reversal from ignorance to knowledge. Antigone's atë is different from the blindness experienced from the passage from dark to light, or from ignorance to knowledge. Antigone's action comes after having experienced a divine intervention with her father. After what she has witnessed with regard to the afterlife, she wants to follow her father to Hades, but she also wants to be welcomed and go there with grace as he was. Burying Polyneices is an act in honor of the gods and the dead, whom she will spend more time with than mortals.

In response to the laments from the chorus as Antigone is being taken to the cave to die,[617] Antigone says they are witnessing her last glimpse of the sun.[618] She explains that she is

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[616] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Oedipus at Colonus*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). "Dear children, remember/ That his last hour was free and blessed./ So make an end of grieving!/ Is anyone in all the world/ Safe from unhappiness? [Lines 1720-1721].

[617] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). Chorus: Love unconquered in fight, love who falls on our havings./ You rest in the bloom of a girl's unwithered face./ You cross the sea, you are known in the wildest lairs./ Not the immortal gods can fly,/ not men of a day. Who has you within him is mad./ You twist the minds of the just. Wrong they pursue and are/ ruined./

being taken "alive to the shore/ of the river of the underworld,"[619] which is the river of death and pain (an apt description, I think, of her solitary entombment and extreme depravation). She laments that she shall never merry and names Acheron (the god of the river of death and pain in the underworld) her mate.[620] Unto death, Antigone believes she is right to have chosen her actions based upon the wishes of gods and the dead because the afterlife is an eternity and mortal life is temporally finite.

The chorus suggests that perhaps, despite her admirable gumption, she has fallen because she is the daughter of Oedipus.[621] Antigone says her darkest thought has been spoken of—the blasphemous marital relationship between her brother/father and her mother.[622] She believes her curse was to die alone and unwed. From Butler's account, Antigone says Oedipus sealed his fate as well as Antigone's fate when he met Jocasta.[623] The chorus tells her that they respect her because she respected the dead, but suggest that her independence made her susceptible to the wrath of power.[624] Antigone reiterates her distress from loneliness and loss of sunlight.[625] Her

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You made this quarrel of kindred before us now./ Desire looks clear from the eyes of a lovely bride:/ power as strong as the founded world./ For there is the goddess at play with whom no man can fight. (*Antigone is brought from the palace under guard.*)/ Now I am carried beyond all bounds./ My tears will not be checked./ I see Antigone depart/ to the chamber where all men sleep. [Lines 781-807].

[618] Ibid., Antigone: Men of my fathers' land, you see me go/ my last journey. My last sight of the sun,/ then never again. Death who brings all to sleep/ takes me alive to the shore/ of the river underground./ Not for me was the marriage-hymn, nor will anyone start the song/ at a wedding of mine./ Acheron is my mate. [808-816].

[619] Ibid.

[620] Ibid.

[621] Ibid. Chorus: You went to the furthest verge/ of daring,/ but there you found/ the high foundation of justice, and fell./ Perhaps you are paying your father's pain. [851-857].

[622] Ibid., Antigone: You speak of my darkest thought, my pitiful father's fame,/ spread through all the world, and the doom that haunts our house,/ the royal house of Thebes./ My mother's marriage-bed./ Destruction where she lay with her husband-son,/ my father. These are my parents and I their child./ I go to stay with them. My curse is to die unwed./ My brother, you found your fate when you found your bride,/ found it for me as well. Dead, you destroy my life. [858-871].

[623] Ibid.

[624] Ibid., Chorus: You showed respect for the dead./ So we for you: but power/ is not to be thwarted so./ Your self-sufficiency has brought you down. [872-875].

despair is not a result of a reversal from ignorance to knowledge. She has knowledge of her mortal limitations and how they measure up against the awesome infinitude of the divine. Yet, her knowledge cannot protect her from the ignorance of those in power. And if we were to take into consideration the tragic flaw the chorus names for Antigone (just as I have done for Creon) it is that she is self-sufficient.

