

Antigone Uninterrupted

Antigone's Biographical Tale of
Learning from Tragic Counsel

Wendy Bustamante

Series in Classical Studies



VERNON PRESS

Copyright © 2020 Vernon Press, an imprint of Vernon Art and Science Inc, on behalf of the author.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of Vernon Art and Science Inc.

www.vernonpress.com

In the Americas:
Vernon Press
1000 N West Street,
Suite 1200, Wilmington,
Delaware 19801
United States

In the rest of the world:
Vernon Press
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,
Malaga, 29006
Spain

Series in Classical Studies

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020934126

ISBN: 978-1-62273-760-4

Product and company names mentioned in this work are the trademarks of their respective owners. While every care has been taken in preparing this work, neither the authors nor Vernon Art and Science Inc. may be held responsible for any loss or damage caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly by the information contained in it.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publisher will be pleased to include any necessary credits in any subsequent reprint or edition.

Cover design by Vernon Press.
Oil painting by Adam Bustamante.
adambustamante.com
[instagram.com/organizedlines/](https://www.instagram.com/organizedlines/)

Table of Contents

| | | |
|--------------|--|-----|
| Preface | v | |
| Introduction | ix | |
| Chapter I | Antigone's Eternal Presence | 1 |
| Chapter II | Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Antigones | 11 |
| Chapter III | Antigone and Creon in the <i>Theban Plays</i> | 21 |
| Chapter IV | Post-Modern Antigones | 49 |
| Chapter V | Antigone and Polyneices in the <i>Theban Plays</i> | 61 |
| Chapter VI | Millennial Antigones | 83 |
| Chapter VII | Antigone and Ismene in the <i>Theban Plays</i> | 105 |
| Chapter VIII | Antigone's Tragic Counsel | 125 |
| Conclusion | 137 | |
| References | 145 | |
| Index | 147 | |

Preface

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 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. This work 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. 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 through the complete context of the *Theban Plays*, 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.

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

¹ Sophocles, *Antigone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), [Lines 43-48].

² *Ibid.*

she feels Zeus has brought upon their family line. Antigone tells her that Creon has determined that one of their brothers should be honored with a 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.”³ Antigone asks Ismene if she’ll go deal with their brother’s corpse with her.⁴

Ismene calls Antigone “hard of mind” since Creon has spoken against it.⁵ Antigone says that Creon has no right to forbid her in the case of her own brother.⁶ 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 power.⁷ 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.⁸

Ismene says it is a mistake to try at what will inevitably fail.⁹ Antigone gravely reproaches her for believing such a thing and declares that she would rather suffer anything than go against the gods.¹⁰ The chorus enters to sing a hymn of triumph because Polyneices and his seven armies failed to take Thebes.¹¹ 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.

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.¹² He declares 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

³ *Ibid.*, 21-38.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 49-68.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 69-77.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92-96.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 99-160.

¹² *Ibid.*, 161-210.

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 the dead.”¹³ This point the chorus makes is one that I find particularly poignant. Creon’s decree is his own. He is not, according to the chorus, upholding something that comes before him. He explains his values and why he believes the decree should be so, but it is ultimately *his decree* and not the people’s.

Creon tells them to be the enforcers of his new law, but the chorus tells him to find someone younger.¹⁴ A guard interrupts the choral dialogue to speak with Creon, albeit reluctantly.¹⁵ The guard eventually explains that the corpse of Polyneices was buried with a complete ritual.¹⁶ Creon demands to know who has done it, though the guard has already told him he does not know.¹⁷ The guard replies 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.¹⁸

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.¹⁹ Creon urges the chorus to say no more and insists that what has been said is utterly ridiculous because the gods don’t honor the wicked.²⁰ 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 returns to cheerfully announce that he has brought the woman who buried Polyneices.²¹ It is, of course, Antigone. Creon addresses Antigone and asks her if she denies having buried the body, to which she gives a clear response, “I say I did it and I don’t deny it.”²² Creon tells the guard his name has been cleared and he can take his leave.²³ Then, to Antigone, Creon asks if she knew about the law.²⁴ Antigone answers earnestly again, “I knew, of course I

¹³ Ibid., 211-214.