Considering that Antigone is literally taken from the sunlight and forced into a cave, it is hard not to make the comparison to Plato's cave allegory (and, of course, it has been done before). The conclusion to the allegory offers a helpful illustration for Antigone's downfall as opposed to that of Creon or Oedipus:

> Socrates: This whole image, Glaucon, must be fitted together with what we said before. The visible realm should be likened to the prison dwelling, and the light of the fire inside it to the power of the sun. And if you interpret the upward journey and the study of things above as the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm, you'll grasp what I hope to convey, since that is what you wanted to hear about. Whether it's true or not, only the god knows. But this is how I see it: In the knowable realm, the form of the good is the last thing to be seen, and it is reached only with difficulty. Once one has seen it, however, one must conclude that it is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything, that it produces both light and its source in the visible realm, and that in the intelligible realm it controls and provides truth and understanding, so that anyone who is to act sensibly in private or public must see it.
>
> Glaucon: I have the same thought, at least as far as I'm able.

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[625] Ibid., Antigone: Unwept, no wedding-song, unfriended, now I go/ the road laid down for me./ No longer shall I see this holy light of the sun./ No friend to bewail my fate. (*Creon enters from the palace.*) [876-880].

> Socrates: Come, then, share with me this thought also: It isn't surprising that the ones who get to this point are unwilling to occupy themselves with human affairs and that their souls are always pressing upward, eager to spend their time above, for, after all, this is surely what we'd expect, if indeed things fit the image I described before.
>
> Glaucon: It is.

Antigone's actions and knowledge look different from the action of tragic recognition we see with Oedipus and Creon. What Antigone has experienced is what leads her to knowingly defy the decree and accept her death sentence. Though she laments her outcome, she is not shocked by it, nor does she have remorse.[626] Hegel stresses that Antigone's action is remarkable because she acts in knowledge. I agree. So, my project has been to promote the poignancy of her knowledge and experience as a pathway to understanding her explanations directly. Unlike Creon or Oedipus, she does not transgress divine law because she is ignorant of her mortal limitations. Rather, she transgresses human law because she knows her mortal limitations, has accepted them all her life, and would rather move toward them swiftly and go with grace than live her mortal life longer. To recall, Antigone's life has revolved around suffering in knowledge that mankind is helpless when the gods decide upon the fates. Antigone knows her father's fate was to suffer at the hands of the gods; she suffers from the same fate.

Socrates' explanation of the two kinds of disorientation provides an allegorical parallel to Antigone's kind of reversal as opposed to her uncle's or her father's:

> Socrates: What about what happens when someone turns from divine study to the evils of human life? Do you think it's surprising, since his sight is still dim, and he hasn't yet become accustomed to the darkness around him, that he behaves awkwardly and appears

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[626] This is a position Lacan develops which will be discussed in the following chapters.

completely ridiculous if he's compelled, either in the courts or elsewhere, to contend about the shadows of justice or the statues of which they are the shadows and to dispute about the way these things are understood by people who have never seen justice itself?

Glaucon: That's not surprising at all.

Socrates: No, it isn't. But anyone with any understanding would remember that the eyes may be confused in two ways from two causes, namely,

when they've come from the light into the darkness [**ANTIGONE]**

and

when they've come from the darkness into the light. [**CREON AND OEDIPUS]**

Realizing that the same applies to the soul, when someone sees a soul disturbed and unable to see something, he won't laugh mindlessly, but he'll take into consideration whether it has come from a brighter life and is dimmed through not having yet become accustomed to the dark or whether it has come from greater ignorance into greater light and is dazzled by the increased brilliance. Then he'll declare the first soul happy in its experience and life, and he'll pity the latter—but even if he chose to make fun of it, at least he'd be less ridiculous than if he laughed at a soul that has come from the light above. [627]

Antigone knows the gods have dealt her a wretched fate. Antigone's action is informed by her knowledge of her mortal limits and the wisdom she gains from suffering so young from what her father tragically discovered after a lifetime of happiness. She suffers despite this knowledge because the one who is in power does not have the same knowledge and will not listen to her.

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[627] *Plato Complete Works* by Plato. Translation by John M. Cooper. *Republic.* Book VII [Sections 517b-518b]. (Hackett: Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1997).

When Creon addresses Antigone and asks her if she denies having buried the body,[628] she gives the clear and straight response, “I say I did it and I don’t deny it.”[629] Creon tells the guard his name has been cleared and he can take his leave.[630] Then, to Antigone, Creon asks if she knew about the law against what she did.[631] Antigone answers earnestly again, “I knew, of course I knew. The word was plain.”[632] Creon expresses his surprised that she acted against the law,[633] to which Antigone makes her argument for doing as she did despite the law.[634]
Her argument is that Creon’s brand new orders as a mortal man do not supersede the orders of Zeus or the rights of the gods who reign over the dead. Furthermore, she states that her suffering is so great that death is welcome, whereas her brother’s unburied body is not and would cause her more grief than death. Lastly, she tells Creon that if her actions look foolish, it might be because a fool is judging them. She is oriented toward the divine eternal afterlife, so her actions seem puzzling to those more interested in mortal life.

To Antigone, death is welcome; she has suffered enough not to despair about natural limitations. Displeasing the gods and the dead whom she will be joining in the afterlife for eternity is a worse fate. Antigone watches her blind father lead the way for her, her sister, and many others as a voice of a god takes him to a sacred place where he is miraculously taken from the earth. She knows the gods are more powerful than Creon’s will and decree—she knows this even before Oedipus dies because of Oedipus’ story and her own suffering from the truth of her

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[628] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). Creon: You there, whose head is drooping to the ground,/ do you admit this, or deny you did it? [Lines 441-442].
[629] Ibid., [443].
[630] Ibid., Creon (*to the guard*): Take yourself off wherever you wish to go/ free of a heavy charge. [444-445].
[631] Ibid., Creon (*to Antigone*): You—tell me not at length but in a word./ You knew the order not to do this thing? [446-447].
[632] Ibid., [448].
[633] Ibid., Creon: And still you dared to overstep these laws? [449].
[634] See epigraph for this chapter.

birth. She knows the gods govern the living and the dead. So, she determines that it would be better for her to act and die on behalf of the gods than remain still and dishonor her family and the gods, whom she values more than anything. Most of her life is spent traveling in exile to the place where Apollo said Oedipus was to die. She serves as Oedipus' eyes and takes in all the wisdom that the gods grant Oedipus through his fated journey of rising to fortune and falling into misfortune. I think that especially once her lifetime companion has gone to the underworld, her overarching motivation for acting becomes to act in service of the gods and the dead whom she will (one way or another) be joining in Hades for an eternity.

After Oedipus dies, she says she wants death too. She wants to go to the place where he died and die also; but since she is unable, she returns to Thebes out of duty to her brothers. In deferring her death to honor Polyneices' Antigone states her preference for the dead and the divine over the living. She hopes at first that her sister will join her, but as Antigone puts it, Ismene chooses life whereas Antigone chooses death. Creon refuses to be schooled by a woman. He has to be shown that he was wrong by Tiresias and by the consequences for his actions. Antigone bears witness to divine power when she accompanies her father on his journey to his death at Colonus. She is not like Creon who is in the dark when it comes to recognize divine authority only too late to make a difference. Antigone moves toward the divine the entire time we witness her choices and actions as a character, which are always made in knowledge of her mortal limits and subordinate position to the gods. On the other hand, Creon and Oedipus suffer from learning the truth of their prior ignorance.

The choral benediction in *Antigone* is: "Our happiness depends/ on wisdom all the way./ The gods must have their due./ Great words by men of pride/ bring greater blows upon them./ So

wisdom comes to the old."[635] The wisdom that comes to the old through the blows dealt by the gods to young, proud men that have not yet learned their limitations as mere mortals. This is a kind of wisdom that Antigone, though young, always appears to have. Antigone welcomes death—her mortal limitation and aims to die with grace. Painful, terrible experiences yield wisdom to the ignorant about the human condition. Antigone gains her experience (makes her upward journey) earlier than Creon.