¹⁴ Ibid., 215-216.

¹⁵ Ibid., 223-236.

¹⁶ Ibid., 245.

¹⁷ Ibid., 246.

¹⁸ Ibid., 247-276.

¹⁹ Ibid., 277-8.

²⁰ Ibid., 279-314.

²¹ Ibid., 384-385.

²² Ibid., 441-443.

²³ Ibid., 444-445.

²⁴ Ibid., 446-447.

knew. The word was plain.”²⁵ Creon expresses his surprise that she acted against the law, to which Antigone explains why she did it.²⁶

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 point of my work is to show that if you want to know why she did what she did, you simply have to read all three *Theban Plays* as her biographical journey. This work is based upon my doctoral thesis.

²⁵ Ibid., 448.

²⁶ Ibid., 449-470.

Introduction

My title promises to un-interrupt 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, or, biographically, as presented by Sophocles, as opposed to an examination of the play *Antigone* in isolation.²⁷ My title is an allusion to Bonnie Honig's *Antigone, Interrupted* (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 in a particular manner, one not really in the same vein as what Honig means by interruption. By uninterrupted, I simply mean by reading her character development according to her age progression in the *Theban Plays* 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.

Honig's *Antigone, Interrupted* (2013) was preceded by Tina Chanter's *Whose Antigone?: The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery* (2011) in which Chanter examines Athol Fugard's *The Island* and asks what difference it would have made if Polyneices or Oedipus had been slaves. Fugard's play takes place in a prison in apartheid South Africa where two prisoners produce their own version of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Both Honig and Chanter claim to move Antigone beyond traditional receptions of her as a figure of classic themes of mortality in Attic tragedy. Honig argues that she does so by pushing Antigone into the realm of political conspiracy. Chanter employs her readers to move Antigone into discussions of race and the way we understand the value of the human body. My thesis is that it is not necessary to move beyond the classic understanding of Antigone's position to argue that the play inspires further inquiry. Her service to the gods and the dead does not preclude other motivations or ideas her action might display.

Both Honig and Chanter refer to Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (2000), which positions Antigone as a melancholic figure of incestuous desire. Butler puts forth the notion that Antigone speaks and acts out against the state because the law and social taboo prevent her from

²⁷ 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.

being able to act upon her particular desire for kinship relations. Further, Butler argues that philosophers and literary critics before her have exhibited blindness with regard to the possibility that Antigone might have incestuous impulses. Butler's claim is that the social taboo of incest has rendered the fullest understanding of her motivations as difficult as Antigone's fulfillment of her desires.

Even more so than Honig and Chanter, Butler insists that her idea is original and takes Antigone beyond the limiting scope of her classic context through which she was blindly examined. My objective is to demonstrate that there is still much to be learned from Antigone as a tragic character who means exactly what she says, especially when we read her whole story throughout the *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth. This is not meant to dismiss the nature of performativity that must be considered in any discussion of a play. I acknowledge that one might object to my insistence upon taking Antigone at her word on the basis of her character being part of a performance, and therefore subject to all kinds of silent aspects that yield meaning. So, I want to be clear that what I mean is that we can take her at word more easily by reading her story in the complete context of the *Theban Plays*. The fuller context makes Antigone's action less enigmatic; and my interlocutors tend toward the unsaid in order to solve or present the puzzle.

I also want to be clear that my claim to originality is not simply my reference to the other plays. Butler, Chanter, and Honig pull from the other *Theban Plays* to support their interpretations of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Yet, contemporary scholars still tend to be wary of reading the three plays like a trilogy and/or in order of the myth. The reason for this is twofold. First, the chronology of when the plays were written and performed does not align with the progression of the myth (the story of the characters as they progress from young to old). Though we do not know the exact dates for all three plays, it is generally accepted that *Antigone* was the first of the three *Theban Plays* written by Sophocles, followed by *Oedipus Rex* (or, *Oedipus the King*, or, *Oedipus Tyrannus* depending on translation) and then later, *Oedipus at Colonus*. The second reason for hesitation is that the three plays were not written for performance as a trilogy (in the way Aeschylus' *Oresteia* was, for example).