We ought to understand Antigone differently than we understand tragic heroes like Oedipus and Creon who act in ignorance and insubordination by thinking they can change or outmaneuver what is controlled by the gods. Instead, we must consider the difference it makes that Antigone knows even as a child what Oedipus suffers to learn—that one cannot escape what is the will of the gods. Her action is not based on her desire to flee her mortal fate. She knows her limits and has experience with a wretched fate the gods played a role in. So, she pushes her limits toward grace, rather than away from it. She submits to the laws of the gods even if it means death by virtue of the laws of a man. Antigone witnesses her father's fortune shift throughout his lifetime. She also witnesses the gods speaking to him and leading him to his eternal redemption. Antigone has gained a number of insights into the kind of wisdom the *Theban Plays* promote. She knows her limits. She knows she must die. Her counsel is to accept that strength gives out in the end, but to strive in knowledge of our mortal limitations toward the best possible outcome in the grand scheme of one's entire existence. Her counsel bears a cheerful tragic insight that we should be careful not to dilute beyond recognition.

My own assessment is that my reading is most beneficial in that if offers a source for understanding the distinction between Antigone and Ismene. I note this because I have found that

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[635] *The Complete Tragedies* by Sophocles. *Antigone*. (U of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1959). [Lines 1347-1352].

in the arguments I have reconstructed, there is hardly any substantive distinction. Jacques Lacan argues that Antigone falls into her family's atë, or misfortune, whereas Ismene does not. His reason for this is based upon his speculation of Antigone's desire. Judith Butler makes a similar move by speculating upon Antigone's possible incestuous desires, which motivate her in a different way from Ismene. Mary Beth Mader challenges Butler on this move by asking if Butler means to say that Ismene *also* has incestuous desires for her brother since Ismene tries to accept guilt with Antigone later in the play. This concern leads Mader to argue for a position opposite Butler that Antigone's work is meant to undo her family's blasphemous incest rather than be part of it. The critical stance I take toward these arguments is that they are missing the context for why Antigone and Ismene do not agree in the opening act of the play. The two women lived apart for twenty years. Antigone lived wretchedly in exile with their father, Oedipus. Ismene lived richly in a palace whilst each of her brothers reigned as kings respectively.

Perhaps Antigone has the desires each of these scholars discuss. Reasonably she could have the desire to transgress the law, to transgress Creon as Lacan pontificates. She could certainly love the men in her family more than her fiancé, Haemon; that is a fair argument to make given her decision. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, presented the notion that Antigone does what she does for Haemon's sake because she's afraid of passing on the familial curse to their children. This appears to me to be a distinct possibility as well. I do not know everything Antigone desires any more than I know everything she does not desire. However, my project shows that she desires a death like her father's, and so she desires to please the gods and the dead. She explains that she cares more about those she will spend eternity with than those she will spend only a mortal life with. This is her philosophical position developed prior to the decision she makes in *Antigone*.

Antigone's decisions in life are motivated by what will bring her the best kind of death and afterlife. The scholarly arguments reconstructed in my project miss the fact that Antigone and Ismene put forth a philosophical disagreement in the opening lines of the play named for Antigone. In that first argument, the two sisters discover that they are not of the same mind. They do not think the same about what one ought to do. This particular argument is a philosophical disagreement; not an expression of opposing laws or opposing desires (which I discussed in response to mainly Hegel and Lacan in Chapter 4 and continue with an emphasis on Butler in Chapter 5). The philosophical disagreement is about what one ought to do when faced with the choice of death and disgrace. Ismene thinks she can ask the gods to forgive her by claiming that she was forced not to bury Polyneices. Antigone says she would not recommend that Ismene make such a request. For Antigone, death is simply the better option. She does not believe she would be forgiven if she tried to claim that a mortal man's threat of death stopped her from carrying out her duty to her deceased family and the gods of the earth. Antigone believes dying with grace is better than living with disgrace. She learned this when she witnessed her father accomplish a graceful death after a lifetime of wretchedness.

I do want to be clear that I appreciate the way in which scholarship on Antigone after Hegel moves from discussing the opposition of laws to the opposition of desires between Antigone and the ruling order. I appreciate it because it makes her a more human-like, psychological subject with individual thoughts and motivations. My criticism is that one should approach a subject of this kind by examining their experience and upbringing if one really wants to understand the subject. Once this is accomplished, we gain the philosophical insights that inspire and motivate individuals to choose certain courses of action over others. It gives us an additional method for better understanding the tragic characters from *Antigone*.

Perhaps the objective of the arguments I have reconstructed is not really to understand Antigone. After all, George Steiner and Bonnie Honig produced impressively thorough anthological guides that depict the ways in which Antigone's perpetual reproductions mimic the political outcries and concerns of the time. The only criticism I have for this particular trend is that it has strayed from her history and from what she says directly. She is like a living subject who appears in new forms all over the world, but her history is missing in some ways. First, the ancient interpretation of her argument has been overwritten. Aristotle says in *Rhetoric* that Antigone's argument appeals to the universal whereas Creon's argument appeals to the particular. Hegel flips this distinction by saying Creon represents the public and Antigone represents the private.

After Hegel, work on Antigone continues to refer to the German Romantic views of Sophocles' *Antigone* and to Hölderlin's translation. Her history has gone missing in this sense because her argument is no longer satisfactory to contemporary scholars the way it was to the ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle. Secondly, contemporary scholars analyze her as one would a human subject with political and sexual motivations, but neglect the fact that her legend comes with an upbringing and experience that informs her decisions and actions in *Antigone*. A more general point would be that perhaps scholars neglect this fact about human beings frequently in order to put forth their theories about human beings and why we do the things we do.

I think that once we examine her whole story, we can reconsider the importance of what she says directly, instead of having to insert so much speculation without even acknowledging the experience that drives her to adopt a certain ancient Greek philosophy. Further, we can examine how that particular philosophy plays out in tragic drama. The most important questions

about Antigone have yet to be answered. For one thing, there is still no concrete explanation for why her legend has endured the way it has. Her timeless popularity remains an enigma. And no matter what sound reason anyone provides for why Antigone would be willing to die to bury her brother, her profound courage and sense of honor will continue to astonish us. Her arguments will continue to inspire questions concerning race, gender, religion, and politics. I have not answered these questions, but I have provided a new approach for reading *Antigone* in the complete context of the *Theban Plays* that incorporates her experience and philosophical positioning.

The approach I recommend is an approach I believe ought to be extended in other kinds of philosophical inquiry. The suggestion is that reading tragic characters ought to mean reading tragic insights. Attic tragedy told its audiences tales of virtues and vices. It presented philosophical accounts of the role mortals play on the earth. There is nothing wrong with using these plays to ask current questions regarding social or political concerns, but there are insights that get overlooked when we take these characters so far out of context and read them so incompletely. I think Antigone still has a lot to say, but we should listen to her whole story. Once we do, we might be able to rethink what her legend really means. Ultimately, the task would be for philosophers to spend some time returning to the philosophical position already presented in ancient texts before inserting a contemporary political position into an ancient text. The new approach would be to listen and understand a tragic character's story completely and directly before reinventing them. Doing so would help preserve their ancient notions of virtue and what matters most in decisions of life and death.

What I have done up to this point is exegetical. The reason for this is the voluminosity of the body of scholarship on Antigone. I began this project with bold philosophical claims about

Antigone being right and Creon being wrong. At that time, I had not listened well enough to the scholarly conversation on Sophocles' *Antigone* that has endured for centuries upon centuries. My project required my becoming a better listener. My thesis became that we should be better listeners with regard to what Antigone says directly. I now feel equipped to make the kind of claim I set out to make when I first proposed this project about what Antigone does right and Creon does wrong, which has everything to do with listening to (and learning from) wise counsel.

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