I, on the other hand, argue that reading the three plays in the order of the myth allows for a better understanding of how Antigone becomes the woman she is in the play, *Antigone*. It does this by revealing what Antigone learns from Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* that would lead her to think differently than Ismene, who did not spend a significant portion of her life in exile with Oedipus. My approach to the *Theban Plays* explores the difference between Antigone and Ismene, and gleans insight from their individual upbringings. I acknowledge that differences between these sisters have been discussed ten

times over, but not as often through the simplistic observation that they spent about twenty years apart.

My work is not an anthology, and is certainly nowhere near as expansive as George Steiner's, *Antigones*—a work that I heavily relied upon in my own project. My project was different than Steiner's or Honig's, though I owe a debt to them both. My objective was to demonstrate that reading Sophocles' *Theban Plays* in the order of the myth provides answers to the contemporary questions asked about Sophocles' *Antigone* that were motivated by accounts and translations of Sophocles' *Antigone* from the era of German Romanticism.

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*.

This work 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 the 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*.

The popular themes of inquiry surrounding *Antigone* most often arise 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 benefit from my way of

approaching *Antigone* is that it provides a source for understanding the distinction between Antigone and Ismene that presents a case for why the two women make different choices. 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. Antigone is commonly discussed in contemporary scholarship as a figure of death and desire (and a pusher of limits toward death and on behalf of desire), whereas Ismene is life and duty. I argue that Antigone thinks differently than Ismene at the beginning of Sophocles' *Antigone* for reasons drawn out in *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Hegel famously claims that Sophocles' *Antigone* depicts the dialectic of opposing laws through Creon and Antigone. Many contemporary critiques replace Hegel's theory of opposition between two laws with theories about Antigone's and Creon's opposing personal desires. The complete context of the *Theban Plays* offers a contribution to this particular discussion of *Antigone*, once again suggesting that there are answers to be found in *Oedipus at Colonus*. 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.

My main contribution to the discussion of Antigone and melancholy 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. 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. 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.

This work 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 the 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."²⁸ 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."²⁹ 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 death and dying. My project aims to show that there is

²⁸ Keri Walsh (Ed), "Book Discussion: Bonnie Honig's *Antigone, Interrupted*" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), (560).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

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,"³⁰ 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."³¹ 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.³² The kinds of actions that succeed in doing this are reversals, recognitions, and suffering.³³ 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 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. My argument is that this traditional understanding is not limiting. It provides a philosophical backing for arguments that might be made in regard to Antigone's variety of motivating impulses that could reasonably attribute to her action.

³⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1987), I, vi: 3.1.2 Plot is the most important part of tragedy.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 3.1 The definition of tragedy.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3.4 The parts of plot.

PAGES MISSING
FROM THIS FREE SAMPLE

References

- Aristotle, *Poetics*. Translated by Richard Janko. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.
- Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life & Death*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
- . "Promiscuous Obedience." *Feminist Readings of Antigone*. Edited by Fanny Söderbäck. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010.
- Chanter, Tina. "Tragic Dislocations: Antigone's Modern Theatrics." *Differences* 10, no. 1 (1998): 75-97.
- . *Whose Antigone?: The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011.
- . and Sean D. Kirkland. *The Returns of Antigone: Interdisciplinary Essays*. Edited by Tina Chanter and Sean D. Kirkland. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014.
- . "The Performative Politics and Rebirth of Antigone in Ancient Greece and Modern South Africa." *Feminist Readings of Antigone*. Edited by Fanny Söderbäck. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010.
- Draz, Marie. "The Queer Heroics of Butler's Antigone." *The Returns of Antigone: Interdisciplinary Essays*. Edited by Tina Chanter and Sean D. Kirkland. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014.
- Festic, Fatima. "Antigone in (Post-) Modern Palestine." *Hecate* no. 2 (2003): 86.
- George, Theodore D. *Tragedies of Spirit: Tracing Finitude in Hegel's Phenomenology*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006.
- Goldhill, Simon. *Sophocles and the Language of Tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, Arnold V. Miller, and J.N. Findlay. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated [from the German] by A.V. Miller; with analysis of the text and foreword by J.N. Findlay. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.
- Honig, Bonnie. *Antigone, Interrupted*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- . "Ismene's Forced Choice." *Arethusa* 44, (2011): 29-68.
- . "Antigone's Two Laws: Greek Tragedy and the Politics of Humanism." *New Literary History* 41, no. 1 (2010): 1-33.
- . "Antigone's Laments, Creon's Grief." *The Returns of Antigone: Interdisciplinary Essays*. Edited by Tina Chanter and Sean D. Kirkland. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014.
- Irigaray, Luce. *In the Beginning, She was*. London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- . "The Eternal Irony of the Community." *Feminist Readings of Antigone*. Edited by Fanny Söderbäck. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010.

- Kristeva, Julia. "Antigone: Limit and Horizon." *Feminist Readings of Antigone*. Edited by Fanny Söderbäck. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010.
- Lacan, Jacques, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller; translated with notes by Dennis Porter. London; New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Mader, Mary Beth. "Antigone's Line." *Feminist Readings of Antigone*. Edited by Fanny Söderbäck. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010.
- . "Being Genealogical: Tragic Necessity in Sophocles' *Antigone*." *The Returns of Antigone: Interdisciplinary Essays*. Edited by Tina Chanter and Sean D. Kirkland. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014.
- Plato. *Plato Complete Works*. Edited and translated by John M. Cooper. *Republic*. Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett, 1997.
- Rawlinson, Mary C. "Beyond Antigone: Ismene, Gender, and the Right to Life." *The Returns of Antigone: Interdisciplinary Essays*. Edited by Tina Chanter and Sean D. Kirkland. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014.
- Seery, John. "Acclaim for Antigone's Claim Reclaimed (Or, Steiner, Contra Butler)." *Theory, Culture & Society* 9, no. 1 (2006).
- Söderbäck, Fanny. "Impossible Mourning: Sophocles Reversed." *Feminist Readings of Antigone*. Edited by Fanny Söderbäck. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010.
- Sophocles, *The Complete Greek Tragedies*. Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959.
- Sophocles, *Theban Plays*. Translated, with introduction and notes, by Peter Meineck and Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003.
- Sourvinou-Inwood, Christiane. "Assumptions and the Creation of Meaning: Reading Sophocles' *Antigone*." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* cix, (1989): 134-148.
- Steiner, George. *Antigones*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1996.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Antigone*. London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016.
- . *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*. Rev. Ed. Slavoj Žižek New York: Routledge, 2001; Rev. ed, 2001.

Index

A

Antigone

- Anouilh, 50, 51
- Sophocles, v, 1, 2, 14, 16, 18, 19, 29, 49, 50, 51, 73
- Theodorakis, Mikis, 50
- Tsavella, 50

Antigonick

- Anne Carson, 94

B

Barhélémy'

- Le Voyage du jeune Anacharsis*, 1

- Butler, 30

C

Canibali

- Liliana Cavani, 51
- Cassiner, 50
- Chanter, 32

F

- Frazer, 50
- Freud, 5, 30, 50, 96, 108

G

- George, Theodore, 51
- Goethe, 1, 13, 14, 18, 20, 25, 27, 49, 63
- Goldhill, 137, 138

H

- Hegel, 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 49, 62, 64, 67, 68, 69, 100, 131, 145
- Hölderlin, 1, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 49, 50
- Honig, 6, 92

I

- Irigaray, 91

K

- Kierkegaard, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 49, 63
- Kristeva, 95

L

- Lacan, 26

M

- Mader, 31
- Mégarée
 - Duron, Maurice, 50
- Mendelssohn, 1

R

- Reinhardt, 18

Rolland, Romain, 50

S

Sartre, 50

Schelling, 1, 18, 49

Schiller, 18, 49

Seery, 11

Söderbäck, 94

Sourvinou-Inwood, 57

Steiner, 1, 2, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18,

20, **31**, 39, 49, 50, 59, **63**, 146

T

The Island

Athol Fugard, 51

Tübingen, 1, 49

Z

Žižek, 28, 29, 31, 35, 36, 37, 39, 41,
43, 95